



*Promoting good practice  
in the management and  
support of aid personnel*

# ***Behaviours which lead to effective performance in Humanitarian Response***

---

*A review of the use and  
effectiveness of competency  
frameworks within the  
Humanitarian Sector*

***June 2007***

***Research***



**Author**

Sara Swords

**Editor**

Ben Emmens

**Printer**

DS Print

People In Aid gratefully acknowledges the support of the Inter Agency Working Group (IAWG) and the Emergency Capacity Building Project ([www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org)) during this research.

**Disclaimer**

Considerable care has been taken to ensure this research report is both accurate and relevant. However, People In Aid is unable to provide any warranty concerning the accuracy, completeness or relevance to your organisation relating to any information contained herein.

This publication may be quoted, by not for profit organisations, in any form (written, visual, electronic, or audio) without the express permission of People In Aid, provided the content quoted does not amount to a whole chapter or section, and provided that any and all references are fully attributed to People In Aid and this publication.

All other requests for permission must be directed to and approved in writing by People In Aid. All rights reserved.

© People In Aid 2007

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>2. Context for effective use of competency frameworks</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>3. Current initiatives to build professional capacity</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>4. Making competencies work in humanitarian response – learning from the sector</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>5. Authentic leadership backed up by support mechanisms</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>6. Tensions underlying competency frameworks</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>7. Personal behaviour in emergency environments – a shortlist of competencies with behavioural indicators</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>8. Developing competencies through work-based learning</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>9. Review conclusions</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>10. Recommendations and ways forward to ground competency practice within humanitarian organisations</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>11. References</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendices:</b> .....	<b>43</b>
1. Participating organisations .....	43
2. Example of competency profiling .....	44
3. VSO competency dimensions .....	45
4. Programme Manager competencies .....	49



# Executive summary

## Background, and purpose of the research

There has been much discussion within organisations and interagency groups about the need to develop personal and technical competencies to improve overall humanitarian aid performance and the capacity of individual staff members. People In Aid, through this report, aims to capture and synthesise the emerging experience and practice on the use of competency frameworks within the sector.

## What we did

During February and March 2007, interviews were carried out with relevant individuals representing a range of different perspectives in humanitarian response. People In Aid workshops on the practical application of competencies, a variety of meetings, events and on-line discussions were used to gather information on competency development from key thinkers and organisations within and beyond the humanitarian sector. This comprehensive review of current best practices on competencies enabled us to identify ways in which organisations could engage with competencies in the future.

## Summary of main review findings

Nine key findings are summarised below. There are also recommendations or ways in which organisations might consolidate good practice and move forward.

1. There is widespread use of competency models or behavioural frameworks in the sector, though their effectiveness varies, especially in an emergency or relief context.

Finding (1) (ref: report section 2, 4)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
Competency models or similar behavioural frameworks are in existence in many humanitarian organisations.	Their usage beyond HQ and HR remains patchy.	Several organisations are talking about batch recruitment rounds for emergency staff. Identification of competencies to inform these recruitments could help make the process more robust and introduce competency language to these potential staff at an early stage.

2. The findings of the review reiterated that competency models incorporated into job roles help national staff understand better the expectations that organisations have of them and how to develop and grow within the organisation.

Finding (2) (ref: report section 2)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
Competency statements describe the behaviours of high performers within organisations and link into future needs of the organisation.	Competency frameworks do need to be updated however. Otherwise, they become obsolete.	There is a need to look at current models to ensure they cover behaviours relating to, for example, accountability to communities and security management.

3. Research respondents agreed that the work of emergency workers these days is much more visible and requires them to demonstrate high levels of self-awareness and self-regulation.

Finding (2) (ref: report section 4)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
<p>Personal competencies are the underpinning behaviours required by humanitarian staff to carry out their role effectively. Key competencies in current frameworks are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Operational decision making</li> <li>✓ Building and maintaining relations in changing teams</li> <li>✓ Pressure tolerance</li> <li>✓ Drive to achieve results/initiating action</li> <li>✓ Self awareness</li> <li>✓ Organisational awareness</li> <li>✓ Managing performance for success</li> <li>✓ Communicating with impact.</li> </ul>	<p>The challenge is how to introduce this ‘softer stuff’ of personal competencies into daily practice without it creating an additional pressure.</p>	<p>Organisations to review list of key competencies as shown and decide if they fit or not with their own priority competencies in humanitarian or longer-term response.</p>

4. The research found that there is impatience within the organisations interviewed 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.

Finding (4) (ref: report section 3.6, 4)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
<p>Competency frameworks are still not used sufficiently on a daily basis by staff at all levels.</p>	<p>The expectation from bodies like Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) is that organisations involved in their accountability approach will be able to demonstrate how competencies are used and applied. This may be the push that is needed to embed competency-usage consistently across programmes.</p>	<p>Member agencies of HAP to review effectiveness of current frameworks. Others to consider how they would do if similarly assessed.</p>

5. Competency frameworks are not stand-alone initiatives. They need to form part of an overall organisational capacity building strategy and underpin existing HR processes.

Finding (5) (ref: report section 4, 5, 8, 9)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
Competency frameworks provide a common language to link the processes of recruitment, performance management and career development.	Learning from the review made clear that organisations can make competency usage too complicated.	<p>Build competencies into existing management and leadership programmes.</p> <p>Develop competency profiles for particular roles.</p> <p>Review how well work-based learning links into competency development.</p>

6. Several interviewees mentioned that organisations search for 'super' programme managers to run their emergency programmes to deliver quality programmes within pressured contexts. It was agreed that 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.

Finding (6) (ref: report section 3.3, 5, 8)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
Shortage of experienced and skilled humanitarian programme managers and those in post requiring more proactive support.	<p>Coaching is now an acceptable support mechanism, which has proved invaluable in helping programme managers work through critical personnel issues and feel better able to cope with difficult situations.</p> <p>Accredited internal learning and development programmes can build up technical and personal competencies.</p>	<p>Advocate coaching or mentoring as possible learning initiatives within programmes and build in funding for them.</p> <p>Identify existing learning and development opportunities for building up project management and personal competencies. Review whether these will meet programme needs for programme managers over the next few years.</p> <p>The sector to agree a core set of competencies and then seek to influence qualification programmes already in existence.</p>

7. 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.

Finding (7) (ref: report section 7)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
Competency-based recruitments can be time-consuming.	Such recruitment methods are therefore only used for the most senior appointments.  The research has generated a shortlist of 3 key competencies and indicators which could be a starting point for other appointments.	Simpler ways to use competencies for recruitment of contract or temporary staff.  Develop specific tools based on the three competencies identified in the report.

8. There was widespread agreement that competencies need to link into existing management and leadership models and training programmes.

Finding (8) (ref: report section 2, 8)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
Competencies should be translated into tools and usable forms which national staff and managers will then work with.	In time, participants attending training programmes will expect to see behavioural output indicators made as clear as training course objectives. These indicators would reflect competency language which can then be fed back into ongoing performance review.	Identify whether your training programmes make clear which competencies participants will gain from attending. Decide how these can be built into ongoing supervision after the training course.

9. 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.

Finding (9) (ref: report section 4)	Observations and reflections	Where next?
Technical competencies are based on particular sets of skills to carry out specific job roles.	Individual agencies and reform coordinated by OCHA are defining technical levels of competence required.	Further work is needed to define minimum levels of technical knowledge and understanding needed by programme managers to fulfil their ever-expanding role.

**Conclusion...**

People In Aid’s review shows the current status of competency frameworks within the humanitarian sector and captures the main themes of the debate around the effectiveness of competencies within the sector as a whole.

The findings and actions, outlined above, suggest a number of avenues that agencies could take to capitalise on the contribution of an effective competency framework. It is hoped that these practical suggestions will help make effective behavioural frameworks a reality within organisations.



## Questions for further reflection...

The research raises a number of important and challenging issues – here are some key questions for you to reflect on within your organisation and across agencies.

- *How far have you got in developing personal and technical competencies for your staff?*
- *How do the competency areas of finding 3 match your own model? How could these be used more for recruitment and development?*
- *What are the implications of this research for short-term recruitment? How do your processes measure up?*
- *Could 'Batch recruitment' work for your agency? What are the opportunities presented?*
- *How are your proactive support systems measuring up? What do you have in place?*
- *Do you recognise the trend or change from macho to emotionally intelligent humanitarian staff within your agency? What are the implications of this shift?*
- *What processes have you put in place to make using competencies easier? Would competency profiling be a suitable way forward in your agency?*
- *How well do the on-job-learning opportunities in your organisation link in with your competency framework?*
- *What is the view in your organisation about accrediting specific training programmes for humanitarian programme managers? How would such a move fit within your current training schedule? Are you prepared to participate in determining a core set of competencies for the sector?*
- *When was your competency framework reviewed against organisational priorities? How much do the competency behaviours in your framework reflect current views on accountability and security management?*



# Section 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 - Purpose and scope of the review

There has been much discussion within organisations and interagency groups about the need to develop personal and technical competencies to improve overall humanitarian aid performance and the capacity of individual staff members. People In Aid, through this report, aims to capture and synthesise the emerging experience and practice on the use of competency frameworks within the sector. The emphasis of the People In Aid review is predominantly on the use of personal competencies rather than technical competencies.

The objectives of the review were to:

1. Build on recent and current sectoral initiatives so as to consolidate learning on the use of competencies to optimise NGO performance and effectiveness;
2. Share this knowledge and understanding to improve the inclusion of effective behaviours or competencies in recruitment and the development of humanitarian workers;
3. Show examples of effective competencies/behaviours 'in use';
4. Build consensus as to further developments needed to ground practice within humanitarian organisations on effective behaviours.

Objectives 1 and 4 served as the overall goals for the project – to collect sectoral experiences and to use the review as a focus for further progress. Objectives 2 and 3 were the intermediate goals as to how these would be achieved – drawing on practical experiences in the field to generate advice on how best to develop and execute competencies within the humanitarian sector.

The main emphasis of the review was the use of competency frameworks in the humanitarian sector, but it is clear that the ideas and practical learning will resonate with the wider NGO sector. At a time when many organisations are managing integrated programmes, the links are even greater.

### 1.2 - Current context for humanitarian work

Humanitarian responses take place in an increasingly challenging environment. Recent factors that have contributed to greater complexity are outlined below.

#### Increasing complexity of the working environment

Humanitarian workers now operate in a more complex environment. They now face complex emergencies with the additional multiplicity of the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. There is also a higher frequency of natural disasters and the ongoing pressure of climate change. All of this means working with increasing numbers of vulnerable people whom the staff need to engage with and listen to more closely.

#### Increased and faster communications have raised expectations

In many contexts, and thanks to the advent of the latest mobile devices, communications are instant and constant. Faster communications means that there is less time and greater scrutiny of what happens at field level and this can create the sense of higher expectations on programme managers. They have teams of specialists to hold together and greater organisational expectations of what they can achieve over and above direct delivery.

