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In Search of Competencies of an Exceptional Quantity Surveyor in Public Entity: Building a Theoretical Foundation

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Abstract

It is the government role in providing infra-structure and basic amenities for the public. In Malaysia the Work Ministry is formed to oversee this role. Ensuring effectiveness and efficiency, the Public Service Department must identify competencies require for every position created in the Work Ministry and one such position is the position of Quantity surveyor. Research thus far shows that individual employees performance is not just built around technical expertise possess but also important is the behaviour. Since organization successes stand on its employees performance thus it is utmost important for organization to identify not only the right technical but also behavioural competencies for each and every individual position created. This paper discusses the need to explore competencies of exceptional Quantity surveyors and in the process suggests the means to identify those competencies. It is also argued that undertaking this heavy task cannot be accomplished without the participation of experienced public Quantity surveyors. The importance of competencies model for Quantity surveyors is also discussed in relation to human capital development which includes promotion, training, and recruitment of young Quantity surveyors to serve the public service.

Key words: Competencies, Exceptional Quantity surveyor, Quantity Surveying Profession, Public Sector, Delphi Study.

Introduction

In developing society and nation, it is an inherent role of governments to provide infra-structure and basic amenities for the public. In Malaysia, in every of its five-year plan the government has persistently allocates large sum of money for the country's development and infrastructure projects. For example in the 9th Malaysia Plan, the government has allocated 692 development and infrastructure projects worth RM30 billion, and an additional sum of RM19.7 billion was also allocated for the continuation of 200 projects from the 8th Malaysia Plan (Bernama, 2006). The extent of the amount of budget infers that the government is serious about upgrading the standard of the country's developments and infrastructures for the betterment of the society. In ensuring effectiveness and efficiency of the budget spends on projects planned, the service of competence quantity surveyors is of utmost significant since they who determine the quantity and quality of materials used and in this in-turn determines the budget of each and every projects. Failure to understand the context-relevant

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competencies required of public sectors quantity surveyor can be detrimental not only for the current on-going projects but also future success of the nation's planned development programs.

While quantity surveyors roles are undeniable, however to-date, there have been little studies reported on these professionals, especially in areas addressing the competencies of an exceptional performer in which quantity surveyors in public sectors can model. Uncovering these competencies is important as it benefits the Public Service Department, especially in setting criteria for personnel selection, determining career development and training of future quantity surveyors.

Finding competencies of an exceptional quantity surveyor can serve as a benchmark for current quantity surveyors' continuous improvement efforts toward a quality project cost and contractual management practice. Young quantity surveyors would also benefit from the identified competencies by treating these competencies as a source of reference for their future career advancements.

Further, it would also benefit the Human Resource Department in the planning for their staff training and development programme, and for organization to match their quantity surveyors with project types that are congruent with their competency domain.

Training organizations, institutions of higher learning, quantity surveying professional body and other certification boards would also benefited from the uncovering of exceptional quantity surveyors competencies as a source of reference for review of quantity surveyors' training programme, selection of the would-be students, and control and recognition of effective quantity surveyors.

Heneman and Judge (2009) in discussing staffing in an organization remind management on the importance of matching a person [of their knowledge, skills, attitudes and others (KSAOs)] and the organization (its values and others). They proposed a model of Person-Organization Match (Figure 1). The model shows that organization seeks to determine how well a person fits or matches not only with the job offering but also with the organization. Likewise so do the applicants. They too will assess as to whether they might fit into the organization. Factors of concerned to both parties are organizational values, new job duties, multiple jobs assignments, and future jobs. According to Heneman and Judge the impact of the match or mismatch will be in the form of human resource outcomes and issues i.e. attraction, performance, retention, attendance, satisfaction and others.

