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WHAT ARE COMPETENT DIPLOMATS MADE OF?

Exploring competency management in Finnish Foreign Service

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ABSTRACT

Diplomats, the civil servants of the Foreign Service, are the actors behind Finnish Foreign Policy and diplomatic relations. Their work includes the rotation of positions around the world. Working with diverse tasks and varying organizations in different cultures requires a great asset of various competencies. Managing careers of this nature requires multiple actions in Human Resources Management so that the civil servants would stay motivated and develop their competencies. This qualitative study explores the current state of competency management in Finnish Foreign Service, and seeks to find characteristics of competent diplomats.

The theoretical framework of competency management discussed the ambiguous concept of competency, and aimed at explaining the steps of competency management. Competencies were defined as the factors that form the potential for superior performance, such as skills, abilities, knowledge, and behavioral characteristics. Some practical tools for competency management were introduced to complete the theoretical framework. Within the scope of diplomacy, the legal requirements for diplomatic career in Finland were listed and discussed. The empirical material was collected by interviewing 15 diplomats of different background, age, and stage of career development. By the means of qualitative analysis, the answers were categorized and interpreted with the objective to form a comprehensive picture of the current state of competency management in the Foreign Service of Finland.

The results give diverse characteristics and abilities for a competent diplomat, most of which represent behavioral characteristics, and personal characteristics of an individual; however, linguistic skills and abilities are seen as the most important competency area of technical nature. The structure of competency management includes individual objectives and job description; practical tools for leadership to promote competency development; multiple options to self-driven development and career planning; and the comprehensive training in the beginning of diplomatic career. The significance of leadership in competency management is crucial for Finnish diplomats, yet individual activities in career planning and competency development are strongly emphasized by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. For leadership, there are tools such as formal discussions with subordinates; performance appraisals; co-operative goal setting; and sparring as a coach. For self-directed competency development, there are options such as mentoring program; participation in additional trainings; transfer of tacit knowledge within rotation; effective self-management; and peer support as in informal discussions between colleagues. Competent diplomats show excellence in interaction and self-expression in diverse occasions; courage and flexibility in front of new challenges; and deep motivation to serve their home country Finland.

KEYWORDS: competency, competency management, diplomacy, leadership, public sector

1. INTRODUCTION

*“What is the difference between a girl and a diplomat?
If a girl says no, it means maybe.
If a diplomat says maybe, it means no.
If a girl says maybe, it means yes.
If a diplomat says yes, it means maybe.
If a girl says yes, she is not a decent girl.
If a diplomat says no, he/she is not a diplomat.” (Susiluoto 2002: 23).*

This anecdote of the nature of diplomats raises several questions on the characteristics of diplomats, the biggest of which supposedly relates to the mysterious reputation of the profession. Diplomats' caricature would look like a well-dressed middle-aged man enjoying his time in cocktail parties – or so it has been. But is it the truth in the world in which Governments are forced to radically cut public spending, and to reform the structures of the public sector. Efficiency and productivity are the trends of this world, and diplomats work by serving these principles. What is interesting, is to examine diplomats more explicitly: what a decent diplomat is; what today's Finnish diplomats are like; what their competencies are; and how they manage in the global setting.

This Master's Thesis concerns competency management in Finnish Foreign Service. Finnish diplomacy has functioned for nearly a century, going through wars and other unstable situations, the latest being the major global economic crisis. Productive Foreign Service needs competent diplomats; however, defining competencies in diplomacy is not the easiest task. Competency studies are more infrequent in public sector than in private sector – the topic is, however, accurate, as governments seek productivity and competent, yet developing, workforce.

Finnish Foreign Service comprises the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and Finland's diplomatic missions abroad. In this thesis, competency management will be examined in the context of Finnish diplomacy. The center of interest is put on internal HRM of the Finnish Foreign Service. More explicitly, managing competencies of Finnish diplomats is the core of the thesis.

Diplomats are civil servants of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and thus strongly attached to Finnish Government. They are carefully selected and tested before their appointment. Moreover, their work includes working for diplomatic missions around the world, in changing cultures and in changing tasks. Consequently, it can be assumed that diplomats need to have certain level of basic competencies required, but then some specific competencies required for good performance are also required. Tasks change as the posts change, and that raises questions on how the training is arranged and completed between these diplomatic missions.

The civil servants of the Finnish Foreign Service work abroad, representing Finland and helping Finns who live abroad. There are two dimensions in diplomats' work: creating and managing relations to the current receiving state in which he/she operates; and informing the homeland about situations and conditions of the receiving state, and about international occasions (Susiluoto 2002: 25). Diplomats change missions in every two to four years, and after two missions of seven years of maximum, they work for the Ministry in Helsinki for some time, after which it is time for new missions. Due to its rotating nature, diplomatic career is considered as a generalist career. That, if anything, complicates the identification of competencies for the profession. Research on diplomats' competencies is considerably rare, although competency management in civil service has been studied more, especially in Europe (see Horton 2000; Hondelghem & Vandermeulen 2000) and in North America (Bonder, Bouchard & Bellemare 2011).

What are competent diplomats made of? This study aims to find characteristics for Finnish diplomats. Today, it is quite rare to find people with long lasting career within the same employer; however, this is the ultimate aim of the Ministry: to find competent and flexible people who would engage on long-term basis. Long-lasting career requires a satisfying relationship between the employer and the employee; and successful activities in management of the employees.

1.1. Background for competency management

Public sector has had to face enormous challenges in the constantly changing world. Yet for decades, the principles of New Public Management (NPM) have modified western public sectors with the main idea of doing more for less, and focusing on performance based approach. NPM has also brought some knowhow from private sector to public sector, such as the concept of human resources management (HRM). HRM emphasizes the role of people in the management process, adding spices to traditional personnel management in public sector. (Horton 2002: 3.) HRM is defined in various ways, and not always academics agree either on its importance or on its definition. For this context, Price's (1997: 1) definition is considered as relevant:

“An organization gains competitive advantage by using its people effectively, drawing on their expertise and ingenuity to meet clearly defined objectives. Human Resource Management is aimed at recruiting capable, flexible and committed people, managing and rewarding their performance and developing key competencies.”

Parallel to the emergence of NPM, there is also another movement that arose during that time: competency movement and, competency-based management, also known as competency management (Horton 2002: 3, OECD 2010: 7). The founder of competency movement is vastly considered to have been David McClelland who associated competency with the identification of individual attributes associated with superior performance. In the late 1960s he attempted to overcome racial and other biases inherent in conventional intelligence testing. (McClelland 1973.) The idea of the terminology was popularized in the early 1980s by Richard Boyatzis and John Raven, and ever since the competency terminology has been more or less part of HR development and training industry. (Lodge & Hood 2003: 134; Hood & Lodge 2004: 318.)

As a real trend in public sector, competency management became in the late 1990s, although it has been introduced in various ways. Overall reasons for the spread of competency management are argued as following:

“...significant changes in society, such as the evolution towards knowledge and service work, globalisation and increased competition, the rapidly changing economic environment which demands greater flexibility from organisations and the flattening of organisations which implies a revision of traditional organisational careers” (Hondeghe 2002: 173).

It seems clear that competency movement arise parallel with NPM and its main principles. If anything, competency management could be seen as an answer to the HRM's demands for NPM. Some researchers slightly criticize OECD for the late approval of competency management (see i.e. Horton 2002; Lodge & Hood 2005: 780); hence, it can be questioned whether competency management would have been introduced more broadly in western countries earlier, had OECD approved the concept earlier.

As it is argued above, competency management is somewhat usual in business environment, yet also accepted at least formally in the context of public organizations. Competency management is not a word of foreign language anymore, but it is unclear whether it is comprehensively applied in public organizations. The variety of different, but somehow very similar, terms is impressive: competency, competence, skills, abilities, capabilities, knowledge, know-how, professionalism, just to mention a few. These often heard and used terms are related to each other – they all certainly belong to HRM. However, since they are strongly related, there is an actual risk of intermingling, and generalizing about competencies (Horton 2002: 5).

Competence is defined as a set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable people to perform well at work; furthermore, the creative use of individual resources in complex situations indicates competence. Skills refer to abilities that are learned or acquired, and naturally they can also be developed through some effort. Knowledge is formed by the outcome of assimilation of information through learning. However, knowledge develops from three types of learning: propositional, practical learning and procedural learning. Propositional knowledge indicates knowing that (*savoir*), practical knowledge is knowing how (*savoir faire*), and procedural knowledge means knowing how to be (*savoir être*). (Cedefop 2009: 65; NICE 2012: 35; Mulvey 2013: 271.)

Consequently, it can be argued that competence and competency are broader terms that include various dimensions and also the terms defined above – it is also titled as “a catch-all term”(Mulvey 2013: 271). The difference between e and y spelling is narrow, yet it needs clarification (see 2.1.). Due to its interesting and more relevant nature regarding the thesis, the context of competency will be on emphasis.

In Finland, public organizations have broadly introduced HRM as a part of management and strategies. Managing knowledge and competencies are known concepts, and they are strived to be recognized; however, competency management is not broadly strategic, yet. Competency development is often enforced as external courses or training sessions, and employees are given the authorization to determine their level of competencies, hence, management’s opinion does not exist in most cases. (Gustafsson & Marniemi 2012: 103.)

The difference between management and leadership is somewhat clear and mostly agreed: management refers to managing processes and operations in an organization, whereas leadership is all about leading people. Some talk about hard and soft tasks: a manager’s tasks are to plan, to organize, to direct and control the HR processes towards the goals and objectives; a leader’s tasks include influencing people’s actions, using people to achieve the goals. Manager’s post is also formally appointed to the hierarchy, and thus he/she has, or is supposed to have, a formal authority. (McLean 2005: 16, Rooney 2010: 6–7).