### Increased demand for quality and accountability

There often seems to be a continuous search by organisations for 'super' programme managers to run their programmes to cope with all of the above and deliver a quality programme. It was agreed that these experienced people are in short supply and later in the report we will look at how organisations are facing up to this.

### Support mechanisms for programme managers and other humanitarian staff

The most effective emergency workers cope with a range of contextual factors that go beyond the performance of the task in hand. These 'extra' demands require the ability to work in mixed, often changing teams, with high pressure demands to perform and in difficult contexts. Later on in the report we will review what support mechanisms can help programme managers and other emergency staff deal with the pressure and the report also includes a shortlist of prioritised competencies with behavioural indicators for those working in emergency environments. The shortlist could be helpful when drawing up recruitment criteria for humanitarian staff.

The effect of this overall challenging context is to leave little room for error in developing and recruiting people for their humanitarian roles. Competency frameworks provide a potentially powerful way of better ensuring that recruitment choices and the development of people fits the roles they will fill. The hope is that by making clear the ways people are expected to behave and in which they will be held to account for their behaviours, individual performance will improve, followed by increased team and organisational effectiveness.

## 1.3 - Methodology and terms of reference for the review

The review linked to other relevant and current initiatives in the NGO sector so that those reading the report can have an overall picture of recent thinking on staff capacity and where to find out more. It also aimed to make available practical advice to improve staff development. During February and March 2007, interviews were carried out with relevant staff, representing a range of different perspectives within humanitarian response.

People In Aid workshops on the practical application of competencies, a variety of meetings, events and on-line discussions were used to gather information on competency development from key thinkers and organisations within and beyond the humanitarian sector. Overall, it was expected that reviewing current best practices on competencies would lay out possibilities for how organisations need to engage with competencies in the future. The aim was to present a coherent picture of the current status of competencies and their effective usage within the humanitarian sector. Good practices highlighted can be applied to different contexts and the wider NGO sector.

# Section 2

## Context for effective use of competency frameworks

### 2.1 - Tradition of competencies

There is a long tradition of industries requiring technical based competencies. More recently this has spread to the development of competencies based on identifying, defining and measuring individual abilities that are critical to successful job performance. The competency approach was devised in the 1970s in the US to identify personal characteristics that result in effective and/or superior performance within a job. It is now generally agreed that the use of competencies can improve professionalism at an individual and organisational level. Once an organisation is clear as to its mandate and has generated a strategy, it can then identify the staff competencies critical to its delivery.

**Competencies are underlying characteristics that lead to superior performance. They are the behaviours, experience and skills that outstanding performers exhibit more often, and at a higher level of complexity or sophistication than typical performers. (Schroder 1989)**

Specifying competencies that summarise behaviours expected of staff clarifies what is needed of teams and individuals and thereby stimulates a more internally accepted organisational culture. A competency framework captures individual capabilities which are linked in to the overall organisational strategic direction. They provide a set of statements that can be used to measure achievements and identify learning or resource needs.

**Competencies** summarise the **experience, skills and behaviours** required to perform effectively in a given job, role or situation. They are what a person has; i.e. a characteristic, attitude, skill, aspect of one's self-image, or body of knowledge and behaviours which he or she uses. They are typically used in recruitment, performance management and performance development of staff.

Mercy Corps US describes competencies as:

- What you know,
- What skills you have; and
- The attitudes you demonstrate.

#### Competencies or competences?

The UK based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) helpfully clarifies: "Although in the 1980s and 1990s HR professionals drew a distinction between 'competencies' and 'competences', now the two terms are often used interchangeably. 'Competency' is more precisely defined as the behaviours that employees must have, or must acquire, to input into a situation in order to achieve high levels of performance, while 'competence' relates to a system of minimum standards or is demonstrated by performance and outputs." Consistent with the CIPD, People In Aid uses the term 'competency' or 'competencies' in this report, and where the reference is to an occupational 'standard' then the term 'competence' is used.

### 2.2 - Developing a competency framework

Competency models are used widely in the public and private sectors, and many NGO organisations have them, in particular, to manage the staff of their HQ and longer-term programmes. To arrive at a framework of competency statements, these organisations have spent substantial time and effort in analysing the behaviours of high performers within their organisation. The idea is to find out which elements of their performance are contributing to their success and then helping others to perform in a similar manner. The identified competencies are tied in with the future direction of their organisation and underlying values. Having undergone this process the resulting competency models provide order and direction to influence HR processes. This takes time. Within CARE it took about one year from the

running of the first focus group to get to the development of the competency framework, and then a further two years to embed the framework.

MSF UK described the organisation as being in the early stages of looking at developing competencies. Initially they will assess their established HR practices in MSF's operational centre in Amsterdam and then look at developing a competency framework as a basis for the assessment of competencies for recruitment processes.

Competency models are effective as they can create order out of diversity by representing aggregate views of many staff. Bioforce Development Institute ([www.bioforce.asso.fr](http://www.bioforce.asso.fr)) did early groundbreaking work on defining competencies for humanitarian programme managers (2002) and this has helped influence work within many organisations and in particular a Masters programme run in partnership with the University of Liverpool.

### 2.3 - Similarities in competency frameworks in use

The following competencies have been applied consistently to humanitarian roles from larger organisational competency models in use. They are not listed in any particular order of importance, or ranking.

- 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

Agencies that are planning to develop a competency framework could use these as a starting point and apply them to their own organisational context.

In 2006, work was done under the auspices of the Emergency Capacity Building project to devise a shortlist of competencies for humanitarian workers that can be used for telephone recruitments for temporary assignments ([www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org)).

This led to the elaboration and more detailed development of three of the above competencies (operational decision making, pressure tolerance and building and maintaining relations in changing teams). The ensuing indicators were tested with emergency programme managers for their robustness and relevance. The programme managers involved in the process felt that the competency-based interviews had helped them to deconstruct their experiences and to describe their leadership qualities. The prioritised competencies have been worked on further still as part of this People In Aid review and now include some suggested behavioural indicators, (see section 7).

**Figure 1: Extract from The British Red Cross Management Competencies**

**Interpersonal and communication skills:  
Building and maintaining relationships  
internally and externally**

- i) Takes the initiative in communicating with others ('up', 'down' and 'sideways'), using all available methods appropriately
- ii) Provides clear and accurate information on policy, strategy, tasks and procedures to individuals and teams
- iii) Communicates effectively with relevant internal and external stakeholders, e.g. volunteers, clients, partners, donors, etc, representing the Society positively and realistically, and managing contacts with the range of stakeholders and others appropriately
- iv) Expresses opinions clearly and persuasively, using information and arguments in appropriate ways, and selecting communication styles, methods and techniques appropriate to the issues, audience and context
- v) Listens actively, asking questions, clarifying points and re-phrasing others' statements, in order to check mutual understanding, and then acting as appropriate
- vi) Able to relate to, communicate and negotiate effectively with a wide range of people, consulting with others and encouraging frank and open exchange of views to achieve optimum outcomes



Figure1: continued

**Managing and developing yourself: Managing your workload and ensuring your own personal and professional development, in order to maximise your contribution to the work of the Society**

- i) Manages own workload, prioritising tasks and activities to achieve the best outcomes for the Society
- ii) Recognises the importance of continuous learning and professional development, and takes responsibility for her/his own professional and personal development
- iii) Seeks feedback from others to identify own strengths and development needs, and uses this to make realistic assessments of training and development needs
- iv) Able to select appropriate development activities to meet identified needs
- v) Takes appropriate risks, while taking responsibility when things go wrong and learning from mistakes
- vi) Able to learn and to acquire new skills rapidly, and to transfer learning from one situation to another.

## 2.4 - Need to update competency frameworks

For competency models to work well they require updating every few years. Also the competency descriptions need to be defined in behaviours (indicators) that staff can understand – i.e. what sort of things do they [staff] do and how do they behave when they perform their role effectively. Without this interpretation the competency descriptions remain abstract – and while no one argues against them per se, in reality no one uses them effectively either. The review found that many agencies' current frameworks are being revisited in the current climate to add in or highlight necessary behaviours for engaging better with affected communities (in order to achieve greater accountability) and for enhanced safety and security management. It is worth highlighting that agencies are increasingly recognising that the effectiveness of their programmes is a reflection of the quality of relationships their staff have with communities. Competency models thereby attempt to specify behaviours to achieve these better relations.

## 2.5 - Personal and technical competencies

Two types of competencies are relevant: personal and technical. Personal competencies are the underpinning behaviours required by all humanitarian staff to carry out their role effectively, such as the ability to work under pressure and in difficult conditions. Working with personal competencies is undoubtedly challenging – in the words of one respondent the challenge is *'to introduce this 'softer stuff' into daily practice without it becoming an additional pressure'*. It also relies on the skill and expertise of managers – as another respondent observed *'[a competency] framework is only as good as the model itself or those carrying it out'*.

An emphasis on personal competencies is evident in the wider NGO sector: Appendix 3 shows the generic competency dimensions that VSO use on their assessment days for selecting volunteers. These focus on personal competencies because experience has taught the organisation that the softer skills are at least as important as professional abilities in volunteer placements – returned volunteers consistently report that they have been more tested personally than professionally. Also the soft skills identified are common across all placements, which means that volunteers are assessed first and then matched to placements at a later stage. But recognising that personal competencies are not enough in themselves, VSO are also currently developing a set of technical competencies for management jobs in particular.

Technical competencies are based on the particular sets of skills and behaviours required by staff to carry out specific jobs. For example, public health advisors may have specific competencies related to malaria and vector control, and those who work in IT may specialise in database management.

World Vision International (through its humanitarian competencies project – HCP) has developed competency-based training and assessment to improve the technical and professional capability of humanitarian workers. The HCP Certificate in Humanitarian Services focuses on technical competencies, for example for water and sanitation and health and also personal competencies, such as communication in the workplace. Each competency area sets out the elements, performance criteria and underpinning knowledge and skills required.

## 2.6 - National staff and competency frameworks

National staff in humanitarian and longer-term (or development) programmes welcome competency frameworks as they provide clarity as to what is expected of them, in terms of what they need to do (behaviours) and how they can develop and grow within an organisation. They provide a set of statements that can be used to measure achievements and identify learning needs or resource gaps.