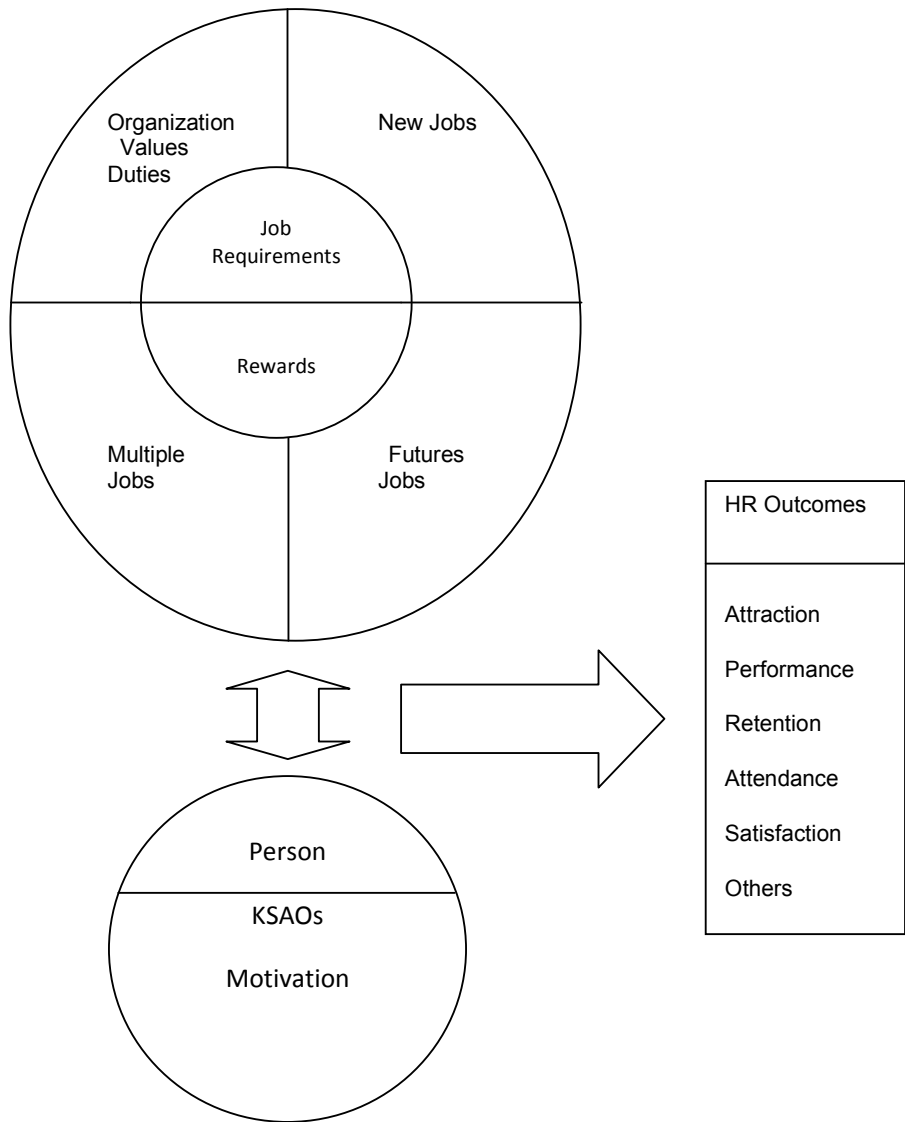


Figure 1: Person-Organization Match
 Source: Heneman and Judge (2009). Staffing Organizations. Singapore: McGraw Hill.

In the quest of finding an “effective job performance model” Boyatzis (1984) drew the importance of individual employee competencies (Figure 2).

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Accordingly, this model conceptualized that individual competencies, job demands and organizational environment will help indicate the specific effective behaviour requires of an employee to function effectively in performing the job. Thus, if Quantity surveyors have the right behaviour competencies within them then it is argued that not only it would be easier for the Quantity surveyors to develop the specific effective behaviour but also excel in the job.

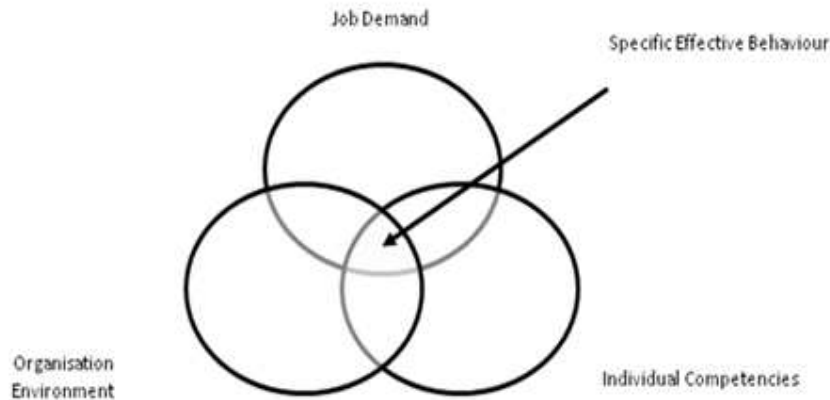


Figure 2: Effective Job Performance Model (Boyatzis 1982:13)

