

A CRITIQUE REVIEW OF CONSULTANCY COMPETENCY MODEL FOR EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS IN KOREA

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1. Introduction

Competency modeling is increasingly being used in many different fields, particularly in business administration. It has emerged to address the need for competent employees who can perform according to given standards, and for organizations to achieve higher levels of success in the competing world. Consequently, various competency assessment approaches have been developed and applied by researchers (see McLagan, 1989, 1996; Rothwell and Lindholm, 1999; Dubois, 1993; Levens, et al. 2004; Bernthal et al, 2004; Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006; LaRocca, 2009). In agricultural extension competency modeling has also gained interest in order to address ongoing challenges in the agro-business sector. Lack of sufficient resources, complexity of new farming systems and technology, globalization, privatization in extension systems and rapid population growth are only some issues that necessitate the need for using competency modeling approaches in agricultural extension (see Stone and Bieber, 1997; Cooper and Graham, 2001; Liles and Mustian, 2004, Karbasioun et al, 2007a, 2007b). For instance, Karbasioun et al (op cit) have developed a competency profile for the role of instruction of agricultural extension professionals. This study took place in the province of Esfahan in Iran. Shim developed the Korean Extension Consultancy Competency (KECC) model (Shim, 2005). The rationale behind this model was that extension is privatizing and that extension professionals instead of being civil servants are developing as private consultants. This is a major shift in their professional identity, which necessitates a fundamental change in their knowledge, skills and above all, attitudes. Shim, endeavored to develop the most pertinent competency model for the future role of Korean extension agents with highlighting their consultancy function. She, therefore, studied quite a number of extension competency modeling approaches and used Delphi Technique for developing her model. Like any other research, her methodology has its own strengths and weaknesses and in this contribution a more critical review is presented of Shim competency model. As said earlier, both researchers (shim, 2005 & Karbasioun et al., 2007) have independently scored the elements of the research methodology, and the competency model. So, this review of a counterpart competency modeler could help other researchers who are willing to do similar competency modeling research to track most trustable methodologies. They are also notified to avoid the bottlenecks of such studies.

2. ASTD 2004: The Basis of Shim Competency Model

In her PhD project, shim has reviewed a considerable number of previous competency models both in formal environment and in agricultural extension domain (Shim, 2005, pp 13-57). She finally decided to take ASTD model developed in 2004 as the basis of her model. This model is a general and more business oriented model for competency assessment of various target groups. She then, strived to adjust this model through integration of this model with two other above-mentioned models (UK consultancy model and Texas Cooperative Extension model). Karbasioun et al. (2007) also started from ASTD McLagan model developed in 1989 and 1996 and adjusted the model with agricultural extension system in Iran. Although shifting from formal to informal setting was not an easy task to accomplish and seemed risky, they both decided to take the risk, keep the structure and change the contents of ASTD model according to their target group. However, even in the final draft of Korean

extension competency model you still face with the terms/phrases that are not commonly used in informal/non-formal situations like extension area. Karbasioun et al. (2007) experienced too the same dilemma in designing the questionnaire and a part of his respondents complained about their difficulties with interpretations of HRD terms in the first draft of the research questionnaire. Thus, he had to re-phrase, change or delete many terms and sentences. Furthermore, triangulation of the final version of the competency model developed for Iranian agricultural extension professionals and combining the results of various studies was the strategy he used to overcome any bias in the results. As it is seen in below figure the ASTD, 2004 model is like a pyramid which includes three main categories: first fundamental competencies at the bottom; then the focus in the second layer is on technical competences and finally at the third level (on the top), there are roles to be successfully played as a result of applying mentioned competences. Shim's model is nearly the same and she similarly used "fundamental Competences" as the first, then "Task Competences" as the second step and finally "Roles" on the top of the pyramid which are the outcomes of the two first layers of pyramid (competencies). Although she changed the appearance of the ASTD, 2004 model from pyramid to a house, the top-down arrangement was kept the same (see figures 1 &2).