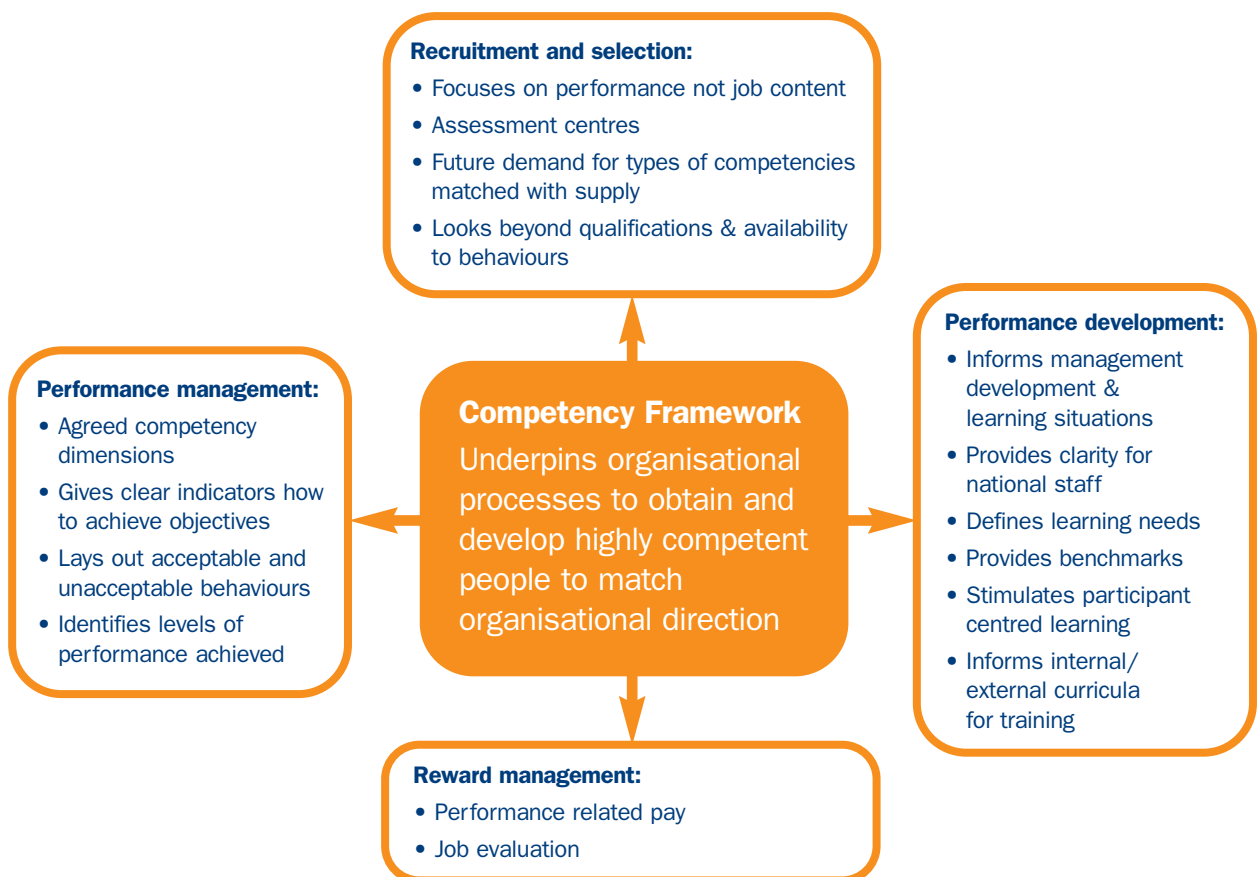
It is essential, however, that national staff understand the assumptions underpinning a competency approach, such as why it is being introduced and the expected impact. If a more competency based interview process is introduced, extra time may be needed to coach national staff as to the changes so that they are not disadvantaged by the new ways of working. Tools, which help national staff gain understanding as to what kind of questions they will be asked at recruitment, are cited as particularly useful.

## 2.7 - Competency frameworks and HR processes

Competency frameworks outline the behaviours needed to do jobs effectively in order to achieve the task. They can also set limits to guide behaviours, which is especially helpful in the area of poor performance. It is the role of managers to make such frameworks visible and clear to their staff. Competency frameworks therefore should never be regarded as simply an HR tool. They can provide a consistent language to record performance feedback, especially effective for those organisations that remain poor at giving negative feedback to staff.

To be effective, competency frameworks need to be applied systematically across a range of HR processes as the following diagram shows.

**Figure 2: Competency Based Integrated People Management**





When using a competency framework, recruiters apply a more structured approach to selection and think through the behaviours that a job entails. In contrast to this robust approach, the People In Aid review found that many emergency recruitments still tend to be influenced more by availability and specialist skill sets presented. Only after these have been considered do recruiters inquire into behaviours demonstrated on previous deployments – provided, of course, enough time remains in the interview.

Some agencies are working to ensure a more robust process becomes embedded – for example, the Irish agency GOAL has trained all country managers to conduct interviews with applicants for international posts, so that short listed applicants can receive a face-to-face interview in their home country.

## 2.8 - Obstacles to the successful implementation of competency frameworks

The failure of competency frameworks to become established has much to do with the belief that they are “*imposed from ‘the top’, [or from ‘HQ’ or the ‘outside’] and therefore do not reflect local issues*”. As with many organisational change initiatives, a framework’s overall acceptability is determined by the way it is developed, introduced and integrated into existing training and development programmes. Competency frameworks have also to fit with an organisation’s broader purposes.

People In Aid found that there was no evidence that the term ‘competencies’ puts people off the use of a framework. Where organisations did not have a competency framework, there was an alternative, similar model for recruiting its senior managers. This incorporated the necessary requirements of:

- Soft skills
- Strategic management skills
- Core management skills
- Organisational fit.

It is important to translate competency language (and jargon) into standardised tools and usable forms and to educate managers how best to use them. If an organisation has used a consultant to help formulate the competencies, it makes sense that the design of tools is also part of the consultant’s brief. Usable tools make aspects of recruitment and performance management more objective and robust. They also enable consistency and greater fairness of opportunity. Examples of competency tools are shown in the People In Aid *Practical Application of Competencies in Aid Work (2006)* available from People In Aid.

A competency framework can readily be made into a questionnaire where people have to rate their performance against competencies and give examples against the highest ratings. This can be used primarily for self-assessment, but also for peer and manager feedback (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Extract of a questionnaire**

In response to each statement, circle the number that most nearly describes the managerial performance of the person being evaluated.							
	1 = Never 7 = Always						
1 Demonstrates skill in setting task goals and deadlines.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2 Plans appropriate ways and means to achieve goals and deadlines.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3 Emphasises efficient use of all resources.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4 Sets clear standards of achievement for each specific task.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5 Initiates actions to accomplish tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6 Seeks information from a variety of sources.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7 Exhibits resourcefulness and persistence in taking action to solve problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The challenge of developing line managers' skills sufficiently is not limited to the humanitarian and development sector... During an interview (as part of this review) with a private sector HR director from a well known FTSE 100 company they admitted that they had not upskilled managers sufficiently to spot competencies during recruitment interviews and therefore '*the overall model remained the domain of HR*'. This underlines the importance of involving staff and line managers in the development of competency usage, for example, through profiling, and the need to invest in training to enable people to use them fully.

### Key messages

#### **The context for effective use of competency frameworks**

- Ensure definitions of competencies link into the future direction and broader purposes of your organisation.
- Update your competency model to keep the model relevant and ensure that it reflects latest sectoral thinking i.e. building relations with affected communities and accountability.
- Keep the competency language simple and easy to apply to the varying contexts.
- Translate the competency framework into usable tools which national staff will then work with. They welcome the clearer expectations that competency frameworks specify.
- Don't impose competency frameworks from the top or let them be seen as the domain of HR. They need to be introduced and integrated within existing processes and learning and development opportunities, to reflect local issues and become acceptable practice.

# Section 3

## Current initiatives to build professional capacity

In a review of similar sectoral initiatives, several examples of activities to professionalise relief workers were identified. They link into competency frameworks as often they include an explicit identification of behaviours which are then used to inform programme development and tools and to make processes more transparent. Overall, there is a general belief that excellence in performance can be analysed and modeled and transferred from one person to another.

### 3.1 - Accreditation and certification

The review found there is general agreement that:

- The work of programme managers in emergencies has become ever more complex,
- There are few qualification programmes already in existence that help to equip programme managers for this role; and
- Greater ongoing support from within organisations to boost programme manager technical and personal competencies will help to bridge the gap.

As a consequence of the above, the humanitarian sector is seriously looking at accrediting learning and development programmes that focus on developing identified skills and competencies. In this way **accreditation programmes** will ensure that people in key posts within the sector will have these demonstrable skills and such programmes will give a clear sense of the learning and development route available for all staff. This will hopefully lead to improved organisational and sectoral effectiveness. Established training programmes where demonstrated performance is assessed against predetermined standards can be accredited by external bodies and are often then made available as distance learning modules across organisations. Agencies also provide certificates for some of their established internal management and development programmes to build up a portfolio of learning for individuals.

More internships and better links with universities may help provide learning and development opportunities for staff. There are already some organisational training programmes specifically designed to certify individual achievement of competencies, such as implemented in World Vision International (WVI) and the Inter-agency Working Group's (IAWG) forthcoming National Staff Development Programme. WVI's well-defined Humanitarian Competencies Project (HCP) has led to national staff gaining a postgraduate qualification, which in normal circumstances would be difficult for them to have access to. Such programmes provide a strong staff development focus, which helps with succession planning.

Save the Children UK has also developed an extensive programme to identify and develop talent to enhance its future emergency response. Participants attend (1) a one-week simulation of an emergency environment, which includes assessment centre activities, (2) six months of a diploma emergency operation programme and then (3) individual secondments into overseas programmes. During the intensive process the participants receive feedback on their performance, personal competencies and skills. A process of accreditation for participants has been developed in conjunction with the Open University.

Elsewhere, for example in the public sector, endeavours to provide accreditation have had mixed results with problems stemming from the additional bureaucratic workload that comes from the development of the assessment tools, the implementation of the schemes and the heavy workload on assessors and qualified trainers. HR managers in the private sector that have worked on large-scale internal accreditation or certification programmes state that the training program can use up all available resources and time for training without making significant improvements in performance, and they can stifle alternative ways of developing staff. By contrast WVI learnt, through its debriefing and informal processes, that individuals who had gone through HCP and were then deployed to tsunami

programmes 'had felt more skilled and knew more what to expect'. They felt that the HCP had translated into better performance on the ground.

### 3.2 - Work on building trust

*The more political the (contextual) environment, the more likely it is that there will be a culture of opaqueness and distrust, rigid hierarchies, blame rather than openness, potentially poor office relations and less value placed on staff.* (ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action 2003 Field Based Learning pp 26).

Recent evaluations have repeated similar concerns where trust, or lack thereof, has been directly related to team effectiveness. Where there are low levels of trust in a humanitarian team, then performance and delivery to communities have been found to be poor. Powerfully, People In Aid has found that the importance of demonstrable respect, trust and diversity is now becoming reflected in the language of existing competency frameworks.

A Trust Index has been developed by Oxfam GB, CARE, Save the Children US and World Vision, whereby humanitarian teams can rate internal and external factors relating to trust in diverse teams and their impact on the work performance. Criteria for trust have been explored and definitions offered for both trust and the factors that impact on trust in multi-cultural teams. (ref: [www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org)). The work has also highlighted various tools already 'in use' which help to build and establish trust within teams and improve relations between international and national staff.

An understanding of trust can be made more explicit through the identification of behaviours related to it and their relevance in particular contexts. Some organisations have separated out clusters of competencies relating to diversity or team working, whereas others have decided that these behaviours are included within other clusters and do not need to be made explicit.

