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## COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR SUPRANATIONAL ORGANIZATION EMPLOYEES: THE ICEBERG MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

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**Abstract.** This article adopts a comparative text analysis method, uses the iceberg model to analyse, encode and compare the differences in competency requirements of different levels in the United Nations. This article selects two levels (entry-level and senior-level) of United Nations professional employees as the research objects to explore the competency requirements of major positions in supranational organizations. This article finds that the lower the level of positions, the higher the requirements for competency in the above-water dimensions of knowledge, skills, and motivation; meanwhile, the higher the level of positions, the higher the requirements for competency in the three underwater dimensions of social role, self-concept, and personality traits. Moreover, the characteristics of competency requirements iceberg model corresponds to the 3 core values and 8 Core competencies and 6 management competencies as proposed in the Future Competence by the United Nations, and the iceberg model of supranational organization competency requirements proposed in this article can be used as a supplement to the Future Competence.

**Keywords:** supranational organization employees, competency requirements, iceberg model

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## ТРЕБОВАНИЯ К КОМПЕТЕНЦИЯМ СОТРУДНИКОВ НАДНАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ: РЕАЛИЗАЦИЯ МОДЕЛИ АЙСБЕРГА

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**Аннотация:** В данной статье с использованием метода сравнительного анализа текста применяется компетентностная модель айсберга для анализа, кодирования и сравнения различий в требованиях к компетенциям на разных уровнях в Организации Объединенных Наций. В статье в качестве объектов исследования для изучения требований к компетенциям основных должностей в наднациональных организациях выбраны два уровня (начальный и старший) сотрудников категории специалистов Организации Объединенных Наций. По результатам исследования делается вывод о том, что чем ниже уровень должностей, тем выше требования к компетенциям в «надводных» измерениях знаний, навыков и мотивации. Между тем, чем выше уровень должностей, тем выше требования к компетентности в трех основных измерениях социальной роли, Я-концепции и личностных качеств. Более того, характеристики требований к компетенциям модели айсберга соответствуют 3 основным ценностям, 8 Основным компетенциям и 6 управленческим компетенциям, предложенным в Будущей Компетенции Организацией Объединенных Наций, и модель айсберга требований к компетенциям наднациональной организации, предложенная в этой статье, может использоваться в качестве дополнения к Будущей Компетенции.

**Ключевые слова:** сотрудники наднациональной организации, требования к компетенциям, модель айсберга.

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Supranational organizations employees are special, they come from different nations, they are located all over the world, yet, they represent the organizations they work for instead of embodying their own countries. In a sense, they function like expatriates sent by multinational corporations, but without working for the interest of a certain party, they intend to conduct their job unbiased and impartially for a supranational organization. Therefore, the analysis of the competency requirements of supranational organizations is of great importance to the study of professional competency modelling in the modern economy, as it needs the ability both to deal with cultural complexity and professionalism.

Professional competency research can be traced back to the “Time Action Research” of Taylor, the “Father of Management Science” in the early twentieth century, who proposed to increase the output of work by analysing the work behaviour of workers, so as to achieve the purpose of scientific management [1]. Taylor was the first to realize the importance of performance management, and proposed that work behaviour will affect work performance. It can be said that it has created a precedent for the study of professional competency. However, he did not distinguish competency from other abilities. At the same time, in the following decades, the rise of scientific research on intelligence, personality, and cognition attracted the attention of scholars, and the research on competency did not continue.

Until the twentieth century, David McClelland saw in a lot of practice that academic tests and intelligence and other ability tests are difficult to predict professional success or other important achievements in life, so he first proposed the concept of competence in the year and pointed out that competence should be used in recruitment [4]. Competency assessment replaces traditional ability tests such as intelligence tests in the past. After that, competency as a group of special kinds of ability that will lead to excellent performance is independent from other ability research.

L.M. Spencer and S.M. Spencer published their book *Competence at work: models for superior performance* in 1993, which gave a complete definition of competence [8]. In the book, based on the accumulation of nearly two decades of competency database, a competency dictionary with good internal logic is proposed, and various competency factors obtained from research are collected. It can be said that the proposal of the competency dictionary means that competency research has entered the stage of competency modelling. After the 1990s, most of the competency researches adopted the method of definition, and conducted research on competency models at different levels such as different industries, different job types, and different job level, and put forward different competency models one after another. In recent years, the intervention of world-renowned management consulting companies has further combined competency research with the market. Many world-renowned companies have begun to have competency models tailored for their companies, which are related to the company’s human resource planning, employee performance appraisal, and promotion. It is closely integrated with practice such as training, and makes full use of the application of the competency model.