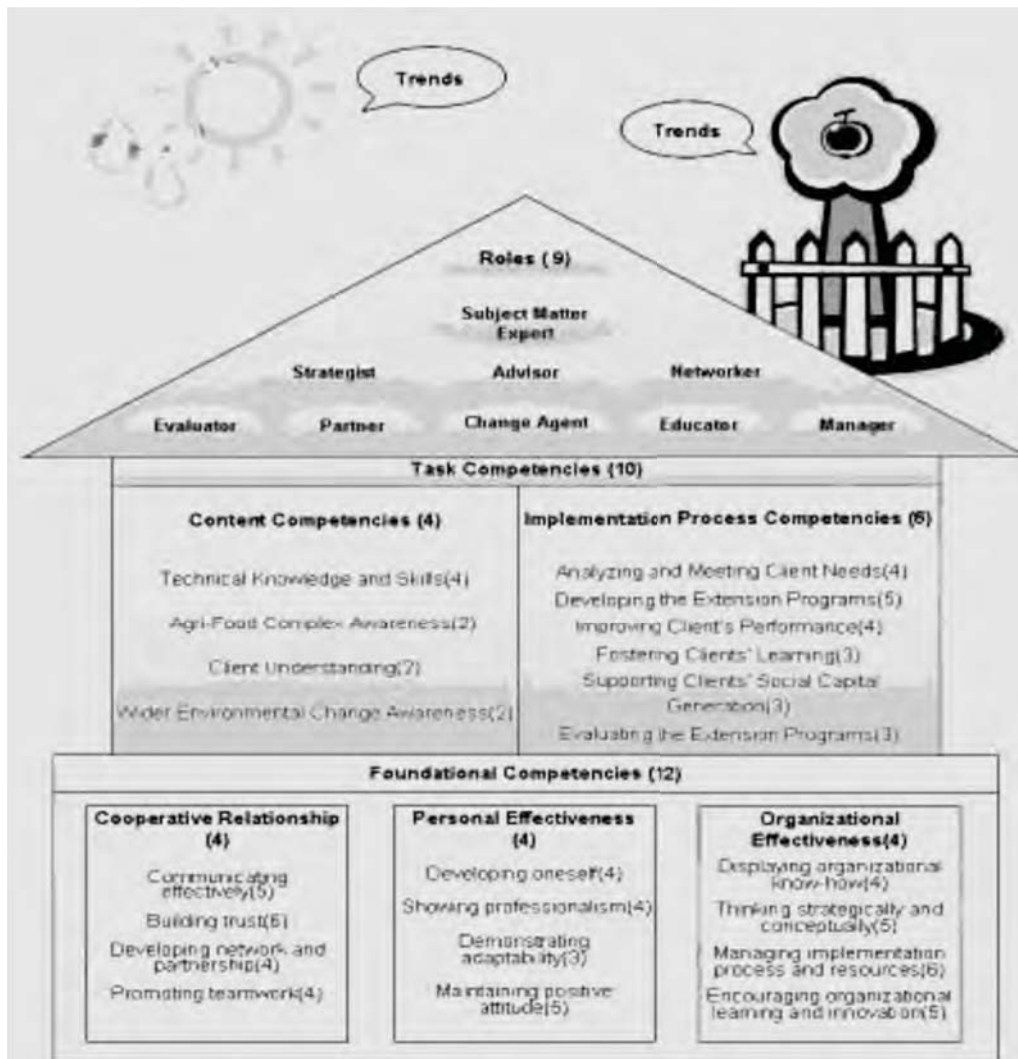
Figure 1. ASTD, 2004 Competency Model (cited by Shim, 2005)



Additionally, she added or replaced more important fundamental and task competences and also roles for extension system with a consultancy tendency in her model. She also considered external factors influencing expected roles of extension professionals in the future. Karbasioun et al. (2007) used the previous version of ASTD model (McLagan, 1989 &1996) which had more concentration on external factors named "Ethical Issues"

and “Future Forces”. Another difference of the last version of ASTD model with the newer version (2004) was the presence of “Outputs” and Standards which are not separately presented in the 2004 model. Although, all issues are presented in both versions under various titles, nevertheless, the concentration on mentioned factors is not the same. Karbasioun (op cit.) claimed that older version of ASTD model is more fit with informal circumstances like extension system.