Building on Boyatzis's model, a conceptual framework of competency model for Malaysian public sector quantity surveyors is shown in Figure 3. Accordingly, the specific behavioural and technical competencies of an individual Quantity surveyors which when congruent with the requirements of the quantity surveying job descriptions and the organization environment (such as regulations, policies and work cultures in which the quantity surveyor is working), would in turn elevate his/her performance to an exceptional level.

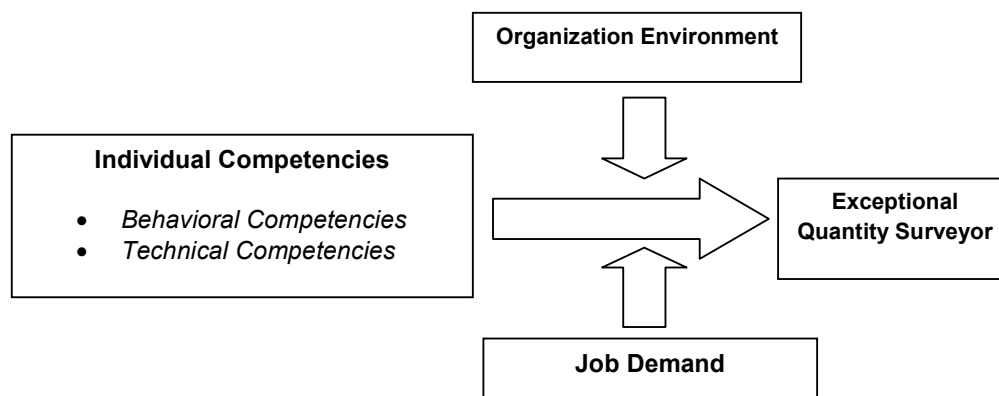


Figure 3: Conceptual framework of exceptional public sectors quantity surveyors

Competency defined

The concept of competence or competency has dominated the management strategy literature of the 1990s, which emphasized 'core competence' as a key organizational resource that could be exploited to gain competitive advantage (Deist and Winterton, 2005). Since then there has been a global acceptance of the importance of appropriate competencies which underpins desired level of performance for most management roles. However, with the growing numbers of literature on competence and competency from diverse disciplines has led to confusion and debate concerning the concept of 'competence' that it is impossible to identify or impute a coherent theory or to arrive at a definition capable of accommodating and reconciling all the different ways that the term is used (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). In undertaking a new piece of research on competencies, one has to therefore be aware of the existence of other words that are inter-related but each having different meaning depending on the context and approach to looking at job performance. The word competencies have been defined in various styles and context:

- concept that focuses on what is expected of an employee in the workplace and embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environment (Golob, 2002).

- skills and traits that are needed by employees to be effective in a job (Mansfield, 1996).

- underlying characteristics of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job situation (Spencer and Spencer, 1993).

- Boyatzis defined competencies as:

....underlying characteristics of an individual that is causally related to effective behaviour or superior performance in a job (Boyatzis, 1982).

..... characteristics of someone that lead to effective and outstanding performance (Boyatzis, 2004:11)

Moore *et al.* (2002) cited Armstrong's (1998) perspective to differentiate competence and competencies; he described competence as what people need to be able to do to perform a job well whereas competencies as those dimensions of behaviour lying behind competent performance. These are popularly known as behavioural competencies or soft competencies. Here, the term competencies are intended to describe how people behave when they are performing a particular tasks or jobs. According to Raven (1984: 402) cited in McCoy (2001), competencies encompass motivated pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities deployed to undertake a valued activity. For the purpose of this paper we defined competencies as any relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics of an individual that have an impact on successful job performance.