These two terms are often pictured as each other’s opponents, management versus leadership, but in reality, a good manager ought to be both, manager and leader. According to Viitala (2004a: 16–17), leadership skills (influencing, motivating, directing, coaching etc.) are equally important in every level of hierarchy, regardless of the type of the organization. The two other types of skills for managers and executives are technical and conceptual skills that vary, depending on the organization. To be consistent, in this thesis, the term management is utilized in discussion about the management system of the Foreign Service; and the term leadership in reference to heads of mission and heads of departments and units of the Ministry, as they perform leadership tasks and thus they have a crucial role in promotion of competencies.

In fact, HRM might be the best example of the mixture of management and leadership: HRM is all about the people in the organization but requires advanced managerial expertise, as well as good leadership. Same principle considers also competency management, which is one tool in HRM, and requires, in addition to leadership, managerial tasks, such as organizing, contextualizing and framing.

1.2. Purpose of the study, research questions and structure of the thesis

In Finland, there is literature concerning remarkable diplomats in Finland's history, and by these images, characteristics, anecdotes and achievements there might be an impression of a Finnish diplomat to be formed (see Susiluoto 2002; Mansala & Suomi 2003). Supposedly, the most relevant research made on the topic is the trilogy on the history of Finnish Foreign Service, from 1918 until 1981 (Nevakivi 1988; Soikkanen 2003 & Soikkanen 2008). The trilogy offers a solid background knowledge on HRM practices of the Foreign Service; however, it does not cover the most recent history, something of which would be the most interesting for the purposes of this study.

The complexity of defining diplomats' competencies may be one reason why the topic is rarely studied outside the Ministry. However, diplomats are civil servants of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and, hence, they are supposed to act within the principle of public service motivation – the altruist mentality that truly seeks performing public service of high quality, and not self-interests of any kind. This sort of public service motivation is related to theory of trust, which empowers civil servants to allocate given resources (within the budget) into certain public service (Le Grand 2010: 57–59).

In addition to the principles of NPM movement, the current global situation requires changes in public entities. On the one hand, those changes are part of global integration, and they comprise, inter alia, economic, political, technological, environmental, social, as well as cultural dimensions. The nature of public service is questioned, and partly redefined by various reforms and efficiency requirements. Productivity and efficiency

gains, traditionally common virtues of corporate companies, have been integrated into public organizations' colloquial language. (Siugzdiniene 2006: 26; Bonder et al. 2011: 1.) On the other hand, economic crises around the globe have forced governments to rethink the ways of spending and start various savings policies. This also challenges HRM processes: how to make the personnel to perform more effectively and more productively? Competency management is argued to help integrate HR activities into the business strategies of the organization (Bonder et al. 2011: 1).

Constant changes and efficiency demands require intelligent use of resources, and thus, competent employees who are able to perform in varying conditions. Supposedly, one of the greatest challenges of the HR department (HR development unit) in the Ministry is the optimal position of diplomats: how are diplomats positioned in the most suitable posts, i.e. how can their competencies be best used for effective performance. Even though diplomats are considered as generalists, multiply skilled people, with common logic, it can be assumed that some fit better in certain posts and tasks than others. That is also the reason why there are diplomats with varying backgrounds.

On organizational stage, identifying important competencies is easier than on individual level, where more psychological measure is needed. Performing well in work tasks requires professionalism. Professionalism involves competencies of which some are related to tasks, some to motivation, and some to social skills in interaction. (Viitala 2004b: 51.)

Identifying important competencies and managing them effectively are a central element for organization's success. Public service, due to its unique nature in today's commercialized environment, is an interesting case for competency studies, since it is not as researched as competency management in private sector. Furthermore, diplomatic principles offer a special environment for civil servants who work as diplomats. In this paper, the center of interest is put on competencies required from diplomats. Naturally it involves studying the context of competency management, its practice and main features.

Furthermore, the principles and the nature of diplomacy need to be on the focus in this paper. There are some unique characteristics in diplomacy that need to be taken into consideration. As diplomats are missioned around the globe, it is relevant to study the ways how their competencies are managed.

Finnish diplomats are selected among people with, inter alia, higher academic degree and required language skills, and they have passed several phases in the recruitment process. After that, they are trained by Ministry for Foreign Affairs for approximately 18 months before the status of a diplomat. Competencies surely are taken into consideration during the selection process, but are they managed after the selection?

Since diplomats have to change missions, posts and countries, it is relevant to ask, how they are trained for new missions. Naturally the basic structure of such training is studied beforehand, but what interests the most, is the level of which the individual is taken into account in the process. In other words, this study aims to explore whether there is a framework for the basic competencies of diplomats in training them for new missions, and whether or not the training concentrates on individual competencies and characteristics that need development.

In addition, the rotating nature of diplomats' work involves the concept of change in completely different manner: despite the cultural change, changes in living conditions; families' adaptation to new countries; new working environment; not to mention new tasks, requires an extreme competency of stress management. The Ministry contributes largely on well-being at work; however, successful learning process is endangered with high levels of stress. Big changes in life require certain level of self-management that also reflects to the day-to-day actions; hence, the interviewees are asked about their self-management.

An interesting detail concerning the topic is that there is barely any research made on diplomatic career – the Ministry's own research being left out of this. In addition, leadership tasks belong to the rotation of tasks, so they lead themselves. In fact, leader positions have traditionally been a part of diplomatic career. The Ministry has recently

devoted strongly on leadership development, and finding the civil servant who have the most potential in leadership tasks. Diplomatic career is yet rather independent type of career, so what is the significance of leadership with independent professionals?

The problématique of this study can be constructed around the themes discussed above. Productivity demands; call for efficiency; Government's savings policies; age range; and international context with roving posts set a great challenge for the Ministry to further development. Practically it serves the aims of NPM – doing more for less. This is possible only by having competent employees whose competencies and knowledge are further improved by high quality management practices.

The aim of this thesis is to study the current state of competency management in Finnish Foreign Service. Leaning on the theoretical basis, the empirical part of the study continues the theme of competency management in Finnish Foreign Service by more elaborated study questions. Answers are sought to the following questions:

- What characterizes Finnish diplomats?
- What is the significance of leadership in competency management?
- How is competency management conducted in the Finnish Foreign Service?

Finally, the ultimate question for the thesis is the title: What are competent diplomats made of? Within the thesis, theoretical discussion concerns competency management and diplomacy. Competency management is studied by definitions, approaches and practices, including the leadership tools for competency management. Diplomacy is defined as a term, and further on the focus is put on diplomacy in Finland, as in Foreign Service. The qualitative empirical study is conducted by interviewing civil servants in Finnish Foreign Service, some of which currently work in the Ministry, and some in diplomatic missions.

2. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION ON COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT

Competency management is argued to be a fair and consistent people management system, as it strongly encourages for individual professional development and helps for better understanding of the organization's mission, goals and the role of an individual, and what is necessary in pursuing high job performance. For managers, it is argued to be a functional tool to motivate the personnel; it also offers a common language on HRM, and gives more transparency in selections, in performance evaluation, and in training decisions. For organizations comprehensively, it offers a view of activities that most need improvement, clarifies the objectives, and allows better integration between organization's requirements and people's characteristics. (OECD 2010: 18.)

Researchers have been interested in the origins of the competency movement in different countries; however, there seems to be several of them, depending on the country. The movement has started in the United States, and then spread across the Atlantic: United Kingdom is argued to be the first country in Europe to adopt the concept of competency as a part of management and HR development (Horton 2002: 6); however, according to OECD, the movement was first introduced in the US and the UK, in tandem (OECD 2010: 7). Reasons to the parallel appearance are argued to have been in similar environmental context, i.e. skills gap, which include changing technology, increasing competition, declining profitability, and search for competitive advantage and improved performance. Many American companies also had factories or affiliates in the UK, which helped spreading ideas. (Horton 2002: 6–7; OECD 2010: 11.)

In this section, the concept of competency is defined, and the basis of competency management is examined by offering approaches and tools for practice. Naturally, competency management also has some difficulties and barriers – they are studied at the end of this section. The theoretical framework of competency management is presented in Figure 1.

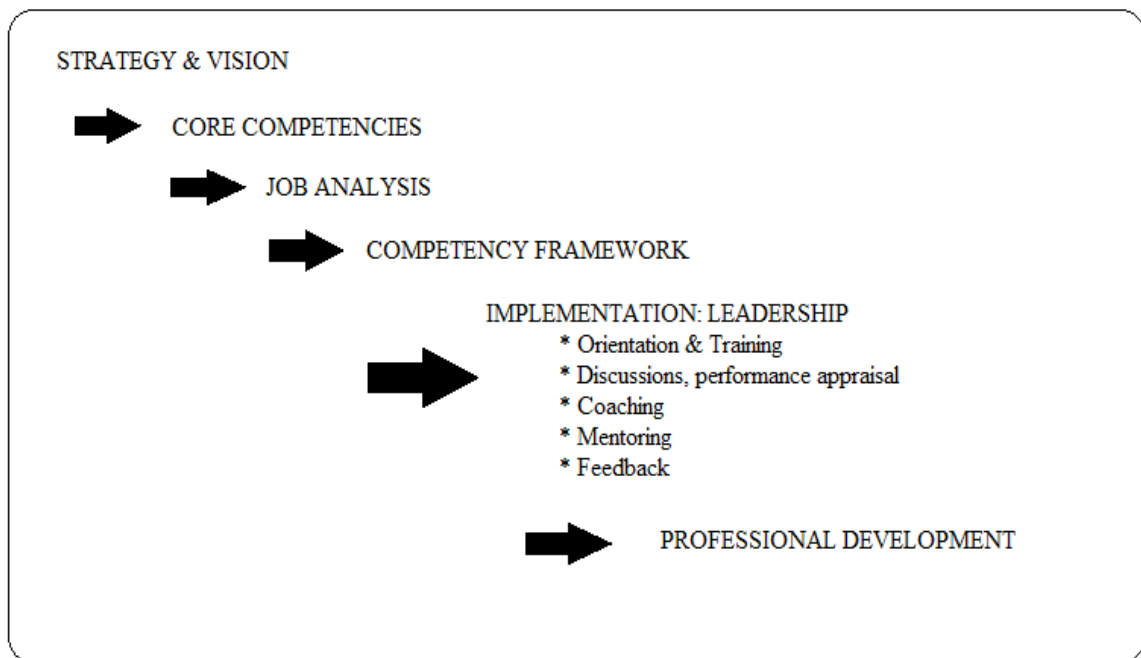


Figure 1. Theoretical framework for competency management.

