

The International Competency Set

A Summary of competencies characteristic of those who are highly effective in transferring their professional skills to an unfamiliar international context.

OPENNESS

New Thinking (NT) - receptive to new ideas, and typically seek to extend understanding into new and unfamiliar fields. Like to work internationally as they are exposed to ideas and approaches with which they are unfamiliar.

Welcoming Strangers (WS) - keen to initiate contact, and build relationships, with new people, including those who have different experiences, perceptions, and values to themselves. Often take a particular interest in strangers from different and unfamiliar cultural backgrounds.

Acceptance (ACC) - not only tolerate but positively accept behaviour that is very different from their own. In an international context they rarely feel threatened by, or intolerant of, working practices that conflict with their own sense of best practice.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexible Behaviour (FB) - adapt easily to a range of different social and cultural situations. Have either learned or are willing to learn a wider range of behaviour patterns. Ready to experiment with different ways of behaving to find those which are most acceptable and most successful.

Flexible Judgements (FJ) - avoid coming to quick and definitive conclusions about the new people and situations that they encounter. Can also use each experience of people from a different culture to question assumptions and modify stereotypes about how such people operate.

Learning Languages (LL) - motivated to learn and use the specific languages of important business contacts, over and beyond the lingua franca in which they conduct their everyday business activities. Ready to draw on key expressions and words from the languages of these international contacts to build trust and show respect.

PERSONAL AUTONOMY

Inner Purpose (IP) - to hold strong personal values and beliefs that provide consistency or balance when dealing with unfamiliar circumstances, or when facing pressures which question judgement or challenge sense of worth. Such values also give importance and credibility to the tasks that they have to perform.

Focus on Goals (FoG) - set specific goals and tasks in international projects, combined with a high degree of persistence in achieving them regardless of pressures to compromise, and distractions on the way. Believe they have a strong element of control over their own destiny, and can make things happen in the world around them.

EMOTIONAL STRENGTH

Resilience (RES) - usually tough enough to risk making mistakes as a way of learning. Able to overcome any embarrassment, criticism or negative feedback they may encounter. Have an optimistic approach to life and tend to 'bounce back' when things go wrong.

Coping (COP) - able to deal with change and high levels of pressure even in unfamiliar situations. They remain calm under pressure, and have well-developed means of coping even without their normal support networks. Have the personal resources necessary to deal effectively with the stress from culture shock.

Spirit of Adventure (SoA) - ready to seek out variety, change and stimulation in life, and avoid safe and predictable environments. Push themselves into uncomfortable and ambiguous situations, often unsure whether they have the skills required to be successful.

PERCEPTIVENESS

Attuned (ATT) - highly focused on picking up meaning from indirect signals such as intonation, eye contact and body language. Adept at observing these signals of meaning and reading them correctly in different contexts - almost like learning a new language.

Reflected Awareness (RA) - very conscious of how they come across to others; in an inter-cultural context particularly sensitive to how their own 'normal' patterns of communication and behaviour are interpreted in the minds of international partners.

LISTENING ORIENTATION

Active Listening (AL) - check and clarify, rather than assume understanding of others, by paraphrasing and exploring the words that they use and the meaning they attach to them.

TRANSPARENCY

Clarity of Communication (CC) - conscious of the need for a 'low-risk' style that minimises the potential for misunderstandings in an international context. Able to adapt 'how' a message is delivered (rather than just 'what' is said) to be more clearly understood by an international audience.

Exposing Intentions (EI) - able to build and maintain trust in an international context by signalling positive intentions, and putting needs into a clear and explicit context.

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Information Gathering (IG) - take time and interest to learn about unfamiliar cultures, and deepen their understanding of those they already know. Employ various information-gathering strategies for understanding the specific context they require.

Valuing Differences (VD) - like to work with colleagues and partners from diverse backgrounds, and are sensitive to how people see the world differently. Keen not only to explore and understand others' values and beliefs, but also communicate respect for them.

INFLUENCING

Rapport (RAPP) - exhibit warmth and attentiveness when building relationships in a variety of contexts. Put a premium on choosing verbal and non-verbal behaviours that are comfortable for international counterparts, thus building a sense of 'we'. Able in the longer-term to meet the criteria for trust required by their international partners.

Range of Styles (RoS) - have a variety of means for influencing people across a range of international contexts. This gives greater capacity to 'lead' an international partner in a style with which he or she feels comfortable.

Sensitivity to Context (SC) - good at understanding where political power lies in organisations and keen to figure out how best to play to this. Put energy into understanding the different cultural contexts in which messages are sent and decisions are made.

SYNERGY

Creating New Alternatives (CNA) - sensitive to the need for a careful and systematic approach to facilitating group and team work to ensure that different cultural perspectives are not suppressed, but are properly understood and used in the problem solving process.