Figure 2. Shim Competency Model developed in 2005



On the other hand, Shim (op. cit.) argued the newer version to be better for the consultancy role of extension professionals and also a more comprehensive competency model. However, considering the nature of US competency models in general and the Korean competency model in particular internally suffers from complexity, too many influencing dispersed items, and lack of the focus. As a result, readers gets entangled within a long list of tasks, competencies, roles, and their sub-items; hence, they are hardly able to recognize the real differences of various preferences. For instance what is the major difference between the role of ‘strategist’ and ‘partner’ in the Shim competency model is not very clear. There are many other similar terms and concepts which can lead to misinterpretation. However, this looks quite essential when evaluating Shim competency

model that many terms need to be defined in a separate part. This phenomenon could be noted as an intervening item for the “context robustness” criteria.

3. “Delphi Technique”: Selected Research Methodology

Concerning the research methodology used by Shim, a modified Delphi technique was applied. A number of 23 respondents in the first round and 18 respondents in the second round filled the questionnaires and sent them back to the researcher. While, the number of respondents was enough to get the reliability greater than .8 (Shim, 2007, p. 74) , the low size of the target group and using a modified Delphi technique could prevent generalization of the model to the a large population. Especially, when number of “successful farmers” whose opinions are crucial for the model are few (five in the first round and three in the second as cited in Shim, 2005, p 80). This endangers the ecological and construct validity of the study to be as a national competency model.

4. The Research Questionnaire and its Challenges

According to Shim (2005, p 75), after revising the questionnaire by three experts, final draft of questionnaire was revised and finalized with one hundred and sixty two items. Twenty eight items related to the extension system internal and external trends, twelve items to the roles, seventy six items to the foundational competencies, and forty six items to the task competencies of extension professionals. She herself agrees with the complexity of questionnaire and being lengthy. She then, skips some questions in the first round of Delphi Technique to avoid negative influence of having a long and complex questionnaire on the accuracy of responses. Nevertheless, this fact could be assumed as another intervening factor which impacts to some extent the reliability of research tool.

On the other hand, the Delphi Technique along with all its strengths, has a big limitation and lessens the level of interaction and mutual communication of respondents. While, this interaction is present in other research methodologies like individual and group interviews or structured questionnaires. This means that respondents’ opinions could be absolutely different when personal query is implemented than using a postal structured questionnaire. This is particularly vital when a questionnaire with many new and technical terms are distributed. So, lack of interactivity of the research methodology is another challenging incident that need more deliberations.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

With all above-mentioned criticisms, shim’s attempt in developing a unique competency model for Korean extension professionals is meaningful. Of course, proposed model needs to be evaluated in practice and until now no international publication or evidence has been presented to show whether her model is properly applied or evaluated in Korea. In terms of exclusiveness, because the model has focused on the consultancy function of extension professionals in Korea, and also due to using Delphi technique, it is scored well. This means that the originality of Shim’s research methodology is appropriate; nonetheless, as already said, its usefulness must be confirmed by practical evidences. Shim’s competency model was an effort of testing a formal HRD competency model for extension system. She incorporated various models in order to develop a unique model for Korean extension system. However, it seems that the appropriateness of developed model for the Korean extension system is still thinkable. For future research it is recommended that the evaluation of this model and also Karbasioun competency model is carefully taken into account. Likewise, it is suggested that Delphi technique is replaced or complemented with other interactive and personal research methods like structured and un-structured interviews, group discussion sessions, experts’ panels etc. Regarding research tool, the research questionnaire needs to be shortened, simplified and focused. One of the solutions could possibly be developing competency profiles for every role of extension professionals separately. In addition, farmers’ opinions are not that significant in Shim study while they are major audience of extension system and have a lot to say about the

competencies extension professionals should possess. Therefore, more attention to farmers' perspective is also proposed in further research. After all, we believe that many questions are important and still not sufficiently discussed in this contribution. Questions such as: What is the cultural bias of employing Western literature for Eastern practices like what Shim implemented in her research? To what extent KECC-model has proper institutional links with the Korean extension system? Which combination of respondents of such extension competency development research is proposed for the future studies? These questions will obviously be addressed later in a more in-depth review of Shim competency model in a journal publication format.

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