David McClelland (1973) proposed the famous iceberg model, which portrays human competencies as an iceberg with six levels, two above water and four underwater [5], as is shown in Fig.1.



Fig. 1. *Competency Iceberg Model* [5]

The above-water part of the iceberg includes knowledge and skills. The underwater part includes social roles or values, self-concept, personality, and motivation. The above-water part is a dominant feature, and the underwater part is a recessive feature. The iceberg model divides the competence into six levels. The different depths from top to bottom indicate the different difficulty level of being explored and perceived. The deeper it goes, the less likely it is to be explored and perceived.

Supranational organizations are an advanced form of international exchanges and are important participants in international relations, and which play an increasingly important role in the international community. Consequently, their employees are irreplaceable in performing international functions, and the competency level of these employees to a large extent determines the operational efficiency of the organization. The discussions of the standard of the competency level of supranational organisation employees never cease. The normative blueprint the "Report on the Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants" prepared by the United Nations International Civil Service Advisory Committee in 1954 [2]. The standards of conduct include loyalty and tolerance, purpose and dedication. In 2013, the Standard of Conduct for International Civil Servants completed a new round of revisions on this basis [11]. The requirements of these organizations for their staff are no longer purely at the technical level and have put forward higher requirements.

Most scholars study the competence of supranational organization employees from the perspective of public management, and the research topics can also be divided into the following three categories. The first category is dedicated to solving the human resource management challenges brought about by global governance and building an international competency framework for this purpose. Most notably, based on existing research on the competencies that national representatives and leaders in the supranational domain should have, Ramata has compiled eleven competencies that global managers and middle-level national representatives should have [6]. The second category, based on the neutrality of supranational organizations, emphasizes the different roles supranational organization employees and national civil servants. Stone and Moloney believes that unlike national civil servants, supranational organization employees should have the concept of internationalism without representing any country. Since each supranational organization has its own unique human resource management policies and practices, he encourages scholars to conduct more comparative studies [9]. The third category focuses on a specific international organization and analyses the relationship between individual staff's quality and ability, organizational role and organizational culture. For example, Xu Yizhong and Weller's research took the "membership-driven" World Trade Organization as an example, and pointed out that the staff of the World Trade Organization should support trade liberalization and be able to provide fair advice as experts in their own fields and communicate with country representatives, actively cooperate to promote negotiations, while maintaining "low profile and anonymity" [12]. Kellow and Carroll believe that compared with the World Trade Organization, the organizational characteristics of the OECD make it more important to the professional skills and knowledge authority of its staff to gain greater influence [3].

At present, the research on the competency of the staff of supranational organizations is relatively limited. The typical supranational organization, United Nations, promulgated the "Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants" in 1954, which stipulated specific standards for international civil servants, and announced the methods and standards for civil servant recruitment, which became an important document guiding supranational employees for half a century. In order to adapt to the development of the times, the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) revised the 1954 "Standards of Conduct for International Civil Servants" in 2013, enumerating in detail 50 standards of conduct for its employees [11]. According to the United Nations Competencies for the Future released by the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Competencies for the Future model includes three core values, eight core competencies, and six management competencies, with a total of 99 expounding competencies [10]. Therefore, this article will use the competency iceberg model to analyse the competency requirements of the various job recruitments of United Nations employees, summarize the similarities and differences in the competency requirements of staff at different levels, and analyse the reasons, so as to provide an in-depth understanding of the competency requirements of supranational organization employees.

In view of the importance of the United Nations in international economics and politics, this article selects United Nations employees as the research object. The positions of United Nations employees can be divided into four categories according to their job categories, namely, general staff, professional staff, director-level staff, and senior staff. Among them, general staff (G-level) are mainly engaged in general affairs work and are recruited by international organizations to work as administrative assistants. The ranks from high to low are G-1 to G-7. Professional personnel (P-level) mainly carry out work according to different projects, with diversified professional types, covering a wide range of fields, and recruiting from all over the world. The ranks from high to low are P-2 to P-5. Director-level personnel (D-level) are generally the heads of internal departments of organizations, and they are selected by competition and appointment. Senior officials are the heads of specialized agencies.

