Using the Competency Framework According to Employment Position to Assess the Competence of University Specialists

Pham Dinh Manh[*], Pham Le Cuong, Pham Minh Hung, Nguyen Nhu An

Vinh University, Vinh City, Viet Nam
*Corresponding author: manhpd@vinhuni.edu.vn

Abstract The paper has built a competency framework of university specialists according to employment position, including 6 basic competencies: Academic and professional competence; Advisory capacity; Information literacy competence; Implementation capacity; Capacity for teamwork; Informatics and foreign languages competence. From there, this framework is used to assess the competence of specialists at Vinh University, as a basis for recruitment, employment and training specialists of the university.

Keywords: specialist, employment position, competency, competency framework, university

Cite This Article: Pham Dinh Manh, Pham Le Cuong, Pham Minh Hung, and Nguyen Nhu An, "Using the Competency Framework According to Employment Position to Assess the Competence of University Specialists." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 8, no. 5 (2020): 286-292. doi: 10.12691/education-8-5-10.

1. Introduction

Higher education in Vietnam is having fundamental and comprehensive innovations in all aspects: training structure and network of higher education institutions; content, method and process of training; planning, training, fostering and employing lecturers and managers; the implementation of scientific and technological activities; mobilizing resources and financial mechanisms; higher education management; international integration ... These innovations have a profound impact on the entire operation of the university, each member and their job position. The requirements for qualifications and capacity of the person at each job position have also changed fundamentally. In the university, besides lecturers, specialists play an important role. Their job positions are diverse, from general administration, staff organization, training, quality assurance, scientific research, international cooperation to university student / learner management ... Each position requires university specialists to have certain competencies. Therefore, research to identify the employment position of university specialists, from which to build the competency framework and use this framework to assess university specialists is an urgent issue.

2. Research Content

2.1. Concepts

2.1.1. Specialist

A specialist is an administrative official who has basic professional requirements in one or a number of domains in administrative agencies and organizations at district or higher levels, they are responsible for advising, synthesizing and implementing regimes, policies according to industry, field or locality. A specialist must have a university degree; a certificate of professional training for specialist in state management, a certificate of foreign language and informatics. Specialists have the following tasks: Elaborating plans, projects and specific regulations to implement the task of state management in the industries and domains; Studying and processing according to their authority or advise the authorities to decide on handling specific issues; Participating in checking, collecting information, statistics, managing records, storing documents and data served in state management in order to make sure that it is strict, accurate and in line with the principles; Synthesizing the situation, conducting summary analysis, evaluating work efficiency and reporting to higher authorities; Directly execute duties, tasks and perform other duties when assigned by the superiors ...

2.1.2. Employment Position (Job Position)

Employment position is the job or task associated with the corresponding professional title or managerial position; the basis for determining the number of employees and the structure of official to recruit, employ and manage officials in public non-business units.

The employment position is formed by the following components: 1) Name of the position (Job title); 2) The duties and powers that the person in charge of the position should perform (responsibility); 3) Requirements for qualifications and professional skills that the person in charge of the position must meet (standards); 4) Wages

paid according to the title, responsibility and standards of the person in charge of the job. Employment position is demonstrated in the form of job description and competency framework to perform that job. Each position requires employees to have a certain level of qualifications and competency. Therefore, job position is the basis for determining the number and structure of the work and the quality of human resources that can ensure the performance of the tasks in agencies, organizations and units; At the same time, it is also a basis for agencies, organizations and units to determine the qualifications and competency of human resources to plan training, fostering as well as recruiting, streamlining human resources, meeting the requirements of each job position.

2.1.3. Competency (Competence)

Before the 1980s, Soviet psychologists (such as VACrutetxki, VN Miaxisop, AG Covaliop, VP Iaguncova ...) all agreed that competency was not a single psychological attribute but a synthesis of personal psychological attributes, meeting the requirements of the activity and ensuring the desired results.

From the 1980s, the issue of competence has continued to receive the attention of many authors. The term "competency" is also considered multidimensional.

Through domestic as well as foreign documents, competence can be viewed in the following categories:

- Competence is considered as an ability (capacity, possibility)

This is the approach commonly found in foreign research papers.