2.1. Defining competencies

“What are competencies? This is a simple question without a simple answer.”
(Horton 2002: 4).

As a term, competency is rather used also in colloquial language, yet it is somewhat complicated to define explicitly. Some researchers criticize that mostly the term is poorly defined or confused with some closely related terms. English language even offers two ways to spell the word: competency and competence, and these terms have become more and more mixed in use. However, it is argued that they have differences in focus and/or the origin from the American and the British English, respectively.

Katz (1974: 91) defined competencies as skills and capacities; however, the concept of competency can be traced way back to medieval apprenticeships (Horton 2002: 6). A skill is defined as an ability which can be developed. It is not necessarily inborn, and it is manifested in performance and potential. Skillfulness indicates effective action under

varying conditions. (Katz 1974: 91.) For the purposes of this thesis, the definition of Katz would be considered as too general a definition of the term.

Boyatzis (1982: 22–25) emphasizes competencies as behavioral characteristics of an individual, and that they are causally related to effective or superior performance in a job. Competency can be a motive, trait, aspect of an individual's self-image or social role, skill, or a body of knowledge which he/she uses. Competencies have different levels and they can be categorized in segments.

Draganidis and Mentzas (2006: 53) study the definitions of competency by analyzing the definitions of various organizations and researchers. They argue competency gives someone the potential for effectiveness, being a combination of tacit and explicit knowledge, behavior and skills. Professionalism includes both tacit and explicit knowledge, and being competent involves individual's behavioral characteristics in addition to knowledge and skills.

Ellström (1997: 267) follows Boyatzis's definition, defining competency as “a kind of human capital or a human resource that can be translated into productivity”, which refers to as an attribute of an employee. However, Ellström spells the term with an e, competence, which is a good example of the mixed spelling. Horton (2002: 4) describes term competence as the ability to perform activities within an occupation to a prescribed standard. In other words, according to Horton, competency refers to as inputs that help achieve successful performance in a job, thus focusing on the people; whereas competences refer to as demonstrated outcomes of competence, hence focusing on work and its achievements.

Bonder et al. (2011: 4) use a combination of skills, abilities and personal qualities, demonstrated through behavior that results in service excellence, as a definition of competency. They argue that competencies can be divided into levels: some competencies concern all employees (core competencies), and some competencies are related to specific jobs (task competencies) and job roles (group competencies). The different dimensions of competency can then be traced into these different levels: for instance, task

competencies require primarily knowledge; group competencies involve skills and abilities; whereas core competencies concern all employees and comprise, for the most part, personal characteristics.

Ellström (1997: 267) notes the difference between competency and qualification, since their definitions are often mixed or poorly defined. That is due to the various opinions on the definition of the term competency. He introduces another point of view, according to which competency refers to as requirements of a certain class of a job, only to attach the definition to the concept of qualification. Some use this definition to define competence, which, if in line with Horton's definition, would be closer to the relevance of the difference between the two spellings.

To broaden the concept, Lodge and Hood (2005: 781–783) explore schools within competency definitions:

- subject-expertise or individual accomplishment;
- the capacity of organizations;
- behavioral traits associated with excellence; and
- minimum abilities required to tackle specified jobs.

Traditionally, bureaucratic competency was closely linked to skills, abilities and merits (see, for example, Katz 1974), and some views introduced competency as a central part of strategic management, as in core competencies that make organizations effective (see, for example, Mintzberg 1989). In HR questions, schools are divided between y and e spellings, where the y spelling is associated with social psychological aspects (see McClelland 1973; Boyatzis 1982), and the e spelling is more used in terms with concrete identification of the factors that have an impact on effective performance, and not that much concerned with behavioral attributes.

Leaning on this differentiation, competency is the term that is used in this thesis from now on. And, consequently, we agree that competency is a concept that means a lot more than skills and abilities. To outline multiple definitions into one, simple version,

competency includes skills, abilities, knowledge and personal characteristics that all together result in effective performance and the potential for professional excellence.

2.1.1. Competencies required in civil service

As a concept, civil service includes a range of various jobs and positions in public governance. Consequently, precise and exact competencies are not possible to be listed; however, researchers (see i.e. Virtanen 2000, Horton 2002, Johri 2014) have examined the list of competency categories that Boyatzis (1982) has introduced, and created their own versions of that.

Before Boyatzis, and thus, before the terminology of competency, the skills and knowledge for effective performance have been in the interest of some researchers. There is a three-skill approach to answer the question, and in many ways, it is applicable in today's situation, even though this approach must be considered as very generalist an introduction. Those three dimensions are technical skill, human skill, and conceptual skill. Technical skill refers to as specific task competencies, as in analytical techniques, specialized knowledge, and facility for tools and techniques of the specific discipline. Human skill is conceptualized as interpersonal skills, and other behavioral and social abilities that are required to effectively work with other people. Conceptual skill involves the ability to see the organization as a whole: its functions, interdependences and politics. (Katz 1974: 91–94.)

According to one version, competencies of public servants (managers and non-managers) are presented in five competence areas: task competence, professional competence in subject area, professional competence in administration, political competence, and ethical competence – of which the task competence is argued to be the most important, as in performance. Related to task competence, professional competence refers to as development, policy program, know-how on co-operation, thus, long-term quality improvement. Political competence refers to as values and power, and ethical competence includes moral and values. (Virtanen 2000: 334–336.)

Concerning another view, commitment, consistency and interest are the most necessary competencies of civil servants. Competency is seen as a two-dimensional concept: the knowledge required to do the job, and the ability to get things done. (Gherardi 1999: 324–325.) It is relevant to question whether these two need to be in consistency for effective job performance, and what if they are not.

In total, opinions on civil servants' competencies truly seem to twine strongly around ethics, as in ethical competency. As competency is a complicated term to define, it is argued that ethical competency does not have a definition that is generally accepted, as ethical standards vary between organizations, and ethical questions are viewed from a situational perspective (Meine & Dunn 2013: 150). Nevertheless, ethical questions are a central element of public service ethos which is defined as “the set of values that guide and motivate civil servants in the practice of their profession” (Salminen & Mäntysalo 2013: 168).

Ethical questions consist of values, principles and commitments that are considered as important in public service. Due to public service reforms, especially values are a case of researchers' interest (Salminen 2006: 172). In addition to laws and legality, trustworthiness, objectivity and efficiency are characteristics of functional governance. On the international tier, generally affirmed concept, good governance, includes accountability, rule of law and transparency. Good governance is a central element in public ethics. (Salminen 2004: 101–102.) Shortly, ethical competency requires ethical awareness, emotional strength and skills to handle ethical issues in quotidian situations.

Public servants operate between politics and citizens. Another central element of public servants' competency is commitment to which for example loyalty is strongly related. Public interest is a key driver for civil service, and it reflects the loyalty public servants are required to have towards citizens – unlike in private organizations in which public interest are considered accordingly with strategy, for example. (Ibid. 102.) Political power, public policy and authority, linked to the concept of two-dimensional loyalty, can all be linked to political competency (see Virtanen 2000), and also to conceptual competency (see Katz 1974).

Together with commitment and loyalty, it is relevant to discuss public service motivation. As it became previously stated, the concept of competency involves motives, traits, and social roles – which are accurate with public service motivation: the willingness to do greater good than one's self-interests. There are opinions according to which public service motivation has a positive impact on both individual and organizational performance (Lewis 2010: 49–50). There are different ways to manage public servants' performance by using varying motivational tools: management styles concerned, both top-down and bottom-up approach are applied. Depending on the work and the motivation of public servants, both approaches are argued to function, and to result good performance, when in the right concept. (Le Grand 2010.)

Task competencies depend on the tasks. Task competencies primarily indicate special knowledge for specific jobs. Closely linked to task competencies and required special knowledge, there are group competencies that indicate primarily skills and abilities, thus, requirements of certain job roles. (Bonder et al. 2011: 4.)

2.1.2. Core competencies

Concerning competencies, the concept of core competencies cannot be forgotten. Core competencies are sought and used to gain competitive advantage in markets. In other words, an organization cannot survive or gain success without its core competencies. (Horton 2002: 10.) In private sector, core competencies are required for the business to compete successfully (Vakola, Soderquist & Prastacos 2007: 260). With regard to public organizations, competition is not a priority, yet core competencies are important for success, for example in strategic point of view, and for successful exploit of resources (OECD 2013: 4). Shortly, core competencies are formulated on basis of previous successes and future visions (Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 52).

Core competencies are related to organizations' core actions and collective learning that consists of tacit and explicit knowledge, skills and technologies. However, what is crucial, it is the level of integration of core competencies, and that is why they are the distinctive

feature of an organization. However, there are often difficulties in operationalizing them, and that is due to the difficulties in identifying core competencies. (Prahalad & Hamel 1990: 82; Horton 2002: 10.)

As organizations outline their competency profiles and frameworks, core competencies need to be identified, as organization's competency profile reflects its core competencies. In addition to competitive advantage for the organization, core competencies concern all employees: because of core competencies the employees are selected to work for the organization. Hence, core competencies could be seen as personal characteristics that are required from every employee. (Bonder et al. 2011: 4.)

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs utilizes a term organizational competency which indicates the procedural knowledge that stays in the unit even though the people rotate within different missions. The term resembles core competencies by its definition. Parallel to defining strategic goals it is essential to identify the level of knowledge and competencies that are needed for the results wanted. Each department, unit, and mission has to identify their own strategic goals. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2005: 14–15.) For employees it is essential to ponder their individual competencies, and how they reflect to those of organization's core competencies. In other words, it is crucial to for an individual to be aware of the means how one's competencies promote those of organization's goals and objectives.