### 3.3 - Developing national staff

Strengthening local capacity for emergency work has been mentioned as critical for increasing effectiveness and efficiency of the sector. The Training and Capacity Building Group (TCBG) of the Inter-agency Working Group (IAWG) on Emergency Preparedness for the Great Lakes, East and Horn of Africa are working with INGOs, local NGOs and

government sector workers to address the learning challenges of the region. A learning needs analysis revealed gaps relating to a lack of:

- management and leadership knowledge and skills
- knowledge and understanding relating to Sphere.

They are now working with training providers to address these gaps in competence.

Another project, led by Oxfam GB and CARE looked at developing national staff, already within organisations, to become key staff to work in emergencies. A very practical skills based programme has been developed comprising simulation-based exercises with feedback on the technical and personal competencies required. Learning and training needs for the course were identified through a learning needs analysis.

#### National Staff Development

The National Staff development pilot includes a Foundation Module for professional emergency workers for the national staff of the seven agencies of the Inter-agency Working Group, attached by accreditation through a specialised external body. Additional modules, including management and leadership, technical and functional, as well as specialised modules on areas such as disaster management, conflict prevention and resolution and human rights are planned to follow, providing a path to career development for their national staff. ([www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org))

Capacity building in this way is not just concerned with efficient service provision – it goes beyond short training inputs and shows respect for and responsiveness to locally defined priorities and clearly links into the accountability agenda (ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action 2004 Capacity Building pp 66-7).

### 3.4 - Listening skills

Another project to influence the future thinking of humanitarian programming is the **Listening Project** ([www.cdainc.com](http://www.cdainc.com)). The Listening Project is about learning how to do emergency work more effectively – to trace the impacts and outcomes of agency efforts. The project asks people in recipient societies how they understand the successes and failures of the international aid efforts.

### Listening Project aims

1. Learning whether (or not) there are any generalisable patterns to the ideas that are heard across contexts and types of assistance.
2. Analysis of the ideas and insights to discover what, if anything, they tell us about how to do international work more effectively.
3. Possible clarification of the balance, or priority, deemed right by recipient people.

Listening teams have traveled to various countries to conduct conversations with communities. The facilitators involved in this project have had to develop and demonstrate listening competencies. The resulting conversations have been shared and themes and patterns highlighted. These are then compared across countries to discover patterns and learn lessons on how to improve humanitarian practice. The overall findings will undoubtedly influence the accountability debate and shape humanitarian programme direction over the years to come.

### 3.5 - Humanitarian Accountability Partnership

(HAP – [www.hapinternational.org](http://www.hapinternational.org))

Humanitarian agencies exercise significant financial, technical and logistical power through their programmes to save lives and reduce suffering. In contrast, the disaster survivors have no formal control and little influence over emergency relief agencies, making it difficult for the people affected by disasters to hold these aid agencies to account. In 2003, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership was set up to promote accountability to disaster survivors and develop principles that agencies could comply with, to ensure that their programmes could be held accountable. It was felt that the principles needed to be backed up by performance benchmarks or compliance indicators, and in 2007 there is now a HAP Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management. It is hoped that this will not be viewed as new, but more a practical means through which continual improvements can be made in the accountability and effectiveness of humanitarian work. The previous HAP principles did not include performance benchmarks or verifiable compliance indicators. Hence this standard reflects a designated set of processes

that enable continual improvement in an agency's performance in meeting essential needs and which respect the dignity of disaster survivors.

Performance benchmark number 4 directly relates to staff competencies:

***The agency shall determine the competencies, attitudes, and development needs of staff required to implement its humanitarian quality management system.***

It will therefore be essential that HAP member agencies adhering to the accountability framework have identified relevant competencies and means to integrate them within their work.

### 3.6 - Humanitarian sectoral clusters ([www.humanitarianreform.org](http://www.humanitarianreform.org))

A humanitarian cluster system coordinated by OCHA has been set up to ensure sufficient global capacity is built up and maintained in key gap sectors/areas of response, with a view to ensuring timely and effective responses in new crises. Thematic areas include health, logistics, protection and early recovery and each has its own specific training initiatives under way, detailed under each thematic area. These are underpinned by thinking of technical competencies.

Overall, these initiatives influence and challenge the operations and ways of working in the humanitarian sector. In response to the need for increased accountability, they are providing a demonstrable linkage between competency frameworks and their practical impact on individuals' behaviours, knowledge and skills; a connection which the previous section of this research has shown to be important.

### Key messages

#### **Competency frameworks and links to other initiatives**

- There are many useful initiatives within the sector that have generated findings and tools that organisations can make use of to strengthen the design, implementation and use of competency frameworks. For further reference see section 11.
- All the initiatives fit with the wider agenda of building capacity both within organisations and within communities and partners and so have a strong resonance with the concept of competency frameworks.
- Current ways of working are being challenged by these initiatives. Organisations will need to demonstrate accountability in their ways of working. It will no longer be sufficient to have a competency framework, but notice will be taken of how it is used and applied.



# Section 4

## Making competencies work in programme responses – learning from the sector

Humanitarian and development organisations are learning what helps to ground the use of competencies into daily practices. As with many organisational initiatives, momentum can slow down after big launches. This was the experience of several organisations where staff turnover and levels of interest in performance management had meant that well-researched competency frameworks had stayed more the remit of headquarter staff than impacting on the performance of field staff. Several key lessons have emerged to ensure the acceptability of competency frameworks. This section looks further at these.

### Competency frameworks are part of an overall capacity building strategy

As figure 1 demonstrates, competency frameworks are not and should not be stand-alone initiatives. They need to form part of an overall organisational capacity building strategy. This has happened in WVI and is the way that CARE International is moving forward.

### To be effective, competencies must be built into induction processes and the early experience of being in the organisation

Competencies work best when they are built into the general experience of starting in an organisation with clear indication how they can be used in work practice. For example:

- (1) In recruitment interviews,
- (2) As part of feedback to the person on why they got the job; and
- (3) Competency language used as part of their induction and early development of a personal development plan.

Several organisations are undertaking grouped or 'batch' recruitments currently, in an attempt to provide fuller inductions, which it is hoped will be more time effective for those involved in delivering them and build greater team and networking relations among those joining at the same time.

### Identification of threshold or entry competencies works well

Another way of using competencies at the recruitment and induction stage is to decide on threshold competencies, or the minimum competencies that someone needs to do the job at his or her entry point into the organisation. These can be backed up by a personal development plan to develop other areas.

### Competencies can help clarify and consolidate training outcomes and feed into performance management

As competencies become accepted and a routine way of working, participants attending training programmes will expect to see behavioural output indicators made as clear as course objectives, which can then be picked up in general supervision sessions. An indicator provides evidence or signs that change has taken place. For example an indicator from a course on Training of Trainers for giving presentations to groups could be: *Information is clear and accurate and presented at a relevant pace, tone, manner and style appropriate to the needs and capabilities of the learners*. Following the course the manager of a participant could then ask them to make a short presentation at a team meeting and hence link the recent training into ongoing work requirements.

### Can be used to define and communicate minimum levels of knowledge for programme managers

Specifically for programme managers more work is currently being done to define minimum levels of knowledge and skills that they require across the range of subjects they have responsibility for. This is work to define technical levels of competence and covers areas like fraud analysis, food security, security management etc. WVI has gone down this route already and the Bioforce Development Institute ([www.bioforce.asso.fr](http://www.bioforce.asso.fr)) which runs a Diploma in International Aid Logistics

or Administration and a Masters in Humanitarian Programme Management, in partnership with the university of Liverpool, have carried out work on defining competencies for logisticians (1996), administrators (2000) and watsan technicians (2001) and for each of these, Bioforce has written generic job descriptions, in consultation with some of the main French agencies.

Appendix 4 shows suggested technical competencies for two levels of programme manager and underpinning knowledge to support these. The work originated as part of the ECB study of competencies and the tables form a starting point for a discussion about the core experience, skills and behaviours needed by humanitarian professionals at management levels and can be used as a starting point to review current job descriptions.

The Fritz institute has developed a Certificate in Humanitarian Logistics ([www.fritzinstitute.org/prgSC-CERT\\_main.htm](http://www.fritzinstitute.org/prgSC-CERT_main.htm)) to provide standardised logistics training and a certification system. The aim is to increase professionalism and competence in the humanitarian community. An advisory committee, which included UNICEF, ICRC, IRC, Oxfam GB and UNHCR helped to create the underpinning competency model and to develop the associated learning materials. One key objective of the certification process is to build local capacity. Through access to training in logistics and supply chain management, local staff will become more effective and empowered in the process.

### Competency profiling makes the framework easier to use

A general view is that competency frameworks can be cumbersome. Mercy Corps, through its Cornerstones competency framework, is developing competency profiles for certain emergency roles to ensure their ease of use and application. The competency profiles consist of job category; priority competencies; ways of acquiring the competencies (on the job learning); indicators to demonstrate that the individual has grasped the competency (mastery or know-how); how you know you have achieved the competency, which links back into the on-job-learning. Having developed competency profiles for certain roles it is then possible to go out and assess the baseline of current levels of competencies. This gives essential information as to where to focus training and development to scale up change. A further example of a competency profile from Oxfam GB is shown in Appendix 2.

A different kind of competency profiling can be done through psychometric testing. Organisations such as Oxfam GB use the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) from SHL ([www.shl.com](http://www.shl.com)) for senior recruitments. The OPQ has sections on *Adapting and Responding to Change and Coping with Pressure and Setbacks*, which together with other scales can produce a 'competency profile'. If used with other tools and discussion it can be a valid indicator of likely reaction to conflict, anxiety and stress.

Figure 4: An example of a competency profile

Job Category	Priority competencies	Ways of acquiring the competencies	Indicators of know-how	How you know you have achieved the competency
<b>Example Country Director</b>	E.g. Performance Management: The ability to communicate expectations to a team, to coach for improved performance, and to hold team members accountable for outcomes	Online coaching tools  Organisational Performance Management materials  Working with mentor	Able to ask for and receive upward feedback from team members  Staff have and use personal development plans	Able to ask for and receive upward feedback from team members  Staff have and use personal development plans



### Transferability of competencies leads to greater opportunities

By seeking to develop wider learning opportunities and to enable the sharing of experience related to the use and assessment of competencies, humanitarian workers are much more likely to be able to move within and across organisations. And indeed, it will become more acceptable to do so. Competency frameworks, if tied into performance management and feedback systems, could make this process more transparent. This is surely desirable, as currently, transferability only tends to come when individuals or their managers spot opportunities elsewhere.

#### Points for reflection

##### **Making competencies work – learning from the sector**

- What is the early experience of using competencies for someone joining your organisation? How will they feel motivated to use them?
- Do your training programmes make clear what competencies participants will gain from attending? How are these built into ongoing supervision?
- How do you make your competency framework easy to apply?
- Have you identified the minimum levels of knowledge or technical competencies that humanitarian or longer-term programme managers need to know? Are these realistic?



# Section 5

## Authentic leadership backed up by support mechanisms

### 5.1 - Proactive support given to programme managers

Within organisations coaching skills are now a key part of a manager's toolkit. Using competencies to discuss performance adds substance to coaching conversations. Humanitarian programme managers coach their staff and expect more proactive support from their own line management. The greater scrutiny of what goes on at field level and the sense of higher standards means that there is more to hold together and that the managers want to feel they can easily find back-up and support.