According to L.M. Dooley, K. E Paprock, I. Sun & EGY Gonzalez, competence is seen as "basic abilities based on the knowledge, experience, values and tendencies of a human being developed through educational practices" [3]. According to F.E. Weinert, competence is "a combination of the abilities and skills that are inborn or learned as well as the willingness of learners to solve arising problems and act responsibly, with criticism to give solutions" [6]. High school education program in Quebec, Canada (2004) sees competence as an "ability to act effectively by effort based on many resources" [5]. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) considers competence as "the ability to effectively respond to complex requirements in a specific context" [4].

- Competence is considered as personal attributes

Author Pham Minh Hac sees competence as "a complex combination of psychological attributes of each person, in accordance with the requirements of a certain activity, ensuring that activity takes place effectively" [1]. According to author Dang Thanh Hung, competence is a personal attribute that allows individuals successfully carry out certain activities and achieve desired results under specific conditions" [2]. Thus, competence is a synthesis of individual psychological attributes, formed and developed in a specific field of activity. The concept "competence" used here is viewed as performance capacity, the possession of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and personality characteristics that a person needs in order to meet the requirements of a specific task.

2.2. Competence Framework of University Specialists

Based on the above concept of competence, competency framework can be defined as follows: Competency framework (also called competency model) is a comprehensive description of knowledge, skills, attitudes which an employee needs to complete their job well. The university specialists' competency framework is a comprehensive description of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that university specialists need to perform well in their jobs. The competency framework of university specialists is built on the basis of describing and analyzing each job position that specialists need to take in order to effectively operate the university's administrative apparatus in all aspects. From there, we provide the general competency framework of university specialists including the following components:

2.2.1. Academic and Professional Competence

Academic and professional competence is the ability of a person to master the content, processes, tools and techniques of an employment position to fulfill the job requirements. In the university, the academic and professional capacity of a specialist has the following features:

- Proactively acknowledging and mastering academic and professional materials according to job position

Every employment position in the university has an academic and professional document system. To be able to handle the job well according to the job position, university specialists should actively learn and master these documents.

- Being able to synthesize and systematize a large number of academic and professional documents according to job placement, actively update new knowledge about the profession to improve proficiency

Not only mastering the documents according to job position, university specialists must also be able to synthesize and systematize documents for their work. Having the ability to synthesize and systematize documents, specialists can advise the leaders in developing strategies, making policies, exploiting resources for the university development.

- Ability to apply professional knowledge to work, perform work in an oriented manner

For university specialists, professional knowledge is knowledge of job position. That knowledge needs to be applied flexibly and creatively in handling daily tasks. Lacking in flexibility and creativity when applying, professional knowledge will create rigidity and machinery in the professional activities of specialists.

- Evaluating the work efficiency of colleague; analyzing arising situations at work

Evaluating the work efficiency of others, analyzing situations arising at work is a high level expression of academic and professional competence. In order to evaluate the performance of others, the specialist himself not only understands what other people are doing, but more importantly has to compare the results of other people with the work objectives, then give appropriate comments. University specialists must also be able to

analyze situations arising at work to take the initiative in proposing appropriate and optimal solutions.

- Being able to train newcomers

This ability demonstrates the responsibility of the experienced university specialists. In the process of professional training for newcomers, the academic and professional qualifications of specialists are also improved.

- Drawing up new methods and techniques to perform daily tasks better

New methods and techniques are essential for the work performance of university specialists. However, these updated methods and techniques are not available. Each specialist himself must have a process of accumulating, drawing and summarizing from his daily activities.

- Ability to think critically, find reasons and solve his own problems

This is also a demonstration of the academic and professional competence that university specialists need. In order to deal with issues related to their job position well, specialists must know how to consider the problem in different aspects; especially be able to criticize the opinions of oneself and others.

2.2.2. Advisory Capacity

Advisory plays an important role in almost all tasks of an organization. The person performing the advisory work is the person who gives the best ideas, plans and strategies to make suggestions to the head of the agency, organization. The head consults or relies on these opinions to make decisions. This is considered the core competence of university specialists. The advisory capacity of university specialists is demonstrated as follows:

- Having in-depth knowledge of the field in charge

This is the premise of advisory capacity. In order to advise the university leaders on a certain issue, the counselor himself must master that issue.