2.2. Approaches to competency management

Competency management has linkages not only to management theory, as in strategic development, but also to behavioral sciences; to pedagogy; cognitive psychology; and information technology. Competency management can be defined as the management approach that aims to strengthen, develop and foster organization's operating capability and competitiveness by means of its knowledge base. All purposeful activities that aim to develop, regenerate and to produce the sort of competencies accordingly with the

strategy are considered as competency management. What is essential is the identification of core competencies. (Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 27.)

In competency management, focus is set on people; however, it differs from people management in a sense that it stresses the inputs, including behavioral characteristics of staff. Traditional people management focuses on outputs and performance on the job. Competency approach aims towards greater employee self-direction and search for excellence instead of standard performance. Self-direction indicates also greater responsibility. (Horton 2000: 354.)

Competency management is applied by implementing competency frameworks into organizational culture. Competency-based approaches have been used, inter alia, in workforce and succession planning, and in performance appraisal. Draganidis and Mentzas (2006: 52) list two main reasons for using competency management approaches:

- They can provide identification of the skills, knowledge, behaviors and capabilities needed to meet current and future personnel selection needs, in alignment with the differentiations in strategies and organizational priorities.
- They can focus the individual and group development plans to eliminate the gap between the competencies requested by a project, job role, or enterprise strategy and those available.

Researchers vastly approve the importance of competency approach in change management; in fact, competency management is seen as providing leverage for managing change (Vakola et al. 2007: 261; OECD 2010: 7). Competency approach offers various aspects for examining change management:

- Competency management is seen as a tool for diminishing the bureaucratic culture in the public sector, as it puts the individual at the center of development, making a way for more personalized organizational culture. Hence, civil servants would not be anonymous agents of bureaucracy. (Hondegheem & Vandermeulen 2000: 343.)
- Competency management is associated with the concept of learning organization and continuous learning. Organizational learning and a learning organization have

been associated with organizational performance (Senge 2006: 280–282; Herrera 2007: 190). Competency development involves learning new, and deepening the existing competencies.

- Competency management is a part of managing performance; in fact, one of the objectives of competency management is effective performance (Boyatzis 1982: 13; Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 45–46). Moreover, it is suggested that performance management system is a way to truly assess competencies in reality (Vakola et al. 2007: 270).
- Competency management is examined through core competencies. Core competencies are an important tool for supporting change; however, in addition to their identification, they need to be developed, which indicates change (Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 27). Core competencies are vastly used a concept especially in private organizations; however, they are gaining appreciation also in public sector organizations.

Ulrich (1997) introduces four main roles for contemporary HRM: strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent. Becoming a strategic partner involves making sure that organization's HR strategy is aligned with the overall strategy – that the HR processes are integrated into the “main” strategy (ibid. 60). Administrative experts are part of reengineering processes at the organization, both at the organizational level, and within the HR processes; moreover, they aim to improve the efficiency of the work they perform (ibid. 87–88, 120). Employee champions seek fostering employee contribution; they optimize resources with demands, enhance commitment and create a communicative culture (ibid. 126, 131, 140–141). Change agents build capacity for change, thus, they need the identification of the core competencies, as known as key success factors. Within change, also the common mindset in the organization needs to be changed, as the culture changes. (ibid. 158–159, 168.) Competency approach can be linked to these four aspects in HRM; moreover, it could be argued that it is a vital part of HRM roles.

Competencies can be understood in several ways, depending on the angle: from organizational point of view, it is a basis for strategic abilities and knowledge; from

employees' point of view, it is a basis of effective performance; and from the managers' point of view, it is a tool to achieve the set goals (Viitala 2004b: 49).

Based on these arguments, the link between competency management and strategies is somewhat clear and relevant. Competency management needs to be clear and systematic, if functional results are aimed at. As a strategic HRM tool, competency management occurs through competency frameworks or competency models which consist of competencies that are considered as the most important for achieving the set goals.

2.3. The practice of competency management

The goal of competency management is identifying, deploying and developing the competencies in an organization, both on organizational and individual level, in an optimal way (OECD 2010: 9). Competency management is actualized through competency frameworks. Forming competency frameworks requires identifying core competencies and modeling competencies to support the framework (see OECD 2013). The reason, why competency frameworks are used, is related to job performance which is supposed to increase as competencies are taken in consideration.

2.3.1. Job performance with job analysis

Job analysis is a helpful tool in defining job performance and forming competency framework. Job analysis provides an objective picture of the job, without mingling the person performing the job into the analysis. Job analysis serves two HR processes in special: it helps ensure that decisions made with respect to HR processes are fair and accurate, and it helps ensure the defensibility of decisions made. (Bonder et al. 2011: 4.)

Job performance, sharply defined as “effective specific actions or behavior”, consists of three elements: individual's competencies, job's demands, and organizational environment (Boyatzis 1982: 13). Job performance can be measured with the help of job analysis, but it contains individual aspects with regard to results.

Figure 2 emphasizes the importance of the consistency within the three elements. In case of inconsistency between the components (one or two), ineffective behavior or action is expected to result. However, according to the model, it is possible to attain effective performance with two consistent components, as its likelihood increases. (ibid. 13–14.) At this point, it becomes clear that competency management, for the vast part, aims towards superior or excellent job performance.

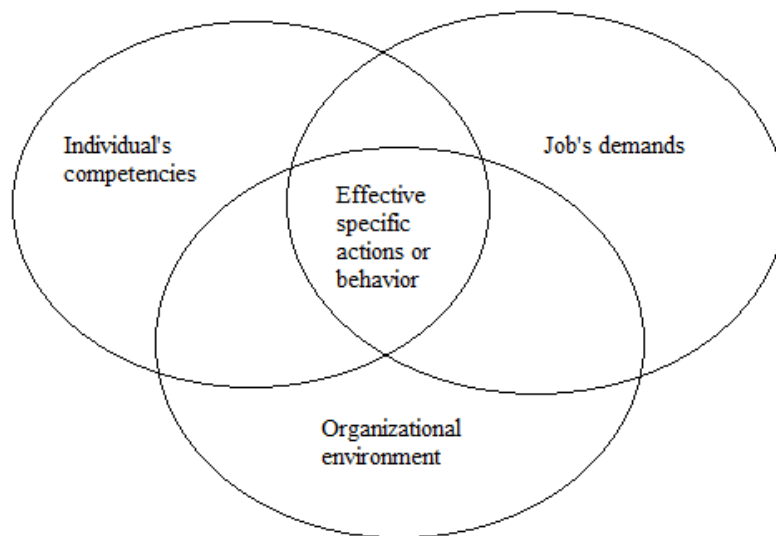


Figure 2. Model of effective job performance (Boyatzis 1982: 13).

Management by performance has been one of the trends in public management reform, in which results are appraised over the inputs. In competency management, effective or superior performance is sought; however, individual characteristics are in the center of interest. (Siugzdiniene 2006: 27, 29.) In other words, instead of fully focusing on results and outputs, focus ought to be put on factors that produce the performance required.

Job's demands become visible after the completion of job analysis which offers an objective picture of the job with specific tasks. Organizational environment is a concept that includes the concept of organizational culture. Organizational culture consists of, for example, certain traditions, values, mutual goals and beliefs. (Schein 2004: 16; Rooney

2010: 26.) Ethical values, integrity and mutual moral opinions belong strongly to the context of organizational culture. When the mutual ethical values are adopted and interpreted similarly within an organization, the culture strengthens. (Rooney 2010: 43.) However, organizational environment can be characterized by terms munificence, complexity and dynamism (Andrews & Johansen 2012: 177), thus, it is more than a culture: it is the atmosphere and attitude towards working together.

Management by performance is often realized through performance-related pay, incentive bonuses or other stimuli for meeting certain level of performance requirements at work. Yet this management approach mainly focuses on the results, and, thus, does not enhance any sort of development of competencies. Improved performance, however, is a valid indicator of successful competency management.

2.3.2. Towards competency framework

Competency frameworks, when applied, are an integral part of organization's strategy, and they can, and should be used in various HR processes (OECD 2010: 7). Sometimes, in the same context, a term competency model is used, and defined as a description of the competencies for a targeted unit of analysis, such as job category, occupational group, division or department (Draganidis & Mentzas 2006: 55). For this context competency framework and competency model are handled as each other's synonyms.

According to Draganidis & Mentzas (2006: 55), competency modeling begins by discovering the competencies necessary for exemplary or fully-successful performance, and forming a description of these competencies, that being the competency framework. Competency framework includes competency standard which identifies the competencies, skills and knowledge required from the employees, and defines the performance levels that must be achieved. With the assistance of competency standard, the competencies can objectively and comprehensively be defined for the competency framework. The managing continues by assessing the competencies of the personnel and comparing them to the competency model. Finally, a competency profile is possible to be created for a specific position, function or department.

Furthermore, mapping competencies has several ways to be conducted. The main competency areas should be classified to support organization's core competencies. More precisely, competency mapping for specific tasks is the next level of creating competency profile. Individual competencies are argued to be best assessed together with the person himself. Adults learn better when they have ownership of the assessment process. Naturally this involves that the competency areas are identified before the self-assessment process; some classification scheme is suggested to be used to achieve the results wanted. (Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 53.)

One of the main aims of competency management is the desire to develop competencies. As the essential competencies are being developed, supposedly, job performance increases. By assessing performance, it is possible to identify competencies that do not fulfill the desired state. Consequently, competency gaps are sought and development actions can be allocated correctly; however, although the process is practical, identifying competency gaps only focuses on weaknesses rather than on strengths. (ibid. 58.)

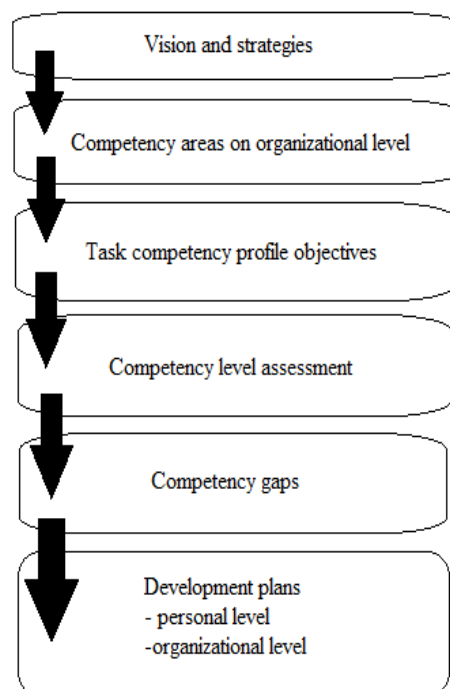


Figure 3. Process of competency development (modified from Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 59).