Very often the managers need space to talk to someone discreet to help them determine the best course of action. Problems are made worse when programme managers feel isolated and cannot talk to other team members about critical personnel issues. It is difficult to talk to peers in other organisations about such things, as this would be crossing organisational lines. Back in 2003, ALNAP drew attention to the importance of managers in creating, connecting (sharing) space for learning by their staff.

There is general agreement in the sector that reverence for heroic, macho leadership is now replaced by the need for humanitarian workers to demonstrate high degrees of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness and self-regulation. Elsewhere in the literature on leadership this is referred to as 'Authentic leadership'. Staff need high levels of emotional intelligence to work in a participative way with communities and to cope with insecure situations. To achieve all this, the review found that emergency programme managers expect to be supported by their organisations and feel very let down when not.

To resolve these issues some organisations provide a mentor or coach for people to contact for help and advice. In other organisations there are now organisational counsellors to talk through more personal reactions to situations. These

positions remain rare however, and there is usually only one such person per organisation. In general, organisations are now making clearer to line managers what support is expected, and when, for their humanitarian staff.

### 5.2 - Use of coaching

People In Aid's findings show that coaching is now an acceptable support mechanism in the NGO sector for helping people to cope with high stress situations. Coaching is an opportunity for a conversation to help someone perform their tasks better than he or she could have done otherwise. It thereby increases skills and confidence of staff and can provide an opportunity for people to take time to stop and reflect on decisions and actions and learn more about what is happening, their role in it and options available.

In 2007 Merlin piloted a coaching process where external coaches worked with Country Directors and Country Health Directors. The initiative formed part of an overall management and leadership programme that senior managers in Merlin participate in. Coachees came forward on a self selecting basis and telephone coaching conversations took place to help the individuals focus on learning objectives set by their line managers. A review of the process has shown that it was a very positive learning experience within the organisation and will be repeated further. It has helped coachees to experience coaching for themselves and has helped to expand their management style and skills and to improve communications within the line. It has also helped the managers to take responsibility for their own learning and development. The benefits of using external coaches were that they were perceived as neutral and non-judgmental and that the overall process did not use up large amounts of internal capacity.

Coaching has also been used to bring new staff up to speed as quickly as possible. One example given by a respondent was when a member of staff joined Oxfam GB and had a fast turnaround

to get out to Darfur. She was allocated a coach for the first few weeks of her deployment to help her understand the organisation and its ways of working which she found invaluable.

In addition to coaching some agencies have provided good support when more experienced learners act as a 'buddy' to new learners or by pairing two or more learners at the same stage of training.

### 5.3 - Use of mentoring

Mentoring incorporates many of the skills of coaching but differs in that mentors do give advice, whereas coaching helps individuals to arrive at their own solutions. Mentors motivate their mentees by giving individualised attention to their development needs as opposed to a line manager who is more concerned with day-to-day work and short-term results (ALNAP 2003). In many organisations there are documents and guides for programme managers to follow, but mentors who have implemented the thinking behind them, may know more about the best way to use them. And there are still barriers to overcome in terms of acceptance and prioritisation of mentoring – there is a commonly held perception that mentoring can be time consuming, and this review found that often

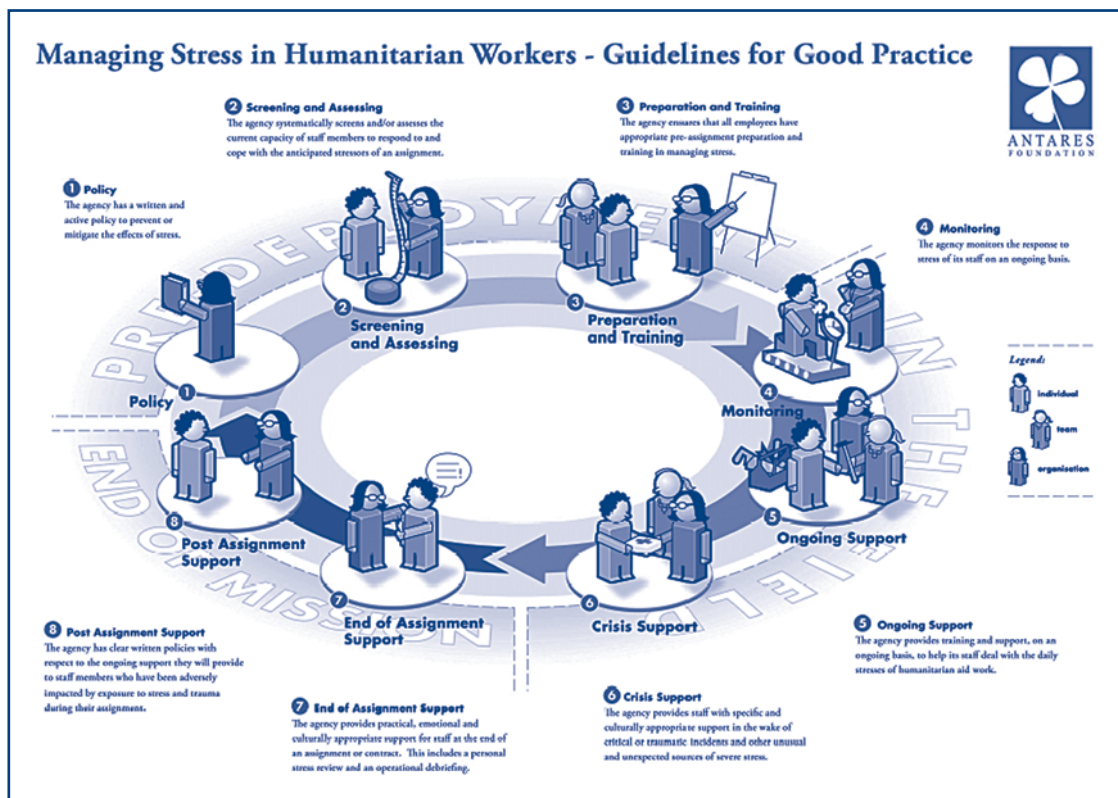
organisations only provide mentors for 'talented' or 'fast tracked' managers. Further, faced with many other priorities some have yet to be convinced of the return on investment – for example a mentoring/coaching pilot was proposed as part of the Emergency Capacity Building project but IAWG members selected other areas of higher priority for the funding.

Several respondents felt that experienced programme managers would make excellent coaches or mentors and could travel to support less skilled and experienced peers. Unfortunately many organisations will not spare them to carry out this role because of the shortage of experienced managers. To build the knowledge and skills base of programme managers, training programmes on emergency project management are being discussed with US training institutes to meet some of the learning gaps.

### 5.4 - Managing stress of programme managers

Providing support mechanisms such as coaching or mentoring can help ease the stress load of programme managers and lead to improved programmes. The Antares Foundation ([www.antaresfoundation.org](http://www.antaresfoundation.org)) stated (2006) that

Figure 5: Antares Foundation guidelines



managing stress in staff of humanitarian aid organisations is an integral management priority in enabling the organisation to fulfil its field objectives, as well as necessary to protect the well-being of the individual staff members, their teams and the communities they work with. They also make clear that adequate care systems for national and international staff are often under-developed and lack attention and resources. In their guidelines for Good Practice for Managing Stress in humanitarian workers there are eight underlying principles. Principle 5, Ongoing Support, states that: *the agency is providing training and support on an ongoing basis to help its staff deal with the daily stresses of humanitarian aid work.* They make clear that proactive support should be routine.

### Case study

#### An example of proactive support in action

*Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has put in place a holistic staff care program to support the wellbeing of its field-based employees. This was in response to results of a survey which revealed serious concerns among field staff relating to stress levels, patterns of overwork, security, travel, office morale, orientation and debriefing. These concerns were reflected in indicators such as staff turnover, absence rates and accidents.*

With strong backing from senior management, a comprehensive program was developed covering all staff from the beginning of the hiring process through to the end of assignment. Interventions included, for example, screening for coping skills during the selection process, candid statements of the working environment, appropriate preparation for the assignment, a self-care awareness campaign, critical incident management protocols and provision of trauma counselling resources, application of R&R policies, debriefing and health checks. All of these were driven through to the local level. Wherever possible, local service providers are engaged to work with staff in their own language and culture. In all emergency contexts, CRS designates at the outset a point person with full responsibility for staff care issues such as accommodation, R&R and professional support resources.

### Key messages

#### The need for support mechanisms

- Emotional intelligence/maturity is replacing macho leadership, meaning, in return, that humanitarian programme managers now expect more support mechanisms from their organisations.
- Use of mentors and coaches to support such roles has worked and there is greater scope for this to grow.
- There is a shortage of skilled programme managers to work in emergencies. Training courses, coaching and on-job-learning in emergency project management may help fill the gap.



# Section 6

## Tensions underlying competency frameworks

Competency frameworks can enhance people management processes in organisations, but there are limitations that can arise, relating to their application and general acceptability. These include frameworks:

### Being introduced in isolation

If a framework is introduced as a Human Resources Department initiative and does not relate to the core competencies and direction of an organisation then it is unlikely to take root. A competency framework clarifies what performance managers are trying to judge, but they still need to make judgments. Sometimes a framework is seen as ineffective when, in fact, it is the loose way managers are applying it, which is to blame. It is also necessary to show how a competency profile or specific identified competencies fit with behaviours demanded through other Codes of Conduct. They do work together and could be fully discussed during induction.

Staff also question whether competencies are demonstrated when individuals are under pressure. Experience has shown that such behaviours will not be paramount during emergencies or crisis situations if they have not:

- Become grounded into practice through robust performance management
- Been experimented with during training courses
- Been backed up by coaching from line managers during the day-to-day work

### Being a strait jacket

A competency approach provides focus but can become too narrowing if used as a prescriptive tick box approach. People can become skilled at talking the language but not living it. Also people can be reluctant to highlight areas of weakness if the framework is being used for reward. Managers still need to value and recognise skills other than competencies, such as language abilities and knowledge of particular regions, for example. It can be helpful to widen a discussion on

performance management if they feel someone is playing with competency language rather than honestly describing their performance.

### Representing a model of deficiency

Sometimes a competency model can be viewed as a threat, highlighting what individuals are not doing well enough. Feedback needs to reflect what is being done well **and** what has to improve. The framework will then be seen as fair to individuals and legitimate at the collective level. To provide differentiation between high and mediocre performers, some competency frameworks highlight what behaviours an organisation wants to see and what it does not want to see.

### Prioritising individual performance over team performance

One senior NGO manager stated that another tension is that competency frameworks and performance objectives can put the whole emphasis onto individual performance. Whilst this is to be commended as a powerful way of improving the quality of work done in organisations, through increased individual responsibility, it could have a negative impact on the team approach and make it collectively risk averse. Also a competency approach that puts the emphasis on an individual rather than a team may not be acceptable in all cultures. In such situations it may be better to start discussing how a team has worked and then see the individual contributions that have led to team achievements.