- Being a person of high principle but handle specific tasks with an objective and dialectical attitude

This requirement is crucial in both general advisory work and the advisory work of university specialists in particular. The principle guarantees for the work of advisory not being dominated subjectively. Considering in dealing with specific tasks with an objective and dialectical attitude ensures that the advisory work is appropriate for each content, situation, and advisory condition.

- Having a sharp mindset for matters that need advised

The effective advisory work depends a lot on the sharp mind of the advisers. If the adviser has a good mindset, their ideas will help the leaders to make decisions for the development of the organization.

- No self-interest, bias, personal motivation to consider, propose, solve the university's significant issues (human resources, finance, regimes, policies ...)

This is considered an "ethical aspect" in the advisory capacity of university specialists. Without this "ethical aspect", the advisory activities of university specialists will be deflected, even erroneous, in violation of the law.

- Daring to propose and taking responsibility for their proposals

Advisory is essentially a proposal and recommendation for the university leaders. In order for the advisory opinions to have a legal basis, the advisors themselves not only dare to propose but also dare to be responsible for their proposals. Therefore, penalties for inappropriate advices leading to serious consequences should be applied.

2.2.3. Information Literacy Competence

In problem solving and decision making, information is a very important factor. Therefore, in the current age of information explosion, the capacity of analyzing, synthesizing and processing information becomes one of the crucial competencies of university specialists. Thanks to this competence, they can quickly give advice to the university leaders in the most optimal way. The information literacy competence has the following demonstrations:

- Mastering the principles and methods of analyzing, synthesizing and processing information

This is a very necessary requirement for the information literacy competence. Without mastering the principles and methods of analyzing, synthesizing and processing information, university specialists cannot use the information for their work.

- Utilizing tools and techniques to collect information and data related to the assigned tasks

Information and data related to the assigned tasks of university specialists are diverse, from a variety of sources. Therefore, in order to collect information and data, specialists must utilize supporting tools and techniques such as accessing information and data method from the Internet; looking up documents in data warehouses ...

- Confident, cohesive and coherent presentation of the information and data collected with analytical analysis.

Information and data related to the assigned work of specialists should be presented in a confident, cohesive and coherent manner with analytical analysis. As a result, the collected information and data will become tools and means of work for university specialists.

- Applying appropriate tools and techniques to make and implement work plans for individuals and the organization

In each position, university specialists must create and implement work plans for individuals and the organization. In order to carry out this task quickly and effectively, specialists must know how to apply appropriate tools and techniques such as plan templates, planning method, planning implementation process ...

- Selecting and applying techniques to make specific types of reports

Reporting is a "career" requirement of university specialists. They make all kinds of reports every month / quarter / year. Each type of report follows different rules. Therefore, specialists must be able to select and apply techniques to compose specific types of reports.

2.2.4. Implementation Capacity

Implementation is an indispensable capacity for specialists in general and university specialists in particular. All activities in the administrative apparatus of the university operate depending on the specialists' implementation capacity. This capacity is expressed in:

- Mastering the specific tasks of each job position

At each job position, there are a number of tasks that specialists need to master. This helps specialists know what to do and more importantly avoid tasks uncompleted.

- Ability to plan the implementation of the assigned tasks

In implementing the assigned tasks, planning is significant for each university specialist. Thanks to the plan, specialists can complete the assigned work on time.

- Knowing how to organize work following certain processes

In order to handle the assigned tasks quickly and effectively, university specialists must know the procedure of managing the duties. When solving the works with process, possible errors will be minimized.

- Knowing how to choose the appropriate implementation method in accordance with the requirements of each task/ duty and actual conditions of the university

University specialists need to know how to implement each task/ duty in accordance with the actual conditions of the university.

- Knowing how to find and mobilize resources to implement assigned tasks / duties

In implementing the assigned tasks / duties, university specialists must find and mobilize resources. These resources can be searched and mobilized in their own department or in others inside and outside the university.