Figure 3 represents the process of competency development. As it is clear, competency development does not start from competency gaps but from strategies and organization's core competencies, from which the competency areas are formed. To form a competency framework, there are various approaches. One way is to create competency profile as a center of HR processes: learning and development; resourcing; HR planning; and performance management. Before forming competency profiles, various actions are to be conducted to support the process: job analysis, competency classification, competency identification, and benchmarking. What is essential, it is the identification of competencies in every level of organization. (Bonder et al. 2011: 3–6.)

Competency framework is a comprehensive tool for competency management in HR processes: organizations use them, for example, to train and develop the personnel (Dessler 2009: 187). In fact, training is one of the most common ways to develop employees' competencies and knowledge. In addition to training, competency management is a useful tool in workforce planning, recruitment processes, learning management, performance management, career development, and succession planning (Draganidis & Mentzas 2006: 55–56; OECD 2010: 32).

With regard to specific competencies, Boyatzis (1982: 26) identified 21 characteristics for a competent manager: accurate self-assessment; conceptualization; concern with close relationships; concern with impact; developing others; diagnostic use of concepts; efficiency orientation; logical thought; managing group processes; memory; perceptual objectivity; positive regard; proactivity; self-confidence; self-control; specialized knowledge; spontaneity; stamina and adaptability; use of oral presentations; use of socialized power; and use of unilateral power. The characteristic found had distinguished effective performance, and they were not unique to the specific product or service that the organization provided. Furthermore, Boyatzis leveled characteristics into three levels: the motive and trait level; the self-image and social role level; and the skill level. Among others, these characteristics have been used when identifying competencies in civil service, for example (see Virtanen 2000). Supposedly, as civil servants of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, diplomats need also these competencies for effective performance.

Researchers propose three-dimensional integration for competency management: vertical, as in align with the strategy; and horizontal integration, as in integrating competency management into the HR processes. The third dimension would be implementation. (Hondegheem 2002: 175; OECD 2010: 8.)

2.4. Tools for competency management

This sub-section introduces some concrete tools to manage and develop competencies. They have been chosen due to their varying nature; however, they all cover the area of developing and transferring competencies – only the focus varies. Some tools are applied mostly for employees, and some tools are specifically applied for leaders and managers.

2.4.1. Performance appraisal and 360-degree feedback

Performance appraisals have gained a significant position in the HRM system, and they are consistently linked to performance agreements, career development, performance-related pay, promotions, and job security. Furthermore, the significance of performance appraisals requires an accurate, transparent and professional management process in total. (Ciobanu & Ristea 2015: 6.)

Performance appraisals create basis for individual development. Individuals form the performance of an organization, and their competencies reflect organization's capacity to develop and improve performance. Nevertheless, every employee is personally responsible of his or her development and performance. (Lankinen, Miettinen & Sipola 2004: 63.) The term performance appraisal relates to evaluation of individual performance in an organization; however, it is a discussion between an employee and a superior, and the aim is to evaluate the past performance, to set goals for the future development, and to give feedback to each other. Performance appraisals should have both personal and organizational goals for future: they are a way to implement organization's vision into everyday work (Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 69).

At their best, performance appraisals help organizations more efficient and keep employees motivated; however, the overall opinion of performance appraisals remains divided (Kondrasuk 2012: 116). In a recent study, civil servants' perceptions on performance appraisals were examined: opinions divided into those who were very satisfied, and those who were not. Some variables for satisfaction were smaller, usually local, public institution, lower academic degree, and executive position; for the contrary, variables for dissatisfaction were larger public institution, Master's degree or higher, managerial or special attribution post. (Ciobanu & Ristea 2015: 14.) Apparently it is easier to discover problems on them than to find solutions or suggestions for their improvement. The problems found can be categorized into four: the purpose; those involved with performance appraisals; the means of measurement; and the system and process of performance appraisals. (Kondrasuk 2012: 117.)

With regard to the term performance appraisal, it refers to as evaluation or review of performance, and an opportunity to give feedback to the employee, as well as a moment to plan future goals (ibid. 117). In some literature, the themes have been separated as separate discussions on goals; on performance evaluation; on organizational results; on career development – a term (career) development discussion is used, especially in Finland (Lankinen et al. 2004: 73).

In Finland, the overall culture in organizations is rather democratic; hence, performance appraisals are conducted as discussions in which a subordinate is an equal participant with a superior. The process should produce a personal development plan for an employee, in which the employee's current state of competencies in relation to organization's core competencies. It should help the employee to see his or her place in the organization, and to help implementing organization's vision in his or her work. (Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 69, 71.)

Performance appraisals are designed primarily for employees; however, managers and other superiors are often evaluated with 360-degree feedback mechanism. The main reasons for applying it only for managerial positions are the complexities involved in

carrying out the process in large organizations, and price, since mostly they are conducted by outside consultants. However, in 360-degree feedback, the employee evaluates his or her own performance as a part of the appraisal; and they include stakeholder feedback, group performance appraisal, full-circle assessment and multi-rater feedback. The multi-rater approach produces anonymous feedback. (O'Boyle 2013: 202–203.)

2.4.2. Training and orientation

The purpose of training is “to ensure that all workers have the skills and knowledge required to safely and successfully operate the business. Workers must be skilled and knowledgeable and be able to perform to high expectations” (Gossett 1996: 5). Training aims towards learning: successful training involves learning. Learning is defined as a process in which learner’s capacity enhances (both individually and collectively) to produce results that are wanted (Senge 2006: 364).

The reasons for training are multifold: for the most part, training occurs when skills or knowledge deficit is identified (Gossett 1996: iv), hence, it is argued that training is mostly organized to enhance employees’ technical skills and knowledge that are related to work tasks. However, focusing mostly on training technical skills results costs and little value; whereas focusing on understanding of the overall system and its functions brings more value for the organization (Lankinen et al. 2004: 184.) Cognitive (technical) skills are, after all, an important essential for effective performance, although they do not provide excellence in performance as such.

There are multiple ways to organize training: some of them are based on manuals (time-based training); some occur in unstructured form, by on-the-job principle; and some are based on individual work analysis, and, thus, focuses on competencies that most need to be trained for effective performance. (Gossett 1996: 8–9.) Gossett advocates competency-based training, as it is organized by individual development needs to meet the requirements in certain competency areas.

With increasing amount of technological tools, more and more training occurs online, via web-based applications. Online training allows trainees greater latitude to decide whether they participate or not; and whether they participate or not in the future. Moreover, both positive and negative experiences on courses are shared among trainees in the organization. (Long, DuBois & Faley 2008: 23.) Online training is argued to be cost effective, required that the results are satisfying.

Recent economic drawback, recession, has forced governments into austerity measures, which has had an impact on training civil servants. However, the final impact has been relatively little on public service training – the reasons are suggested to be, i.e. public service ethos, and the reputation of public sector as a good employer. (Jewson, Felstead & Green 2015: 246.) Within constantly changing operational environment, organizations are forced to make rearrangements and reform organizational structures; the recent austerity measures are also a part of rearrangements. Replacements require sufficient orientation that is close to training but involves also the introduction of the new working environment, colleagues etc. Change also involves stress management and effective self-management in addition to supportive management from leaders' side.

2.4.3. Mentoring

As a concept, mentoring concerns the transfer of experiences in an organization. The amount of experience and tacit knowledge is impressive in organizations, and it is endangered as more experienced employees do not forward their tacit knowledge for younger and less experienced employees. Mentoring is a challenging process and not successful without careful planning. (Lankinen et al. 2004: 95–96.)

Mentoring is an interactive relationship that aims towards professional and/or personal development. In practice this means a relationship between two people in the organization – between a mentor and the one who is being mentored, the protégé. It is a process in which they work together to find their abilities and potential. A mentor contributes one's time and know-how for the development of the protégé. Via discussion, for instance, the protégé discovers new aspects in his or her personality; increases one's know-how; and

makes progress in performance and outcomes, if mentoring has been successful. (Juusela, Lillia & Rinne 2000: 14–15; Bhatta & Washington 2003: 212.)

Mentoring has proven to be a useful tool, especially concerning predictions on career outcomes. Mentoring relationship is considered as one of the most focal work relationships. It is argued that mentoring is an appreciated form of knowledge sharing despite personality or career related variables. However, mentoring relationship might diminish the information seeking outside the relationship. (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge 2008: 277–278.) Mentoring has vastly been studied from the protégés' point of view, although there are other sources, such as mentors and organizations (Allen, Eby, O'Brien & Lentz 2008: 355). Supposedly, mentoring is not a parallel relationship but a multidimensional interplay between a mentor and a protégé, and for the organization.

An interesting and rather new aspect in mentoring is e-mentoring, also known as distance mentoring. E-mentoring is defined as “mutually beneficial relationship between a mentor and a protégé, which provides new learning as well as career and emotional support, primarily through e-mail and other electronic means” (Ensher & Murphy 2008: 300). Such means comprise, for instance, instant messaging, chat rooms, social networking spaces, and other online communication tools. E-mentoring enables greater number of mentors, and, as such, enables access to mentoring for those who do not have possibilities for traditional mentoring. Electronic tools can also be used as a part of mentoring, in which another part happens face-to-face. (Wilbanks 2014: 24–26.)

Naturally mentoring cannot be applied to all employees. It is a process that requires time and resources, which are scarce today. However, for beginner leaders' and managers' careers – not forgetting the organization itself, it could be beneficial. To summarize, mentoring is universally recognized as a useful component of an organization's, either public or private, HR toolkit (Bhatta & Washington 2003: 211).