### Combining to develop one generic competency framework across organisations

Another point raised during the review was whether one generic competencies model could serve all emergency agencies. Does a successful humanitarian programme coordinator in Oxfam demonstrate the same personal and technical competencies as a Country Director in World Vision, for example? If yes, one generic model

could be developed. Reviewing the existing competency models certainly highlights similarities between the competencies, but the review found that those who have invested in developing their models are unlikely to abandon them to subscribe to one overall hybrid model.

### Committing large amounts of time for competency-based interviewing

Respondents stated that a focussed interview approach such as behavioural event interviewing that is used to recruit to competencies is time consuming. One organisation was finding that each interview lasted two hours and then the interviewer needed further time to write up extensive notes. Whilst it was acknowledged that it did help to get to the heart of someone and had led to successful appointments, such recruitment processes were now only being used for the most senior posts. Elsewhere in the organisation, questions focussed more on what motivates people to work in a particular way; what drives them and the kind of decisions they make in particular situations.

#### Key messages

##### **Tensions underlying competency frameworks**

- The humanitarian sector is unlikely to develop one generic model across the sector. Individual organisations have already invested in their own models in use.
- Competency interviews take time. Simpler approaches are needed that still draw out the competencies of the applicants.
- Competencies need to become grounded into practice through robust performance management, experimented with during training courses; and backed up by coaching from line managers during day-to-day work.



# Section 7

## Personal behaviour in emergency environments – a shortlist of competencies with behavioural indicators

Earlier work through 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 led to prioritising and the development of three competencies in particular:

- Pressure tolerance
- Building and maintaining relations in changing teams
- Operational decision making in emergency situations.

The indicators for these competencies were tested with emergency programme managers for their robustness and relevance through brief interviews. Programme managers fed back afterwards that the competency based interview questions on these three areas had caused them to deconstruct their experiences of emergency situations and helped them to describe their leadership qualities.

This next section shows how the competencies were developed further during the People In Aid work so that they now include suggested behavioral indicators. Special thanks goes to Mary Anderson of Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA – [www.cdainc.com](http://www.cdainc.com)) for her input to the shortlist which reflected the learning that has come from the Listening Project and the development of behavioural indicators for the listening skills of the project teams. They were also used in the ECB Learning Needs analysis for the National Staff development pilot.

The competencies reflect consistently the areas that emergency staff need to demonstrate competency in, across varying contexts. It is hoped that the shortlist is useful for prioritising areas discussed in recruitment, especially for organisations without defined competency models

and to help the interviewer understand how a person has worked in emergency contexts before, and is useful in predicting job performance.

Each of the competencies has a list of potential behavioural indicators beneath it. These indicators could vary according to the context.

### 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 that managers have more responsibility to act on 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.

**Points for reflection**

**Personal behaviour in emergency environments.**

**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?**

# Section 8

## Developing competencies through work-based learning

One of the most promising ongoing approaches to professional growth is work-based learning. This is learning that occurs as staff engage in their daily work activities by expanding their skills and knowledge, sharing what they have learned from their experiences, reflecting on specific work experiences to uncover new understanding, and listening to colleagues share the best practices they have discovered while trying out new approaches or planning and implementing a project.

Work-based learning excellently supports the development of competencies. Being given responsibility to improve their skills and knowledge within work activities increases

learners' motivation, which in turn improves progression and enhances their career development. Some organisations design progression routes that give learners the opportunity to acquire a range of additional skills and qualifications and which include activities that develop individual confidence and self-esteem.

Managers or providers of training who assess the capabilities and aspirations of learners at the outset of work-based learning are able to match them to appropriate work placements or programmes of training. Individual learning plans that work are those with clear targets, where progress is reviewed regularly and targets adapted if circumstances change.

**Figure 6: Examples of work-based learning**

Reflective practice	Reflecting on own work Reflective logs Supervision 1:1s
Participating in specific areas of work	Project work Work attachments Secondments Work shadowing 'Acting up' Guided visits Part of an evaluation team or learning exchange Part of an assessment team
Learning from others on the job	Receiving coaching Being mentored Completing distance learning modules
Learning from developing others	Coaching others Demonstrating Training others Developing training materials

Alongside such activities as highlighted in figure 5, many organisations have developed easy to access materials to help individuals develop competencies and to expand their knowledge, understanding and skills in areas of their work. Oxfam GB has Pick Up and Go packs (see [www.peopleinaid.org/resources/casestudies.aspx](http://www.peopleinaid.org/resources/casestudies.aspx) for an example) in a variety of topics that individuals can use to train their teams or partner organisations, or use as individual resource items. Some of the most popular topics covered in the Pick Up and Go range are:

- Coaching and feedback
- Gender mainstreaming and introduction to gender
- Time management

A further example of providing materials for staff to broaden knowledge and understanding is shown through the Tearfund approach. They have developed an international learning zone where staff and the wider sector can access information on varying topics including impact assessment, advocacy, human rights, water and sanitation (<http://tilz.tearfund.org>).

The following table gives some tips for developing competencies in *building and maintaining relations in teams and achieving results* through work-based learning. Such activities can provide a very powerful learning experience. Types of activities need to reflect an individual's learning style. Some people learn by observing, others by doing, by reading, or by a combination of these. The ideas below are suggestions only and can be expanded on by courses available within and beyond an organisation and also by suggesting books and articles that individuals can access.

Providing such tips for competency development can be made available as an intranet resource for staff to access as part of self managed learning.

This section has outlined suggestions of how managers and staff can identify learning opportunities within work activities to build a competency development approach to bring about a culture of continuous improvement and self-learning.

Competency	Tips to aid competency development
Achieving results	<b>Measure accomplishments against objectives.</b> Determine if you are satisfied with your progress or that of your team against the targets and goals. List any obstacles that are getting in the way of achieving your objectives, identify resources you can draw on to overcome the obstacles. Based on this review, take action.
Team relations	<b>Keep a record of your contributions to team meetings and determine your impact in each situation.</b> Did you contribute a great deal or very little? Was the effect of your participation positive, neutral or negative? Think how you can make your contribution more positive and make an action plan.
Team relations	<b>Avoid taking control of team meeting agenda or being first within the group to make suggestions.</b> Instead try playing different roles within the group. Listen during team meetings. Don't answer your own questions, practise remaining silent for at least 10 seconds after you ask a question.
Resource management	<b>Reflect on resource use.</b> During two weeks make a list of unexpected resource problems and issues that come up and think through possible trends and patterns. Examine the list and try to identify common themes or similarities. Ask yourself whether you have seen the problem before? What do I already know that may help ease the situation? What could be the possible cause? What could have prevented this from happening? Is there anything I could have done to speed up my understanding of the problem?
Resource management	<b>Identify development tools that will help you track resources more effectively.</b> Keep a spreadsheet that lists your financial and non-financial resources and record what is available to you and when. Keep a diary of contacts that you approach to ask for additional resources. Evaluate this network to see if it needs to be expanded.

# Section 9

## Review conclusions

### The use of competencies and their relevance for NGO performance and effectiveness

The review has found that the use of competencies builds the quality of programmes by informing individuals and their managers how outcomes can be delivered more effectively through softer person-based behaviours, complemented by technical skills. **This underlines the applicability of competency frameworks to humanitarian work and the benefits they can provide.**

**The review found that, where there are easy to use and effective tools to help the implementation of competencies, staff at all levels benefit from competency frameworks.** The only people who would feel threatened by their usage would be poor performers who would receive clear feedback as to where their behaviours fall short of expectations. To achieve all this, competency models have to be developed into tools to make day-to-day processes easier to implement. **Competency profiling is now being used by a number of organisations and has helped to make competency use simpler and easier to apply.** Once a competency profile has been developed for a particular job role, an assessment of the current level of competencies within that grouping can be carried out. This baseline can then be used to determine appropriate learning and development priorities.

The findings reiterate that competency models incorporated into job roles help **national staff understand better the expectations that organisations have of them and how to develop and grow within an organisation.** All staff have clearer benchmarks and know what is expected of them.

Respondents agreed that the work of emergency workers is now much more visible and requires them to demonstrate high levels of self-awareness and self-regulation. It seems that the tasks that staff carry out in emergency situations require a high level of emotional intelligence in order to be

more participative with communities and to cope with highly insecure situations. **Competency models help define such softer, intangible behaviours and make it easier to identify poor performance.**

As one senior manager said: *'During humanitarian response we have high organisational expectations in dysfunctional situations'*. **Competency frameworks**, which clearly set out acceptable staff behaviours at all levels, **give managers a language to help them manage behaviours in such demanding situations.**

Current models in use are being revisited in the current climate to add in or highlight necessary behaviours for engaging more effectively and appropriately with affected communities (achieving greater accountability) and to highlight those relating to safety and security management. The review also found that organisations are taking on board the fact that effective programmes reflect **the quality of relations that their staff have with communities. Competency models thereby attempt to specify behaviours to achieve these better relations.**

The review found that there is impatience within the organisations interviewed 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.** The expectation from bodies like HAP is that organisations involved in their accountability approach will be able to demonstrate how competencies are used and applied by staff at various levels. This may be the push that is needed to embed competency-usage consistently across programmes.

Several interviewees stated that the failure of competency frameworks to become established has much to do with the belief that they are imposed from 'the top', from 'HQ' or 'outside' and therefore do not reflect local issues. All interviewees agreed that **the way a framework is**



**developed, introduced and integrated into existing training and development programmes determines its overall acceptability.** Organisations therefore need to give this careful attention.

Organisations with competency models stated that they help to bring together the behaviours required to do the job and the attributes that allow individuals to do things well. Used consistently, competencies provide a **common currency of language** for discussing performance and development, **which helps to break down confusion across working cultures.** All of this confirms their particular relevance to emergency work.

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 to test out competencies can help probe how a person has worked in such contexts before. Interviewee answers give insight to predict future job performance. The review did find however that **organisations would welcome simpler ways to use competencies for recruitment** as current practices were time-consuming and as a result their use was often limited to the most senior appointments.

**Respondents agreed that deciding on threshold or entry competencies for new recruits had been helpful.** These are minimum competencies that someone needs to be able to do the job at their entry point into the organisation. These were then backed up by a personal development plan to develop other areas. There was evidence that building in an early experience of competencies for a new recruit had further helped establish and cement the usage of competencies into daily practice.

**It was generally agreed that competencies need to link into existing management and leadership models and training programmes.** This leads to a more sustainable application and fit with the overall organisational culture and mindset. As competencies become an automatic part of a working approach, participants attending training programmes will expect to see behavioural output indicators made as clear as course objectives. These would reflect competency language which can then be fed back into ongoing performance review.

According to the findings of this review, **coaching is now an acceptable support mechanism for helping people to cope with high-pressured situations.** Where coaching has been used i.e. to bring new staff up to speed as quickly as possible, it has been widely welcomed. Internal coaches or those external to an organisation have been invaluable in helping programme managers work through personnel issues. Coaching can therefore provide a robust way of developing managers with potential, rather than put the emphasis on recruitment searches for 'super' managers.