2.2.5. Capacity for Teamwork

In these days, teamwork becomes an especially important competence for human beings in general, university specialists in particular. With teamwork, members can share experiences, knowledge and work methods, as a result, the work goes smoothly. In a university, a specialist's teamwork capacity is shown in the following skills:

- Mastering the teamwork goals

To work in groups, university specialists must master the team's working goals. Therefore, the work of the team will bring the desired results.

- Knowing how to express ideas and solutions to solve problems of the team

When working in a team, it is essential that every university specialist knows how to present opinions and solutions to solve a group problem. If this is unfulfilled, teamwork will not make sense.

- Being open, honest, and respect each other in communication

In group work, university specialists must be open, honest and respectful. The attitude of each member will have a great influence on the results of the teamwork.

- Knowing how to agree on, evaluate and solve problems towards a common solution for the team

The results of teamwork must eventually lead to a common solution for the group. Therefore, in the process of working in groups, there should be agreement, assessment and problem solving among specialists.

- Believing and listening to the opinions of team members

Trusting and listening to the opinions of other members are also important to shape and develop teamwork capacity for university specialists. Believing and listening to the ideas of members, other members of the group also trust and listen to their opinions.

- Knowing how to manage conflicts that can occur in teamwork

During group work, ideas and opinions among members may vary, which may cause conflicts. University specialists need to know how to handle these conflicts.

2.2.6. Informatics and Foreign Languages Competence

In the context of globalization and deeper integration, informatics and foreign languages become two indispensable tools for human beings in general and university specialists in particular. If these two are missing, a person may lose the opportunity to work in multinational organizations and reduce the opportunity to compete directly with candidates who are fluent in information technology and foreign languages.

Informatics and foreign languages competence has the following demonstrations:

- Fluency in common software such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint

These are software programs that any university specialist must master. Thanks to these software, specialists can quickly solve the technical works

- Being able to explore, learn how to use different tools on computers, meeting the requirements of effective university operation

There are many different tools on the computer. These tools may not be covered in the IT program. Therefore, each university specialist needs to explore and learn how to use different tools for their work.

- Ability to accurately read and understand documents in foreign languages, serving professional work

There are numerous documents that serve the professional work of university specialists written in foreign languages, mostly in English. In order to use these documents, specialists must be able to accurately read and understand documents in foreign languages, especially in the context that Vietnamese higher education is increasingly deeply integrated with higher education in the world.

- Being able to write documents such as test plan, test spec, summarize test results

This is also a requirement of informatics and foreign language competence for university specialists.

In summary, the competency framework of university specialists has 06 basic elements. These are common competencies for all positions of university specialists. Depending on each group of job positions, these general competencies are concretized into specific competencies (or specialized competencies). For example, the specialists' competence of the Administrative Department, Personnel Department; specialists' competence of the Training, Science and International Cooperation Department; competence of specialists in Political work – Students Department; competence of specialists in Planning - Finance, Investment Department...

2.3. Using the Competency Framework According to Employment Position to Assess the Competence of University Specialists

To evaluate the competence of university specialists, we use the competency framework above. Each competence is assessed through demonstrations / criteria

according to 5 levels, corresponding to the scores 1,2,3,4,5. Each level has a certain average range (Bad: 1.00-1.80; Poor: 1.81-2.60; Average: 2.61-3.40; Fair: 3.41-4.20; Good: 4.21-5.00). The competency survey of specialists is based on the assessment of leaders and self-assessment of university specialists. Participants in the evaluation and self-assessment are 111 leaders (departments / faculties / institutes / centers) and 182 specialists of Vinh University (as a case study).

2.3.1. Assessing Academic and Professional Competence of Specialists

From the data of Table 1, there are following comments:
- Leaders do not highly evaluate the academic and professional competence of specialists; Among 7 manifestations of this competence, up to 3 ones rank at level 2 (poor); others ranked at 3 (average).
- Specialists self-assess their academic and professional competence, although higher than leaders, only at level 3 (average); There is only one manifestation of this capacity, which specialists rate themselves at level 4 (fair).
- Assessment of leaders and self-assessment of specialists on academic and professional competence are objective, reflecting the real situation of this competence of specialists at Vinh University.