2.4.4. Coaching

Coaching is related to as a tool for managers and leaders to help develop their subordinates' competencies. Coaching is considered as an ideal way to lead by the principles of competency management. Coaches participate in discussions and in developmental work, clarify strategic objectives and organizations' vision, contribute towards a supportive atmosphere that enables learning and development. (Viitala 2004: 172–173, 179.) However, the coach is in charge of achieved results, thus he or she needs to have clear idea of the results wanted. It is argued that coaching enhances productive learning among employees. (Lankinen et al. 2004: 85.) Coaching has been one of the biggest trends in leadership and management, and one of the most crucial strategic approach in performance development (Aas and Vavik 2015: 253).

Coaches are the participative leaders among their subordinates. Being a coach requires a set of competencies, and, hence, it demands also training. Yet certain competencies of coaches are behavioral characteristics of an individual, and thus need a specific type of training. Coaching skills are a result of long-lasting and patient training, and implementing them can appear to be difficult, as they are so-called soft skills. However, the training as proven to be more effective when it is closely related to practice, hence there is a strong linkage between theoretical grounds and practice. (Grant & Hartley 2013: 104.) Benefits of coaching comprise i.e. improved self-awareness; confidence; communication skills; assertiveness; understanding difference; stress management; and work/life balance (Wales 2002: 276).

Coaching is also an acknowledged method in training managers and leaders. Decades ago, managers' basic functions were considered to comprise planning, organizing, controlling, motivating, and coordinating (Boyatzis 1973: 17). Mintzberg (1989) introduced ten roles for managers to fulfill in their work. In today's hectic organizational atmosphere, managers and leaders are asked to handle constantly changing challenges, and contribute valuable time for the subordinates. Coaching for managerial level is often conducted by outside consultant of field. Benefits of coaching (see above Wales 2002: 276) also include improved management and leadership skills, since one of the principles

of coaching is to transform from instructive to non-instructive, and this way to help another individual to achieve goals, for example (Aas & Vavik 2015: 253).

Coaching can be formal, in arranged coaching meetings with a specific agenda for coaching; or it can happen during everyday workplace conversations. Formal coaching is typical when managers and leaders are being coached, whereas informal coaching can be related to as leader's communication with subordinates. (Grant & Hartley 2013: 102, 105.) Informal coaching between colleagues occur within occasional consultations, meetings, group projects, and discussions at workplace.

2.5. Barriers and difficulties in competency management

Although western governments have approved some sort of competency approach to their HR processes, difficulties exist. Common difficulties refer to implementing and utilizing competency framework; in addition, lack of understanding by staff, and lack of commitment, ownership and support by management and by senior management have been experienced. The lack of understanding can sometimes be explained by too abstract competency frameworks that eventually will not become implemented. (Horton 2000: 358; OECD 2010: 50.)

It is also noted that for various cases, competencies approved for the framework are somewhat backward-oriented rather than future-oriented. Competency models are often based on benchmarking practices, and they tend to focus on the current situation and needs, rather than what is needed for effective performance in the future. (Horton 2000: 354; Vakola et al. 2007: 261.)

With regard to the topic of the study, there are challenges in forming the competency framework, as rotating posts require diverse competencies and knowledge. However, position-based competency frameworks are possible, although there are some possibilities for diplomats to affect their work and objectives. However, the main frames of required competencies should be defined for each position.

Competency development requires actions, some of which require investments, such as organizing training courses. The period of austerity sets pressures for Governments to cut public spends, and prioritize training activities. Study in the UK has shown that austerity measures affected in frequency of courses, prioritization of courses in terms of relevance, tightening of the eligibility criteria among potential trainees, and economizing on training delivery (Jewson et al. 2015: 228). Competency development is not mere training, and there are multiple possibilities for public organizations to rethink their systems, and whether it is possible to utilize organization's inner resources in competency development, for instance, by introducing mentoring and coaching activities, and various other group processes.

Supposedly the biggest barrier for implementing competency management in an organization is attitude that does not support the benefits competency management has proven to have. Competency management cannot be too abstract a process: the practices of it should be introduced to daily activities of an organization, and by that way empower every member of an organization to rethink their competencies and objectives for future development.

3. DIPLOMACY

3.1. Defining diplomacy

“The establishment of diplomatic relations between States, and of permanent diplomatic missions, takes place by mutual consent.” (United Nations 1961: 3, Article 2).

Existed for centuries, diplomacy has evolved vastly during that time, although maintaining the basic idea of its nature. Defined by a dictionary, diplomacy means the art or practice of conducting international relations, as in negotiating alliances, treaties, and agreements. Diplomacy is associated with managing international relations and relations between states with peaceful means.

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, declared in 1961 and entered into force in 1964, defines the major guidelines for diplomacy and diplomatic missions for the sake of both sending and receiving State. In Article 3 (UN 1961: 3), the main functions of diplomatic missions are listed, and they include, inter alia:

- representing the sending State in the receiving State;
- protecting the interests of the sending State and of its nationals in the receiving State, within the limits of international law;
- negotiating with the Government of the receiving State;
- ascertaining, by all lawful means, conditions and developments in the receiving State, and reporting thereon to the Government of the sending State; and
- promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations.

A diplomatic mission has some elementary agents, of which the most important, presumably, being the head of mission. Heads of mission, such as ambassadors, envoys, ministers, or nuncios are accredited to Heads of State. Heads of mission are in charge of the performance of their diplomatic staff; at the same time they remain accountable to their responsible Ministry which, in most cases, is Ministry for Foreign Affairs. (UN 1961.) Consequently, it is arguable that as diplomatic relations occur between states, there

are mediating individuals and organizations that actually have an influence (Faizullaev 2014: 276).

The main features of diplomacy are described above, yet it only discusses bilateral diplomatic relations; however, multilateral diplomacy should not be ignored, as it is becoming increasingly important in the constantly more global world in which multinational tensions are more and more common. Perhaps the clearest examples of multilateral diplomacy are global organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and various unions that tie together states within continents, for example the European Union (EU), although the EU represents itself in the global forums as well. In multilateral diplomacy, the relations between states require elaborate strategic planning and considerations within fundamental objectives.

The main objective of diplomacy could be summarized as peacefully influencing others and managing both bilateral and multilateral relations on global stage. That means, negotiating, interacting and communicating in the right and commonly acceptable way, and in different levels of diplomatic mission (internal and external). Diplomacy consists of various symbols and symbolic actions that also include rituals and ceremonies. (Faizullaev 2014: 277–278.) This leads to the question of competencies required in diplomacy.

An interesting term, public diplomacy, should also be introduced here, since it might get mixed with traditional diplomacy defined above, or then associated strongly, and also negatively, with propaganda. Public diplomacy involves, in addition to governments, interaction primarily with non-governmental organizations (NGO) and individuals. The modern origins of public diplomacy are in the US; some researchers even call it political marketing (see Sun 2008). Public diplomacy belongs to the country image every state pursues to form, something of which is an important area of diplomats' work.

The development of new technologies enables diplomatic communication to be faster and wider than ever before: competencies to read and interpret the media, and to manage the

flood of information are extremely important (Gregory 2008: 283–284). As negotiations are one of the most essential tools in diplomacy, there are both possibilities and challenges with regard to virtual tools: technology facilitates communication between diplomats and the stakeholders of diplomacy; conversely, the world has become more hectic, and therefore diplomatic actions are also supposed to have become faster. However, virtual transformation has made diplomacy more transparent and interactive with various actors.

“Technologies are transforming diplomatic communication. Transparency, speed, volume, and sharply declining transport costs generate greater diversity and competition from third parties including the media”, (ibid. 285).

Public diplomacy is influencing mass audiences and creating an image (Leonard, Stead & Smewing 2002: 8–11). In today’s world people have opportunities to be visibly critical more easily than perhaps ever before: electronic media is fast, and social media enables individual opinions to be spread around the globe in short moments. Hence, public diplomacy cannot be just delivering messages; it is active influencing in different levels of domestic and international stages.

3.2. Legal basis for diplomacy in Finland

There are a set of laws and agreements that govern the missions’ activities. The international basis for diplomatic actions is strongly based on the Conventions formed by the United Nations. The international legal base comprises two agreements:

- Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961), and
- Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963).

Finnish laws and decrees also govern missions, and set the practical principles for actions:

- Act on the administration of the Foreign Service (Ulkoasiainhallintolaki 204/2000);
- Government Decree on the administration of the Foreign Service (Valtioneuvoston asetus ulkoasiainhallinnosta 256/2000);

- Decree of the President of the Republic on the locations of Finnish diplomatic missions (Tasavallan presidentin asetus Suomen ulkomaanedustustojen sijaintipaikoista 541/2006); and
- Amendments to the Decree. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

Act on the administration of the Foreign Service defines the Foreign Service and its offices, as well as the representations abroad. It sets basis for the principle of roving ambassadors, and rotation of posts between the Ministry and the diplomatic missions. Government Decree on the administration of the Foreign Service handles the regulations concerning offices in the Foreign Service: for example, it declares the qualifications required from civil servants working for the Foreign Service. It also states the principles and hierarchy within the diplomatic missions. Overall, both the hierarchy in diplomatic relations, and the hierarchy in the Foreign Service can be seen as very a traditional type: status and experience are something that is highly appreciated.

3.3. Requirements of diplomatic career in Finland

Official qualifications and requirements regarding career in the Foreign Service are stated on the Government Decree on the administration of the Foreign Service (256/2000). Diplomats are recruited through multi-level selection process to attend a course on international affairs, named Kavaku (Kansainvälisten asioiden valmennuskurssi). For diplomatic career, the formal regulations can be found on the Government Decree on the administration of the Foreign Service (256/2000). To become selected to Kavaku, an applicant must qualify in following requirements:

- Finnish nationality;
- Master's degree, or other higher academic degree;
- excellent level in Finnish language, and, at least, satisfactory level in Swedish language; and
- good level of oral and literal skills in one language, and, in addition, satisfactory level of oral and literal skills in another language of the following: Arabic, English, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, French, German, Russian.