It is expected that as organisations develop a shared understanding of competencies for emergency workers, there will be greater scope for staff to move within and across organisations. Within organisations, competency frameworks can make this process more transparent, especially if they are tied into performance management and feedback systems. Decisions about career development for national and international staff can be more consistent and evidence-based.

Reviewing existing competency models has highlighted the similarities between the competency frameworks but the review found that **organisations that have invested heavily in developing their models are unlikely to abandon them to subscribe to one overall hybrid model.**

The review concluded that **as organisations continue to develop and refine their use of competencies they will improve the sourcing, development and retention of quality staff.** There are also a number of useful outputs and conclusions from other projects that organisations can link into and make use of.

# Section 10

## Recommendations and ways forward to ground competency practice within humanitarian organisations

The review also suggests seven ways in which humanitarian organisations could consolidate good practice with regard to competency frameworks within their organisations:

### 1. Identify core areas

This research has shown that competencies group around the same priority themes, even though the behaviours or indicators vary by agency and cultural context. Although this makes a single generic competency impossible, 'core areas' can be highlighted to help agencies develop their frameworks. To reiterate, the core competency areas 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

Humanitarian agencies can review this list against their own identified priority areas and decide whether attention to these would help to inform better recruitment and development processes.

### 2. Recognise the importance of trust

The review has highlighted the importance of the development of trust, emotional intelligence and overall resilience needed by humanitarian workers. Competency frameworks can clarify what these look like in terms of behaviours expected by

staff. Organisations are encouraged to build up these elements within their frameworks so that staff can give and receive feedback on these.

### 3. Provide additional learning and development opportunities

There was general agreement that there needs to be additional learning and development opportunities to build up the technical and personal competencies of existing and potential programme managers. In the US this is being taken up by the Project Management Institute. There is a need to determine possibilities within the UK and Europe.

### 4. Accredite learning

Accreditation of organisational learning programmes has begun to reap benefits for organisations that have gone down this route and it is certainly something that the sector as a whole could look at more seriously. In addition to accrediting internal programmes, the sector could agree a core set of competencies and then seek to influence qualification programmes already in existence.

### 5. Develop competency approaches for short-term staff

Several organisations would welcome simple and easy to use competency approaches for recruiting short-term staff. The People In Aid review has helped to develop a shortlist looking at three priority personal competencies. Specific tools to develop these further would be an appropriate next step, along with greater sharing of other processes in use for contract staff.

## 6. Provide more support to humanitarian managers

Humanitarian programme managers now expect more proactive support mechanisms from their organisations. There is gathering evidence to suggest that use of mentors and coaches to support such roles has worked and there is scope for this to grow. Coaches can help individuals achieve learning objectives set by their line managers and reflect on their personal and technical competencies. Some organisations have used internal coaches; others have gone down the route of externals because of lack of internal resource. Donors may be prepared to support such learning initiatives during a humanitarian programme and this could be researched further.

## 7. Adopt competency profiles

Competency profiling is in use by a number of organisations and has helped to make competency use simpler and easier to apply. Once a competency profile has been developed for a particular job role, an assessment of the current level of competencies within that grouping can be carried out. This baseline can then be used to determine appropriate learning and development priorities. The review findings suggest that it would be worthwhile to develop case studies on the impact of competency profiling and see how it impacts on staff development and overall individual and team performance.

### Conclusion...

People In Aid's research shows the current status of competency frameworks within the humanitarian sector and captures the main themes of the debate around the effectiveness of competencies.

The recommendations and ways forward, outlined above, suggest a number of avenues that agencies could take to capitalise on the contribution of an effective competency framework. It is hoped that these practical suggestions will help make effective behavioural frameworks a reality within organisations.

### Questions for further reflection...

The research raises a number of important and challenging issues – here are some key questions for you to reflect on within your organisation and across agencies.

- *How far have you got in developing personal and technical competencies for your staff?*
- *How do the competency areas of recommendation 1 match your own model? How could these be used more for recruitment and development?*
- *What are the implications of this research for short-term recruitment? How do your processes measure up?*
- *Could 'Batch or grouped recruitment' work for your agency? What are the opportunities presented?*
- *How are your proactive support systems measuring up? What do you have in place?*
- *Do you recognise the trend or change from macho to emotionally intelligent humanitarian staff within your agency? What are the implications of this shift?*
- *What processes have you put in place to make using competencies easier? Would competency profiling be a suitable way forward in your agency?*
- *What is the view in your organisation about accrediting specific internal training programmes for humanitarian programme managers? How would such a move fit within your current training schedule?*



# Section 11

## References and source documents

ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action 2003  
Field Level Learning

ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action 2004  
Capacity Building  
[www.alnap.org](http://www.alnap.org)

Antares Foundation Managing Stress in  
Humanitarian Workers Guidelines for good  
practice July 2006  
[www.antaresfoundation.org/](http://www.antaresfoundation.org/)

Authentic Leadership – courage in action. Terry R W

Bioforce: Competencies for International Relief  
and Development Programme Manager  
[www.epn.peopleinaid.org](http://www.epn.peopleinaid.org)

Co-active Coaching  
Whitworth L, Kimsey-House H, Kimsey-House K,  
Sandahl P, Davies-Black Publishing 1998

CRS case study of good practice  
[www.peopleinaid.org/resources/casestudies.aspx](http://www.peopleinaid.org/resources/casestudies.aspx)

Developing Managerial Competence.  
People In Aid. 2004.  
[www.peopleinaid.org](http://www.peopleinaid.org)

IASC emergency Team Leadership programme  
2004 Emergency Team Leadership competencies  
[www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc](http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc)

Managerial Competence and Organizational  
Effectiveness: The Key to Excellence  
Schroder H.M (1989)

The Managers Pocket Guide to Organisational  
Learning. Gill S, 2000 Amherst MA:HRD Press

Practical Application of Competencies in Aid Work  
People In Aid. 2006.  
[www.peopleinaid.org](http://www.peopleinaid.org)

### Website resources:

The Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB) is a  
collaborative effort of seven humanitarian agencies  
that are jointly tackling common problems in  
emergency response and preparedness.  
[www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org)

Humanitarian Accountability Project  
[www.hapinternational.org](http://www.hapinternational.org)

CDA has details of its Listening Project on  
its website.  
[www.cdainc.com](http://www.cdainc.com)

Management Standards Centre provides  
information on UK standards and links to  
training approaches  
[www.management-standards.org](http://www.management-standards.org)

People In Aid offers support to agencies seeking  
to work with competency frameworks in the form  
of workshops and practical guidelines.  
[www.peopleinaid.org](http://www.peopleinaid.org)

World Vision International has a website on its  
humanitarian competencies programme  
[www.humanitarianstandards.org](http://www.humanitarianstandards.org)



# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### List of participating organisations

We gratefully acknowledge contributions from the following during the course of this research.

ALNAP

Bioforce Development Institute

British Red Cross Society

CARE International

Care USA

Catholic Relief Services

Collaborative Learning Projects

EPN

HAP International

Lingos

Mercy Corps

Merlin

MSF UK

Oxfam GB

RedR-IHE

Save the Children US

The International Rescue Committee

VSO

World Vision International

### Contributions from independent consultants:

Emma Jowett

Sean Lowrie

Isobel McConnan

Peta Sandison

Sara Swords (author)

# Appendix 2

## Example of competency profiling from Oxfam GB

<b>Procurement Officer SKILLS AND COMPETENCE:</b>			
<b>IV. Competency Profile Detail</b>			
<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Level Required</b>	<b>Criticality</b>
<b>Non – Technical</b>			
Working together	Communication	High	Vital
	Team Working	Medium	Necessary
	Knowledge Sharing	Medium	Necessary
Planning and Organizing	Work and Project Management	Medium	Vital
	Decision Making	High	Vital
	Logistics and Procurement Planning	High	Vital
Expectation Management	Performance and Result Oriented	Medium	Necessary
	Programme Support Oriented	High	Vital
	Quality and Detail Minded	High	Necessary
	Integrity and Ethics	High	Vital
Intellectual Ability	Judgment	High	Vital
	Analytical Thinking	Medium	Vital
	Strategic Thinking	Medium	Necessary
<b>Technical</b>			
Procurement Skills	Understanding of the Total Cost of Ownership	High	Vital
	Supply Chain – Global Understanding	Medium	Necessary
	Understanding and Ability to Execute Oxfam Purchasing Procedures	High	Vital
	Understanding of the Supply Base	High	Vital
	Comprehension of Terminology	High	Necessary
	Mastery of Procurement Processes	High	Vital
Logistics Skills	Understanding and Ability to Execute Oxfam Logistics Procedures	Medium	Nice to Have
	Knowledge of International Import / Export Procedures and Guidelines	Medium	Necessary
	Crisis Assessment	Medium	Necessary
Strategic Supplier Management Skills	Development Sector Expertise	High	Vital
	Market Analysis Ability	High	Necessary
	Supplier Analysis and Selection	High	Necessary
	Risk Management	Medium	Vital
	Supplier Negotiation	High	Vital
Support Skills	Understanding of Ethical Purchasing Guidelines	High	Necessary
	Understanding of Finance and HR Integration pts	Medium	Necessary
	Auditing Skills	Low	Necessary

# Appendix 3

## VSO Dimensions, Elements and Indicators

The Dimensions were developed about ten years ago and are generic to all placements. The Assessment Day is designed to measure the 'soft skills' necessary for successful volunteering overseas. A report from the assessment is written using the same terminology and passed to the people responsible for matching volunteers with placements and to programme staff overseas. Programme staff are asked to list the most important Dimensions for a given placement in the placement description.

### Definitions

**Dimensions:** a convenient way of clustering together, under broad headings, the skills, attributes and attitudes determined as necessary for a successful period of service as a VSO volunteer

**Elements:** dimensions broken down into more manageable elements which focus on measurable attitudes, experiences and behaviours that VSO expect to be able to assess on the Assessment Day. They also help guide Selectors' assessments by clarifying VSO's definition of dimensions. Examples of areas which are included in each element are included to help the process of classification

**Indicators:** specific examples of behaviour from the candidate's past as reported in the interviews or what the candidate said or did during the afternoon activities that can be used to assess the elements. Selectors will identify their own indicators

### Positive and realistic commitment

*A positive approach to working as a volunteer based on realistic and not excessive expectations*

Volunteers who have thought through what they are leaving behind – personally and professionally – are better able to adjust to the realities of volunteering. A firm commitment to volunteering and their area of work helps volunteers cope with the inevitable frustrations encountered working in a new environment overseas where, for example, placements do not always match placement descriptions and/or volunteer expectations. Volunteers who have thought through their applications carefully, who have a realistic picture of the likely realities overseas and who have a positive commitment to their work and VSO's values are more likely to be able to adjust successfully to their placement in the long-term.