2.3.2. Assessing Advisory Capacity of Specialists

From the data of Table 2, there are following comments:
- All manifestations of advisory capacity are rated by leaders at level 3 (average). Meanwhile, specialists assess 3/5 criteria at level 4 (fair).
- Compared to the self-assessment of specialists, the evaluation of leaders reflects more objectively the current status of specialists' competency at Vinh University. Many university specialists are lacking in this capacity.

2.3.3. Assessing Information Literacy Competence

From the data of Table 3, there are following comments:
- While all criteria of information literacy competence are rated at 3 (average) by leaders, most of them are evaluated by specialists at level 4 (fair).
- Despite such high rate of self-assessment, in fact, many specialists of Vinh University are still unqualified in analyzing, synthesizing and processing information which affects their academic and professional work according to job positions.

Table 1. Results of assessing academic and professional competence

No.	The demonstrations / criteria of competence	Leaders		Specialists	
		$\bar{X}$	Level	$\bar{X}$	Level
1	Proactive learning and mastering academic and professional materials according to job placement	3.09	3	3.45	4
2	Being able to synthesize and systematize a large number of academic and professional documents according to job position, actively update new knowledge about the profession to improve proficiency	3.00	3	3.17	3
3	Ability to apply professional knowledge to work, perform work in an oriented manner	2.91	3	3.23	3
4	Evaluating the work efficiency of colleague; analyzing arising situations at work	2.88	3	3.34	3
5	Being able to train newcomers	2.45	2	3.12	3
6	Drawing up new methods and techniques to perform daily tasks better	2.54	2	3.13	3
7	Ability to think critically, find reasons and solve his own problems	2.40	2	3.06	3

Table 2. Results of advisory capacity assessment

No.	The manifestations / criteria of competence	Leaders		Specialists	
		$\bar{X}$	Level	$\bar{X}$	Level
1	Having in-depth knowledge of the field in charge	3.08	3	3.50	4
2	Being a person of high principle, but handle specific tasks with an objective and dialectical attitude	3.02	3	3.24	3
3	Having a sharp mindset for matters that need advised	2.99	3	3.18	3
4	No self-interest, bias, personal motivation to consider, propose, solve the university's significant issues (human resources, finance, regimes, policies ...)	3.17	3	3.53	4
5	Daring to propose and taking responsibility for their proposals	3.13	3	3.52	4

Table 3. Results of evaluating the information literacy competence

No.	The manifestations / criteria of competence	Leaders		Specialists	
		$\bar{X}$	Level	$\bar{X}$	Level
1	Mastering the principles and methods of analyzing, synthesizing and processing information	2.98	3	3.26	3
2	Utilizing tools and techniques to collect information and data related to the assigned tasks	3.05	3	3.50	4
3	Confident, cohesive and coherent presentation of the information and data collected with analytical analysis.	3.01	3	3.54	4
4	Applying appropriate tools and techniques to make and implement work plans for individuals and the organization	3.18	3	3.51	4
5	Selecting and applying techniques to make specific types of reports	3.16	3	3.55	4

Table 4. Results of evaluating the implementation capacity

No.	The manifestations / criteria of competence	Leaders		Specialists	
		$\bar{X}$	Level	$\bar{X}$	Level
1	Mastering the specific tasks of each job position	3.36	3	3.65	4
2	Ability to plan the implementation of the assigned tasks	3.22	3	3.30	3
3	Knowing how to organize work following certain processes	2.97	3	3.34	3
4	Knowing how to choose the appropriate implementation method in accordance with the requirements of each task/ duty and actual conditions of the university	3.19	3	3.61	4
5	Knowing how to find and mobilize resources to implement assigned tasks / duties	2.99	3	3.20	3

Table 5. Results of teamwork capacity evaluation

No.	The manifestations / criteria of competence	Leaders		Specialists	
		$\bar{X}$	Level	$\bar{X}$	Level
1	Mastering the teamwork goals	3.37	3	3.66	4
2	Knowing how to express ideas and solutions to solve problems of the team	3.01	3	3.64	4
3	Being open, honest, and respect each other in communication	3.32	3	3.38	3
4	Knowing how to agree on, evaluate and solve problems towards a common solution for the team	2.99	3	3.36	3
5	Believing and listening to the opinions of team members	3.29	3	3.35	3