Above listed the formal requirements; in addition, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has some informal requirements concerning the competencies of future diplomats. The Ministry, according to the website, searches flexible team players to represent Finland. Diplomatic career is considered as a generalist career, as the tasks vary along with the career; however, occupational qualifications must exist, as well as good interpersonal skills in communication and cooperation. Those selected, represent (by their occupational skills and abilities) the actual need of the Ministry, as the needs change every time the Ministry recruits. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

Diplomats are selected through an advanced process which includes preliminary interviews, material-based exams, language tests, aptitude tests, and final interviews. By each phase, some applicants become sifted out. For the first phase, applications are sent to the Ministry. After the application period, approximately 120 applicants are invited for preliminary interviews and material-based exam. Of these 120, approximately one third are invited to the next phase, which would be aptitude tests and language tests. Of these, approximately a half becomes invited for the final interviews. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015b: 5.) From these aspects it is assumable that the Ministry is careful when selecting and recruiting future diplomats. Diplomats are expected to be committed to stay in the Foreign Service, and that is one reason for the careful selection.

Diplomats usually have their background in social, economic, historical or legal studies. They also have experience of working within different sectors of society, and/or international working experience. Many of them have been employed to the Ministry earlier (internships alongside with the university etc.). To summarize, it is difficult to outline an actual profile for a standard diplomat, if the background is an exclusive factor. It could be assumed that behavioral characteristics are the factors that eventually settle the selection.

4. EMPIRICAL STUDY ON FINNISH FOREIGN SERVICE

4.1. Introduction of organization

4.1.1. Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland consists of three Ministers, Secretary of State, four Under-Secretaries of State, and eight departments that share the duties of the Ministry. The Ministry is led by the Minister for Foreign Affairs who is in charge of the government department. Other Ministers, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, and Minister for Nordic Cooperation each lead the departments of their field of responsibility. The Secretary of State, being the highest civil servant, is the head of the Office of the Minister, and the Under-Secretaries of State. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

With regard to organizational structure, the Ministry comprises elements of many structure types: diversified organization, professional organization – also political aspects exist. Diversified organization is divided in divisions that are tied with central administration. However, professional organization relies on the expertise of its operating professionals, it has many strategies that, after all, forces for cohesion. Professionals are frequently trained and required to have certain level of expertise. (Mintzberg 1989: 155, 174–176.) Political aspects are linked to the position of the organization: attaches to Finnish Government, and the Ministers who are politicians elected by Finnish citizens.

Responsibilities in policy coordination are divided by Political Department, Department for External Economic Relations, and department for Development Policy. Regional matters are managed by Department for Europe; Department for Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia; Department for the Americas and Asia; and Department for Africa and the Middle East. The eighth department is Department for Communications. Outside the departmental division are the following functions: the Legal Service; Consular Services; Protocol Services; Administrative Services; Financial Management Service; Unit for Internal Audit; Unit for Policy Planning and Research; National Security Authority; and

Development Evaluation Unit. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.) The organizational structure of the Ministry is presented in Appendix 1.

Finland's representation abroad is led by Ministry's roving Ambassadors that operate in the units of the regional departments. They are in charge of the geographical region of their field of responsibility. Finland's representation abroad comprises diplomatic missions and consular missions which aim to "build a secure and predictable future for all Finns". The network of Finnish missions consists of 89 offices around the world. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

4.1.2. Finnish Foreign Service – diplomatic missions

Strategic objectives of the Foreign Service are, i.e. to strengthen Finland's international status; to secure Finland's independency and regional impunity, as well as improve safety and well-being of Finnish citizens. In the interdependent world, Finland promotes international stability, peace, democracy, human rights, rule of law, and equality. The main tasks of diplomatic missions are promoting the interests of Finland and Finns abroad in various ways. Tasks include general political tasks, official tasks, and participation in the network of Finnish activities in the host country. Some major tasks for the missions are, inter alia, foreign policy; trade policy; development cooperation; public diplomacy; consular services; citizens' services; and Finland's representation in other countries and international organizations. In principle, all the missions handle the same basic tasks determined by the Act and Decree governing the Foreign Service, and the two Vienna Conventions of the UN. Some specific tasks may be on emphasis more in some countries than in others. Some missions also handle relations, in addition to their host countries, with the neighbor countries, in case Finland does not have a representation there. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

The main services for Finns abroad are providing information on security situations by publishing travel bulletins. The missions maintain a register of Finns living in their host country, in case of crisis situations. The missions maintain a preparedness plan for crisis situations, and practice for emergencies. They also organize a possibility to vote in

advance in Finnish elections. In the field of public diplomacy and communications, Finnish missions seek to increase Finland's influence, appeal and visibility worldwide, by utilizing Finland's international distinctive features to build a strong country brand. Public diplomacy comprises the daily activities, and strategic communications. The essential element of public diplomacy, nowadays, is to build networks and enhancing the relations with stakeholders. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

Finnish missions engage in export promotion work for Finnish companies, as a cooperative partner; yet, the ultimate responsibility for exports and internationalization remains with the companies. The missions monitor trade threats and possibilities, and release information on the subject. The transmit of information, the suggestions on diminishing hindering legislation in the host country, and the aim to lower the threshold for Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises to enter the international markets are just a few tasks of Finnish diplomatic missions abroad. Naturally, these actions are conducted both bilaterally and as part of the EU membership. With regard to development cooperation, Finland has seven long-term partner countries in which the bilateral operations are concentrated. Moreover, long-term development cooperation is conducted with certain countries recovering from conflicts. Presence in these countries is essential, for example, for the sake of monitoring the use of funds, for building trust, and for looking into the future development and possible bilateral relations. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

According to the Ministry, the added value of the network of diplomatic missions arises from the geographical coverage as well as the ability not only to produce information about the business opportunities in the host countries and possible barriers to trade, but also to provide companies with door-opening authoritative services vis-à-vis the host country's actors, such as authorities and enterprises. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.) In conclusion, diplomatic career is a generalist career that offers various tasks, and included with the changes of environment (host country, colleagues, climate etc.), the work of diplomats is varied. Diplomats are needed from different backgrounds, so that the tasks are conducted thoroughly and effectively – they also need to be competent to perform well.

4.2. Introduction to the themes of the study

With regard to managing knowledge and competencies in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, there are some elements that need introduction before the empirical examination.

4.2.1. Strategies and resources

Management of knowledge and competencies is taken into account in HR strategies of the Ministry. For the thesis, HR strategies since 2005 were examined, and notions of knowledge and competency management existed. Managing constant change was emphasized in terms of ensuring the superior level of knowledge.

Today the resources are diminishing and there are strong demands to further diminish and to allocate human resources to the most crucial tasks. The Ministry has decided to prioritize, to deprioritize and to eliminate tasks that are not necessary. Some concrete examples comprise i.e. closing down embassies and merge missions/embassies if possible, and diminish the resources of those who survived. There is an element in performance appraisals that has an effect on salaries; however, as the resources are scarce, pay raises have become impossible.

In the Ministry, a strong focus is set on developing well-being at work. In fact, the Ministry has been awarded by State Treasury for the achievements in development of well-being (Valtionkonttori 2013). In the newest HR strategy for the years 2015 to 2020, developing competencies was linked with well-being at work (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015c). According to the Ministry, well-being is a crucial factor in job performance, hence, it is emphasized. Several HR processes, such as recruitments and trainings, are planned and organized in respect of the needs in practice. In fact, according to the Ministry, about 70 per cent of the total learning occurs in practice, while the rest, 30 per cent, is for the sake of colleagues and training.

4.2.2. Training in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The HR policies of the Foreign Affairs have faced phases of criticism and appreciation. Before the establishment of Kavaku training in 1970, training of future diplomats was reported as vague, especially for those who had not studied politics or commercial policy. The salary system and the system of welfare payments were not comparable to those of other Nordic countries; moreover, the disparity of the salaries between those working in Finland and those working abroad resulted a favor of working abroad rather than in the Ministry. (Soikkanen 2003: 132, 136, 141.)

With regard to recruitment, the Ministry utilizes centralized process, and structured training program for the chosen ones. The centralized recruitment of future diplomats is considered as useful to govern the right type of competencies in diplomatic career, even though the need varies between recruitment processes. Applicants not only must fill the formal requirements by the law, but also be competent in languages and communication; and by behavioral characteristics, they need to be flexible; adaptable to new cultures and sometimes intractable conditions; able to work with changing colleagues and organizations inside the Foreign Service. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2005.)

The process of centralized recruitment for Kavaku started in 1970, and ever since the equality of applicants has increased: civil servants for diplomatic career represent varying social backgrounds, varying educational fields, and the percentage of women as risen significantly from the 1980's. Today, the percentage of female ambassadors is 50 for Finland, the same sort of trend as in other Scandinavian states; however, globally examined, men remain strongly presented among ambassadors. (Niemeläinen & Hannula 2016.) Today Kavaku training comprises theoretical and factual courses, and two internship periods. It includes both orientation and training for the upcoming career; introduction to the Ministry, its Foreign Policy, and main strategic objectives. Kavaku also prepares participants to negotiations, and public performance. To broaden their knowledge and abilities, participants are commissioned to do internships in missions or in Ministry's departments and with tasks of which they do not have that much earlier experience. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

Training policies of new diplomats were reformed in 1965, and again in 1970 as Kavaku was launched. The establishment of Kavaku increased the number of applicants significantly. However, even the systematization of the training of future diplomats did not ease the pressure of better training incentives: during the first 10 years of Kavaku, the number of applicants decreased year by year. For comparison, in 1970 there were 280 applicants, whereas in 1980 the number was close to 100 applicants; in the latest recruitment in 2015, the number of applicants was close to 1500 people. (Soikkanen 2008: 97, 102–103; Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.) This reflects well the popularity of diplomatic career.

Before the departure abroad, the Ministry offers transfer trainings to help in orientation for new tasks. A growing part of trainings are conducted online, and hence, helping the missions to provide training in a receiving state. The courses are yet somewhat general and provide, most of all, technical support for performing new tasks, such as consular affairs, managing invoices, budgeting, and language courses. Cultural orientation occurs according to diplomat's own actions. Yet one of the most essential parts in orientation within transfers is communication with the predecessor of the tasks.