The scope of work of the P+ post mainly includes eight aspects, namely: management and business support; economic and social development; politics, peace and security; information systems and communication

technology; law; public information and external relations; conference management; safety and security. In order to better generalize, it can be categorized into three levels: Entry-level professionals, Mid-level professionals and Senior level professionals as is shown in Table 1. The recruitment methods for these three levels are all global recruitment. While different ranks have different working period requirements; in terms of language, they must be proficient in the working languages of the United Nations, namely English or French; they must also have excellent analytical and communication skills, solid professional knowledge and leadership.

Table 1. Working period requirements of different levels [7]

	Entry-level		Mid-level		Senior level	
	P-2	P-3	P-4	P-5	D-1	D-2
Working Period	≥ 2 years	≥ 5 years	≥ 7 years	≥ 10 years	≥15years	> 15 years

This research uses job information on the official website of the United Nations to ensure the objectivity and authenticity of the original data. The recruitment information of P-2, P-3 that posted within seven days by the day of access (Sep. 25. 2021) were imported and due to the scarcity of materials, the recruitment information of D-1, D-2 that posted within 30 days were imported, to form two documents with a unified format. To get a clear comparison of the different competency requirements for different posts, the author selects two levels (entry-level and senior) of UN professional employees to explore the different competency requirements of major positions in supranational organizations. For entry-level professionals, 45 pieces of competencies requirements (7 for P-2, and 38 for P-3) are put into a single file to be analysed. And for the Senior Level professionals, 33 pieces of competencies requirement for different positions are collected (23 for D-1, and 10 for D-2). And for each level, positions from a variety of different department and organizations of the United Nations are presented, including economic affair officers, legal officers, and public information officers, etc., meanwhile, the posting of these jobs are all over the world, ranging from Geneva to New York.

To analyse the data collected, Nvivo 12.0, QSR International’s qualitative analysis computer software package, is employed to get more precise results. First, the entry- level and senior level documents are loaded into Nvivo 12.0 separately, and after running word frequency searches for each of them, two pictures are generated showing the most frequently used words as shown in Fig.2 and Fig.3.



Fig. 2. Most frequently appeared words for entry level employees

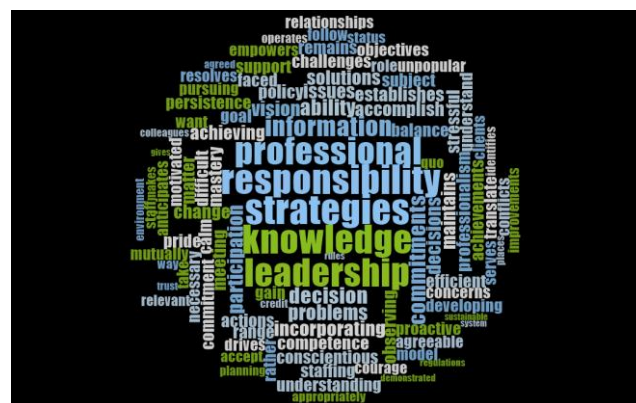


Fig. 3. Most frequently appeared words for senior level employees

From the above two pictures, it can be seen that for entry-level employees, more emphasis is put on their professional skills , team spirit and job responsibility, while for the senior level employees, apart from those three, strategic think and leadership ability are equally highlighted. That is a very rough comparison, to get precise results, more encoding need to be done.

Next, the keywords in the two texts are encoded in Nvivo 12.0. For entry-level employees, 10 nodes are established; while for senior level employees, 15 nodes are established, which include all of the 10 nodes as found in entry level employees. Then based on the Competency Iceberg Model, the 15 nodes obtained by encoding are integrated and summarized into six dimensions of knowledge, skills, social roles, self-concept, personality traits and motivation. So, a framework of the competency requirements for entry-level and senior-level UN employees is established, as is shown in Fig 4.