Table 6. Results of evaluating the informatics and foreign languages competence

No.	The manifestations / criteria of capacity	Leaders		Specialists	
		$\bar{X}$	Level	$\bar{X}$	Level
1	Fluency in common software such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint	3.38	3	3.67	4
2	Being able to explore, learn how to use different tools on computers, meet the requirements of effective university operation	3.07	3	3.38	3
3	Ability to accurately read and understand documents in foreign languages, serving professional work	2.42	2	2.85	3
4	Being able to write documents such as test plan, test spec, summarize test results	2.99	3	3.08	3

Table 7. Summary results of university specialists' competency assessment

No.	The manifestations / criteria of capacity	Leaders		Specialists	
		$\bar{X}$	Level	$\bar{X}$	Level
1	Academic and professional competence	2.75	3	3.21	3
2	Advisory capacity	3.07	3	3.39	3
3	Information literacy competence	3.08	3	3.47	4
4	Implementation capacity	3.14	3	3.42	4
5	Capacity for teamwork	3.19	3	3.48	4
6	Informatics and foreign languages competence	2.96	3	3.24	3

2.3.4. Assessing Implementation Capacity of Specialists

From the data of Table 4, there are following comments:
- Manifestations of implementation capacity are assessed at level 3 (average) by leaders. Meanwhile, specialists rate 2 criteria at level 4 (fair). These manifestations are colloquial requirements that any specialist needs to meet according to the employment position.
- With the capacity of implementation, the self-assessment of specialists from Vinh University is more appropriate than that of leaders.

2.3.5. Assessing Specialists' Capacity for Teamwork

From the data of Table 5, there are following comments:
- Leaders have a lower rating than specialists' self-assessment regarding teamwork capacity
- In fact, teamwork is currently a limitation in the competence of specialists at Vinh University, especially the teamwork method.

2.3.6. Assessing Specialists' Informatics and Foreign Languages Competence

From the data of Table 6, there are following comments:
- Both leaders and specialists underestimate the ability to use foreign languages at work of Vinh University's specialists.

- Compared to leaders' evaluation, proficiency in using common software such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint is rated at higher level by specialists. These are mandatory software for university specialists. However, not all specialists are proficient at using these software for work according to their job position.

From the data of Table 7, there are following comments:
- The competencies of specialists at Vinh University are all assessed at level 3 (average) and above. There are 3 competencies that specialists self-assess at level 4 (fair): Information literacy competence; implementation capacity; capacity for teamwork.
- Based on the order of the competencies' average scores, there is a certain similarity between leaders and specialists.

3. Conclusion

Specialists play an important role in operating the administrative apparatus in the university. Determining the employment position, thereby building a common competency framework for the position of university specialists is an urgent requirement. Survey of specialists' competence (through a case study of Vinh University)

shows that the competence of university specialists is only at an average level. To meet the increasing requirements of each job position, university specialists need to be fostered comprehensively in both competency and quality.

References

[1] Pham Minh Hac, editor (1988), *Psychology*, Volume 1, Vietnam Education Publishing House, Hanoi.

[2] Dang Thanh Hung (2012), "Competence and education according to competency approach", *Journal of Educational Management*, No. 43, December.

[3] L. M. Dooley, K. E Paprock, I. Sun & E. G. Y. Gonzalez (2001), *Differences in priority for competencies trained between U.S. and Mexican trainers*, Unpublished manuscript.

[4] OECD (2002), *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Fundation*.

[5] Québec- Ministere de L'Education (2004), *Québec Education Program, Secodary School Education,* Cycle One.

[6] Weinenrt F.E (2001), *Vergleichende Leistungsmessung in Schulen-eineumstrittene Selbstvrtondlichkeit, in F.E. Weinenrt (eds) Leistungsmessung in Schulen, Weinheim und Basejl: Beltz Verlag.*