Thus, competence is a work-related concept that defines the areas of work in which a person needs to be competent (Armstrong, 2001 p. 302); "competency" on the other hand is a person-related concept that refers to the dimensions of behaviour underlying competent performance (Woodruffe,

1991). Holmes & Joyce (1993) define competency as action, behaviour or outcome which a person should be able to demonstrate, or the ability to transfer skills and knowledge to new situations within an occupational area. Meyer and Semark (1996) have added to this definition with personal attributes and value orientation.

It has proven possible to identify a range of important competencies that underpin exceptional performance for most occupations namely behavioural and technical. Behavioral competency refers to personal attributes that a person draws upon as part of their work activities (Roberts, 1997).

Competency model has been used as a base plan to enhance human resource areas, which include recruitments and selection, workmen compensation and benefit, performance management, training and development, and succession planning (Spencer and Spencer, 1993). Studies into competencies are widely covered by many disciplines with the aim to enhance performance at work. For example project management (Dutta, 2000; Virtanen, 2000; Golob, 2002;), human resource management (Mansfield, 1996), nursing (Pulcini et al., 1987), higher education (French and Raven, 1984), club management (Perdue et al., 2002), and information system (McCoy, 2001).

An employee's competency can be categorized into technical and behavioural competencies. While the technical competency of exceptional quantity surveyors is commonly understood and mainly focuses on knowledge and skills, it is the behavioural competency that needs to be determined. Attitudes, motivation, personalities and values are some of the behavioural competencies that the literatures have shown to be important for employees' success in job.

Literatures on Competencies for Quantity Surveyor

Studies focusing on quantity surveyors thus far cover a broad range of topics. Among others, it includes ethical concept and ethical behaviour (Ho and Ng, 2003; Fan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Bowen et al., 2007), knowledge management (Woods, 2007; Anis Sazira Bakri and Shamsida Saidan Khaderi, 2007; Mior Azly Mior Azam and Abdul Rashid Abdul Aziz, 2006), strategic planning (Hasnanywati Hassan et al., 2007), profession branding (Preece and Moodley, 2007), adjudication (Munaaaim and Loh, 2007), venturing into non-construction services (Norhanim Zakaria et al., 2007), education (Sher et al., 2007), continuous professional development (Mohd Hisham Ariffin and Torrance, 2008), leadership (Fellows et al., 2003), and ICT (Fogg, 2007; Ghassan et al., 2007). However, discussions on competency are limited. Thus far study on competencies have been carried out by Nkado and Meyer (2001) and Syed Qusoiri and Mohmad (2007) that focus on behavioural competencies and Nkado and Meyer (2001) on technical competencies.

Nkado and Meyer (2001) identified the competencies required of professional quantity surveyors in the developing economy. Using factor analysis on data collected from registered members of the South African quantity surveyors Association, he identified four competencies require

of a quantity surveyor i.e. *Relationship, Built Environment Objectives, Technical Skills, and Property Economics*. However, their findings did not distinguish which competencies are important for quantity surveyors of exceptional performance. In addition, their findings did not consider quantity surveyors working in the public sector, which may require a different set of competencies compared to those working in the private sectors. At the same time their findings cannot be generalized to all quantity surveyors in the contexts of different cultures and practices.

Within the Malaysian contexts, a study by Syed Qusoiri and Mohamad (2007) tries to identify critical characteristics of quantity surveyors among quantity surveying graduates as perceived by the quantity surveying practitioners. However, their study too did not take into account the characteristics of quantity surveyors serving the public sector.

The search for competencies inherent of exceptional quantity surveyors in the public sector can be undertaken through the process of job analysis and a three-round Delphi technique. Once the technical and behavioural competencies are identified through job analysis, they are then subjected to Delphi process in which dimensions from both the technical and behavioural competencies are scrutinized by senior quantity surveyors serving the various government agencies.

Conclusion

The paper tries to highlight the importance of identifying competencies of exceptional quantity surveyors in public entity. The theoretical framework within this paper had identified that organization environment, job demand, and individual competencies, if are in congruent, would successfully promote effective job performance. The paper had also proposed a three-round Delphi technique for analyzing the dimensions of technical and behavioural competencies identified through job analysis. Owing to the non-threatening nature of the Delphi process and its usefulness in obtaining a reliable consensus of opinion from a group of senior public sector quantity surveyors, it is thus deemed to be the most suitable approach in identifying the competencies of exceptional quantity surveyor in public entity.

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