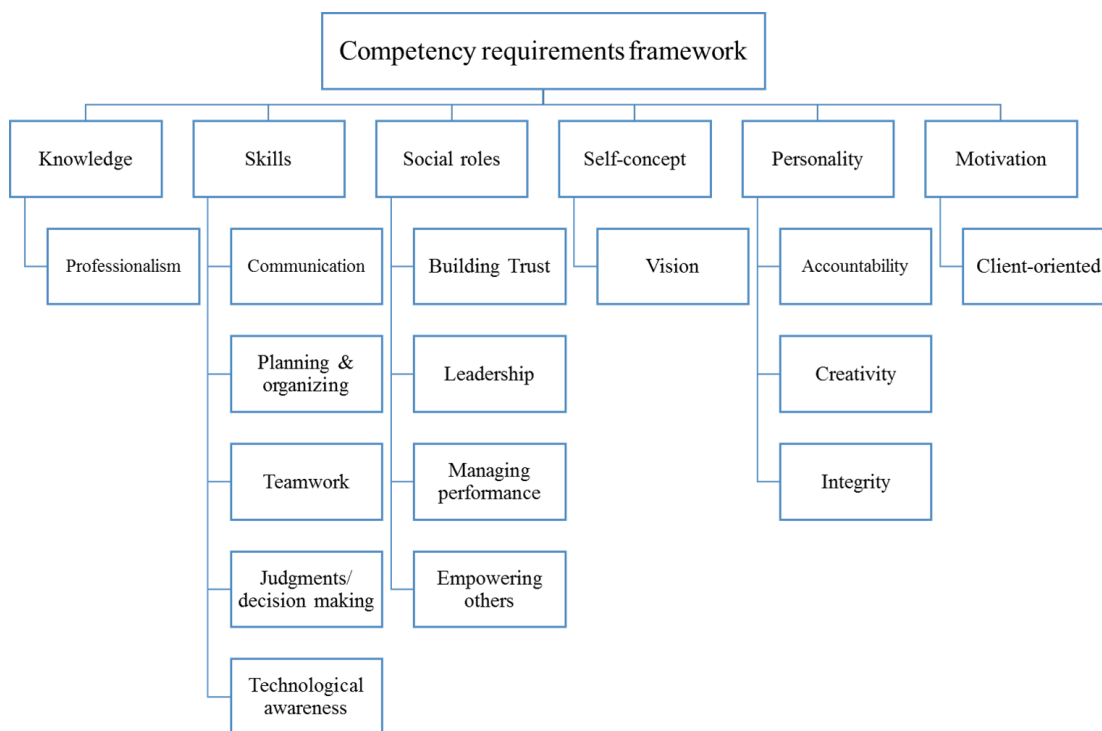


Fig. 4 Competency Requirements Iceberg Model

Furthermore, according to the encoding results, the number of reference points of each nodes are sorted out, all together, there are 139 reference points for entry-level employees and 132 reference points for senior level employees, the number being roughly equal, as is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Reference points and percentage of entry level and senior level employees

First-level nodes	Second-level nodes	Entry-level employees		Senior-level employees	
		reference points	percentage	reference points	percentage
Knowledge	Professionalism	45	32.37%	33	25%
Skills	Communication	21	15.11%	8	6.06%
	Planning & organizing	27	19.42%	3	2.27%
	Teamwork	27	19.42%	5	3.79%
	Judgements/decision-making	1	0.72%	11	8.33%
	Technological awareness	3	2.16%	3	2.27%
Social roles	Building trust	/	/	16	12.12%
	Leadership	/	/	31	23.48%
	Managing performance	2	1.44%	3	2.27%
	Empowering others	/	/	1	0.76%
Self-concept	Vision	/	/	5	3.79%
Personality traits	Accountability	4	2.88%	7	7.30%
	Creativity	2	1.44%	1	er
	Integrity	/	/	1	0.76%
Motivation	Client-oriented	7	5.04%	4	3.03%

Based on the proportion of the first level node reference points, the percentage of both levels in the six dimensions is drawn, as is shown in Fig. 5.