#### **Commitment to volunteering with VSO**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Why the candidate wants to volunteer
- Why the candidate wants to volunteer with VSO (as opposed to other agencies or a private contract)
- Why the candidate has decided to apply at this stage of their personal and professional life

#### **Evidence of professional commitment**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Has an ongoing interest in their field, skill or profession
- Has thought through where VSO fits into their career
- Has considered what they may gain professionally from volunteering

#### **Aware of likely realities**

Example of areas included in this element:

- Has prepared for the Assessment Day (e.g. talked to Returned Volunteers/VSO Local Group, visited VSO's website or the Resources Centre)
- Has a realistic picture of what volunteering will be like
- Understands what VSO's expectations are of volunteers

### Commitment to learning

*The continuing desire for others to learn and the humility for personal learning and development*

It is important that volunteers join communities with an open attitude and an awareness that there are things they will need to learn in both the professional and personal spheres of their lives. Most volunteers will be sharing their skills and encouraging others to learn. It is therefore important that volunteers have a desire to facilitate the learning of others. They need to be responsive to the learning needs of the people they are working with.

#### **Open to learning**

Examples of areas included in this element :

- Has taken opportunities to learn new skills in or outside the workplace
- Has thought through what they may learn from volunteering
- Is able to identify times when they have learned in the past

#### **Committed to helping others learn**

Examples of areas included in this element :

- Has proactively sought to share their skills with others in or outside the workplace
- Are keen to share and not just use their skills
- Has thought through what skills they expect to share overseas

### Practical problem solving ability

*The ability to solve practical problems using available resources. An inventive and positive approach, making decisions where necessary*

Volunteers have to be able to solve problems in very different social, cultural, physical and work environments. A frequent problem for volunteers is coping with situations where they have to work with far fewer resources than they have been used to. This requires a proactive, persistent, practical and creative approach to seeking solutions. Volunteers need to be able to stay with a task and keep problems in perspective. They need to be comfortable making decisions which may not be ideal but are 'good enough' given the parameters within which they are working and/or based on available information.

#### **Positive approach to solving practical problems**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Able to give examples
- Willing to tackle practical problems
- Persistence in the face of difficulties
- Pragmatic approach

#### **Willing to make decisions where necessary**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Prepared to act on available information
- Knows when to move on
- Willing to accept 'good enough' solution

#### **Inventive use of available resources**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Experience of making do
- Seeks alternative solutions

## Flexibility and adaptability

*An adaptable approach to dealing with new and demanding situations*

Volunteers have to operate in very different physical, social, cultural and work environments. They need to be open to unexpected situations both personally and professionally and to have the resilience to cope with difficulties. Volunteers need to be able to change/modify their behaviour **within** the same culture and environment (*flexibility*) and **between** different cultures and environments (*adaptability*).

### **Balanced response to change**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Experience of change
- Able to learn from change
- Takes change on board

### **Alters behaviour in a way that is appropriate to new and demanding situations**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Experience of conforming
- Accepts what can't be changed while retaining perspective
- Willing to conform in order to achieve goals

### **Open to different ways of doing things**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Prepared to learn new systems
- Willing to take considered risks
- Flexibility in application of skills

## Self assurance

*The self-confidence to be sufficiently independent and to deal with people and circumstances with equanimity and humour*

VSO volunteers need the confidence, self awareness and good humour to cope with being in situations which are new to them. They need the ability to build new networks of friends and colleagues who are likely to come from different backgrounds to themselves (ethnically, socially, professionally and in age group). They need to be able to identify when they need help and have the confidence to seek it out.

### **Comfortable in new situations**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Appears at ease during Assessment Day
- Comfortable dealing with others
- Not threatened by new situations

### **Good humoured**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Not over serious
- Even tempered
- Able to bounce back

### **Aware of and able to express own needs**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Aware of own strengths and weaknesses
- Able to ask for help
- Able to see own needs are met

### Working with others

*The social skills to work with others and to enable others to solve problems, as well as persuading others to implement plans*

VSO volunteers work alongside local people in order to 'share skills, build capabilities and promote international understanding and action in the pursuit of a more equitable world'. It is important, therefore, that volunteers have the social and interpersonal skills to develop effective working relationships in order to enable them to work toward this aim. They will need to be able to involve others and negotiate with them in order to put plans into practice.

#### **Able to develop working relationships**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Shows interest in other people
- Comfortable working in a team
- Able to handle difficult relationships

#### **Able to involve others in seeking solutions**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Asks opinions of others
- Invites others to contribute skills/ideas
- Supports/encourages others

#### **Able to negotiate with others**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Able to present own case
- Willing to compromise
- Works towards consensus
- Able to reconcile different interests/diffuses conflict

### Sensitivity to the needs of others

*An open and non judgmental approach which respects other people and cultures. Good listening skills and empathy*

Volunteers are placed in situations where the people they are living and working with are likely to have different beliefs, behaviours, values and norms to their own. Volunteers need to be aware of, and sensitive to, these differences. With time this enables a better adjustment to their placements, helps them understand, cope with and respond diplomatically to frustrations which may be caused by being in an environment which is different to their own.

#### **Sensitivity in interpersonal relationships**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Caring attitude
- Caring response to other candidates
- Effects of separation/absence considered

#### **Diplomatic response to cultural difference**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Awareness/experience of different cultures
- Able to keep views (e.g. on politics/sex/religion) to self/private

#### **Non judgmental approach to different beliefs, behaviours, values and norms**

Examples of areas included in this element:

- Aware of limitations of own understanding
- Accepts diversity



# Appendix 4

## Programme Manager level 1 Technical Competencies

(ref: ECB Humanitarian competencies study [www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org))

The second column highlights the competencies critical to the post of programme manager, level 1. Organisations can expand on this column from their own organisational competency models.

Competency Cluster	Competency Name	Level Required	Criticality
<b>Emergency program management and implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to assess current situation, anticipate needs and resources</li> <li>Analysis of political, social and security context of the program</li> <li>Propose program and set objectives and indicators</li> <li>Monitor the program for progress, relevance and efficiency</li> <li>Apply and develop participatory and community oriented programs</li> <li>Develop transition and exit strategies</li> </ul>	High/medium/low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vital</li> <li>Necessary</li> <li>Nice to have</li> </ul>
<b>Program resource Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervise or carry out search for funding</li> <li>Design appropriate staffing structures</li> </ul>		
<b>Policy management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply organisational policy to programs to fit with contexts.</li> </ul>		
<b>Health and security management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure every day application of security strategies with appropriate behaviour</li> <li>Apply guidelines for health and safety in workplace, healthy living conditions</li> <li>Evaluate and prioritise risks</li> <li>Able to brief all staff on security situation and procedures</li> <li>Manage asset security</li> <li>Manage internal and external communications in event of severe security problems</li> </ul>		
<b>Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write donor reports and grant proposals</li> <li>Write management reports to HQ</li> <li>Maintain M&amp;E systems for internal and external use</li> <li>Joint work on press releases, advocacy papers</li> <li>Encourage authorities to apply humanitarian and development principles</li> <li>Establish systems for info flows from HQ to field and vice versa</li> <li>Coordinate and network with other agencies, local authorities</li> <li>Demonstrate expertise in HF, VHF radios, sat phone</li> </ul>		

Competency Cluster	Competency Name	Level Required	Criticality
<b>Codes, contracts and law management</b>	Ability to draw up and manage contracts and memoranda of understanding Understanding of protocols of donors i.e. UN, EU Adhere to and contribute to code of conduct and conventions, People In Aid, Sphere Application of labour, economic and social law relating to national and international staff		
<b>Finance, compliance management and accountability</b>	Coordinate and manage program budgets within spending levels and ensure compliance with organisational and donor regs Secure local/partnership funding		

### Underpinning knowledge for program management

- General relief and development environment
- Organisational structure, including formal lines of reporting and responsibility
- Organisational goals and objectives
- Organisational core values and standards of behaviour expected of aid workers
- Organisational software
- Knowledge of the local culture
- Donor organisational structures
- Donor priorities
- Sphere standards
- Common field operational practices – UNHCR guidelines
- Sectoral requirements e.g. food security information
- Participant feedback mechanisms
- General project cycle
- Relief to development transition issues
- Logframes
- Analytical tools and techniques appropriate to local context
- Unfair dismissal rules and due process
- Performance management systems utilised within organisation
- Standards for organisational record-keeping and audit requirements
- Key concepts in operational security
- Capacity/vulnerability framework
- Local Capacities for Peace (LCP)/Do No Harm framework (Sourced from WVI humanitarian training package)

## Program Manager (Level 2) Technical Competencies

It is assumed that the level 2 programme manager is able to demonstrate the competencies of the level 1 manager.

Competency Cluster	Competency Name	Level Required	Criticality
<b>Program Coordination</b>	Overview of programs within agreed organisational strategy Responsible for program progress and quality Relay information on quality gaps to internal and external donors to meet contractual requirements Develop exit strategies with indicators to phase in and out emergency program work	High/medium/low	Vital Necessary Nice to have
<b>Leadership and strategic use of program resources</b>	Develop program strategies which maximise international and external resources and relationships Evaluate program priorities to leverage impact Promote ethical practice		
<b>Security Management</b>	Oversee security assessments and strategies Take security decisions and action in case of evacuations etc or other major events affecting the security of staff		
<b>Representation and Advocacy</b>	Consolidate quickly the learning from experiences to produce policy briefings fast. Lobby organisations and institutions on important program issues Develop and nurture culturally sensitive internal and external relationships and networks to ensure optimum program success		
<b>Codes, contracts and law management</b>	Manage memoranda of understanding Application of the law in country as far as possible		
<b>Fiscal Responsibility</b>	Oversee and maintain structures to segregate finance, admin and logistics Manage complex funding arrangements Ensure program funds are spent in accordance with donor rules and regulations		
<b>Organisational learning</b>	Record experience and learning from programs and feed learning across organisational programs Contribute to organisational policy by transmitting experience of program into policy		

### Underpinning knowledge for level 2 programme managers

- Basic research, demographic and economic analysis techniques
- Strategic planning methodologies
- Risk evaluation practices
- NGO benchmarks in related areas
- Organisational policies and procedures relating to military
- Staff development strategies
- Relevant pay awards and agreements
- Core competency concepts
- Organisational change processes
- Organisational design principles
- Legislation codes and bylaws relevant to the organisation's operations
- Key principles of quality management and their application  
(Sourced from WVI humanitarian training package)





## *About People In Aid*

People In Aid is a **global network** of development and humanitarian assistance agencies. We help organisations whose goal is the relief of poverty and suffering to enhance the impact they make through better management and support of staff and volunteers.

The impact and effectiveness of relief and development operations depend on the quality of staff and volunteers and the support an agency gives them. Our very practical output can help agencies enhance that quality.

We respond to the needs of members and the sector by acting as an information exchange on good human resources and people management practice, by facilitating networking, by providing resources, by undertaking research and by answering queries.

Established by agencies in the relief and development sector in 1995, we are a not-for-profit membership organisation governed by our members, whose experiences and HR practices shape our activities and have informed the cornerstone of our work, the 'People In Aid Code of Good Practice in the management and support of aid personnel'.





**Promoting good practice**  
in the management and  
support of aid personnel