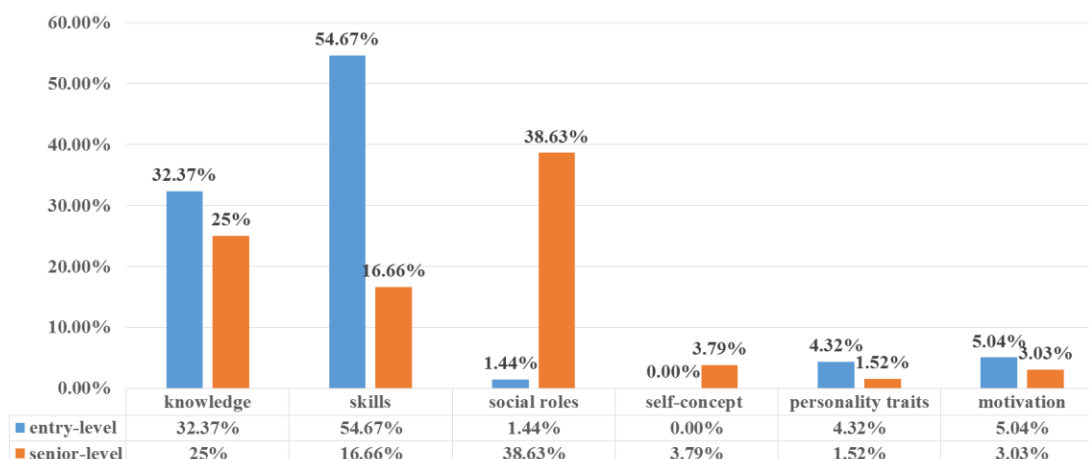


Fig. 5 Percentage of six dimensions

From a close analysis of the above tables and figures, the following conclusions can be drawn.

1. The lower the level of the position, the higher the requirements for competence in the three dimensions of knowledge, skills, and motivation.

Competencies in the two dimensions of knowledge and skills are the visible part of the iceberg model, and it is an important part of the recruitment requirements of the United Nations. In entry level employees, these two competencies take up to over 86%, while in senior level employees, these two competencies take up just a little bit over 40% of the total requirements. Within the skill dimension, the most prominent competencies for entry-level positions are planning & organizing skills and teamwork skills, each takes up 19.42%, and the most prominent skills for senior level employees is the judgement /decision-making skills (8.33%). Both levels require high communication skills.

2. The higher the level of the position, the higher the competence requirements for the three dimensions of social role, self-concept, and personality traits.

Competencies in the three dimensions of social role, self-recognition, and personality characteristics are the hidden part of the iceberg model. The requirements for this part in the recruitment information are significantly less than the visible part. The total requirements of these three parts for entry-level positions account for a little bit over 10%, and there are no requirements for many of them, such as leadership, empowering others, vision and building trust; in this part of for senior level employees, higher vocational education, leadership is emphasized above any other hidden competencies.

3. The characteristics of competency requirements iceberg model corresponds to the 3 core values and 8 Core competencies and 6 management competencies as proposed in the Future Competence by the United Nations [10]. The iceberg model of competency requirements of supranational organizations summarized in this article can be regarded as a concrete structure framework of the competence demand of supranational organizations.

Firstly, it can be seen from Fig. 4 that in the competency requirements iceberg model, the knowledge and skills parts basically correspond to the core competencies of the United Nations Competencies for the Future, namely, communication, teamwork, planning and organization, and other 8 core abilities. The core competencies in the future competencies of the United Nations are also regarded as transferable competencies, that is, important competencies that can be migrated and converted between different jobs and working environments. In the competency iceberg model, this part of the ability is above the water, which means that it has strong learnability and can be obtained through certain training and training. It is often the main content of staff training.

Secondly, the social role dimension in the middle of the iceberg is related to the management capabilities in the United Nations' future competencies, namely, vision, leadership, empowerment, performance management, trust-building, and decision-making. It can be seen that they all value leadership and decision-making capabilities, and are key considerations when promoting staff and appointing management.

Thirdly, the self-concept, personality traits and motivation at the bottom of the iceberg are similar to the three core values of integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity in the future competence of the United Nations. They are both implicit, stable and difficult to learn. Therefore, it is often regarded as a prerequisite



for staff recruitment and selection. The difference is that the competency in the iceberg model is more micro and specific, while the values in the future competence of the United Nations are more macro and abstract. On the whole, the iceberg model of supranational organization competency requirements proposed in this article can be used as a refinement and supplement to the future competence of the United Nations.

At present, the global competition on the theme of supranational organizations and global governance is becoming increasingly fierce and intensified, which to a certain extent confirms the urgency of the country to train high-quality talents for supranational organizations and global governance. Becoming a staff member of a supranational organization is no easy task, and becoming the head of a supranational organization requires experience. If a supranational employee of the general rank can occupy a place in that organization only if he possesses the qualifications defined in the corresponding competency framework, then the leader of that organization should be a person who can integrate the organization's competency requirements to the extreme. Analysing the competency framework of the entry-level and senior-level professional employees of United is a process of learning and exploration. It is hoped that through the analysis of the details in the competency requirements and the proposal of a competency requirements iceberg model, it can provide a certain reference for those who aspire to work in related organizations.

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