4.2.3. Leadership in the Foreign Service

An interesting aspect to mention is the fact that the HR personnel of the Foreign Service are diplomats who have certain amount of experience: diplomats are each other's leaders and managers. There are various instruments to support management and leadership: performance appraisals, barometer for job satisfaction, and 360-degree feedback, for instance. For those who aim at leadership tasks, there are tests to survey leadership potential that has been recently launched. Ministry's mentoring program was established in 2008, and ever since, it has run annually. The program has had participants with various tasks, not all of them have worked with leadership tasks. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

Leaders are referred to as diplomats who work as heads of mission (ambassadors), heads of units and heads of departments in the Ministry. It is a relevant issue to examine whether the leaders of the Foreign Service are leaders of substance, or leaders of people, as they have traditionally been nominated by their credits within their career. The Ministry emphasizes the training of leaders, as well as identifying those with the highest potential to function as leaders. Leadership is a demanding task that involves taking responsibility of the subordinates. The Ministry offers tools for leaders in their leadership tasks. The tools were introduced theoretically, and more explicitly analyzed in the empirical part of the study.

4.3. Study methods

This thesis is a qualitative study on competency management in Finnish Foreign Service. The empirical material was collected with 16 interviews that were conducted in Finnish. Responses are interpreted in English for the purposes of the thesis. By translating the responses it is possible to neutralize the language of diplomats (accents, word choices etc.). Requests for interview were e-mailed to 20 diplomats recommended by the Ministry's HR unit, and the interviews were conducted with 16 people: 6 interviews via Skype, 5 interviews via phone calls, 4 interviews face-to-face; and one interview via e-mail. The interviewees are diplomats from various backgrounds and in different phases with regard to the career development. The lengths of their career varied between 2 and 42 years, and ages were between 30 and 68 years. Of the 16 interviewees, there were 7 men and 9 women, and 7 of them currently worked abroad in embassies; however, every interviewee had certain amount of working experiences abroad for the Foreign Service.

Qualitative study is a vast concept that includes dozens of types which might not even resemble each other. Despite the fact that there are different traditions of qualitative research in different fields of science, some similarities and main features exist: there is a holistic approach to the research problem, and the data is collected comprehensively in natural and actual, true situations; the role of individual (people) is a central element when collecting empirical data; an inductive analysis is used – the material is more important

than testing a theory or a hypothesis; the target group is selected purposely, not randomly; the research plan may evolve during the study; and, finally, the cases are managed individually and uniquely. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007: 158, 160.)

The empirical data of this study was collected via open, theme-based interviews. The interview included three themes: diplomat's competencies, competency management, and training and development. Questions were formed beforehand; however, not every question was used in every interview. The interviewees were sent an e-mail concerning the themes and main points of the interview, not the exact questions. By doing so, a certain amount of spontaneity could be reached. The durations of interviews varied from 30 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes.

4.3.1. Interview as a data collecting method

One of the most important and used data collection methods in qualitative study is interview. In an interview, the researcher and the interviewees are in direct interaction, which makes the situation intimate but somewhat vulnerable: the interview makes it possible for the researcher to learn about the world of others (usually interviewees), although the situations are unique, and real understanding is complicated to achieve. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007: 199–200; Qu & Dumay 2011: 238.)

By interviewing, individual experiences and perceptions are raised into the center of interest. However, interviews demand careful planning: choosing a structure might be the most significant determinant for interview's nature. Interviews can be categorized into three main groups in terms of structure: structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews. Structured interview is based on prepared and structured form, which is filled by interviewer during the interview. Other used term is standardized interview. Questions are well prepared, and their order is strict and rational, and, consequently, only a limited number of response categories are allowed. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007: 203; Qu & Dumay 2011: 244; Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas 2011: 33.)

Unstructured interviews are open, vague and not structured on beforehand: there may be only a list of topics for possible discussion and exploration. Discussion is free and open, but the interviewer must have greater control on the situation, as the structure does not offer it. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007: 204; Saldana et al. 2011: 33.) In unstructured interviews the number of results is significantly smaller than in structured interviews, although the nature of information is deeper (Metsämuuronen 2008: 41). Hence, the nature of interview should be carefully considered before conducting data collecting, so that the data attained would be the most suitable for the purposes of a study.

Semi-structured interview is established on themes that are well thought and structured, but questions give more freedom for the interviewee to answer. In other words, it is a sort of mixture of structured and unstructured interview which offers freedom to adjust in changing situations but also has a structure easy to follow. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007: 203; Qu & Dumay 2011: 246.) The interviewer is seen as a motivator in interviews, and he or she must be aware of this role. With regard to interviewer's own motivation and commitment to the study: the more freedom in terms of structure of interview, the more commitment and contribution are needed. (Metsämuuronen 2008: 41.)

Interviews can be conducted in various ways: one-on-one interview in which the interviewer is alone with the interviewee; an interview in which there are two interviewees; or a group interview with a focus group. Not surprisingly, one-on-one interview is considered as the most common way to organize an interview. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007: 205.) In this study, one-on-one interviews are chosen to be exclusively used.

With advanced technology, interviews are possible to be conducted via Internet-based applications and software, such as Skype. It is described as cost effective (free) and useful for situations with time and/or place limitations for face-to-face interviews. Via Skype, it is possible to have synchronous text chat, voice chat, and video chat, thus, an impression of a face-to-face situation is possible to create. However, there are some limitations: for example, some technical drawbacks might appear concerning the connection or the quality of voice and/or video. A video chat makes the situation comfortable for the interviewee, since some of the body language is not possible to observe, and he or she

can choose the place that is the most comfortable. (Ryobe 2008: 2; Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour 2014: 1–2.)

A researcher must be aware of the nature of interviews, and the cornerstones of the structure: how to start, the follow-up questions, specifying questions, direct and indirect questions, just to mention a few. Silence is an interesting detail in interviews: silence provides natural pauses for an interviewee to think, to gather energy, to outline ideas etc. The way people understand and interpret silence is a cultural aspect. (Qu & Dumay 2011: 249–251.) Doyle (2004: 11) stresses the importance of understanding silence in qualitative research:

“Qualitative interviewers have to learn to tolerate silence. It is important not to get impatient, but to give participants a chance to think about what they want to say. It is a natural human tendency to fill in pauses in conversation, and if the researcher can avoid doing so the interviewee will often fill the silence with more information.”

The interviews for this study are conducted via Skype, via phone calls and face-to-face. The differences of these methods are clear, yet the interviews are all recorded the same way, and certain human reactions are hearable even if there are no facial expressions visible (the case of phone calls). Technical drawbacks were minor, and they were handled delicately. The nature of silence was surprisingly same kind, whether or not it was possible to see the face of the interviewee.

4.3.2. Qualitative analysis

Above all, qualitative study is a process for the researcher: methods, questions, problems, and development of theoretical framework evolves alongside with the process. This is valid also for the analysis, as it constantly develops within the process. (Kiviniemi 2010: 79.) Qualitative analysis is referred to as making a jigsaw puzzle: finding and assembling all the similar pieces together; assembling the outside borders and other big figures of the picture; and finally identifying the linking pieces to merge the big chunks to form a whole picture (LeCompte 2000: 147).

There are several methods to analyze qualitative data, and in many cases, researchers use multiple methods in their analysis. In qualitative analysis, the empirical material is handled as a whole, and as a result, something is sought to be explained and understood. In general, qualitative study is either based on theory (deductive) or based on empirical material (inductive) (Taanila 2007). Consequently, it is to be stated that this study is theory driven; however, the empirical material is strongly exploited.

There are two major points to be taken into account when analyzing qualitative data: simplifying the observations, and solving the mystery, both of which, in practice, occur in parallel. The material is observed within the scope of the chosen theoretical framework, and some main themes/observations are sought. The themes found are used in simplifying the material and in forming of a bigger picture of the topic. (Alasuutari 2011: 39–41.) The data collected has to be compared with the research questions in the early stage of analysis, to make sure the data is the correct and valid kind for the study. It is vital for a researcher to stay as unbiased and neutral as possible, yet always some choices are made, since the researcher is a human being. Simplifying the observations indicates tidying up the material, and finding items and thus categorizing observations. (LeCompte 2000: 148; Alasuutari 2011: 40.)

Qualitative analysis aims towards an understanding explanation, and there are always references to theoretical framework chosen, or previous research conducted on the topic (Alasuutari 2011: 51). The 'mystery' is solved by finding items, creating patterns, and assembling bigger structures of the material (LeCompte 2000: 150–151). As the qualitative data has been collected in open structure, it is in unstructured format before analysis, and thus there is the tool of three Cs presented to help in analysis: code, classify, connect (Murphy 1995: 32). In this study, the structure of the interview was formed beforehand for the sake of clarity, and so that the transcribed material would fill in the outside borders of a jigsaw puzzle.

Qualitative study does not provide answers without questions set to it; however, it tells what sort of questions are suitable for it (Ruusuvoori, Nikander & Hyvärinen 2010: 15–16). Questions are open and vast, yet focusing on a specific problem or area.

Consequently, the analysis of this study is mostly explanatory; however, the first theme, concerning diplomats' fundamental competencies, has elements from psychological theory. There are aspects that are derived from the theory of Big Five (John & Srivastava 1999) that explores personal characteristics of individuals. For the purposes of this thesis, five dimensions are referred to, as they act as top categories of competencies listed by diplomats.

4.4. Reliability and validity of the study

In a qualitative study, reliability examines the level of systematic analysis, and the reliability of the interpretation; whereas validity indicates assessment of the validity of the empirical material and the interpretations. (Ruusuvuori et al. 2010: 27). Qualitative analysis was conducted by utilizing tools provided by literature. All spoken answers were transcribed to make the analysis easier for the researcher; and to ensure that all the answers are treated equally and comprehensively. The answers were carefully coded and categorized to form an understandable and clear picture of each topic. To some extent, the theme of the study is vast, and thus there was the aim to cover the whole field of competency management of the Foreign Service instead of focusing on some specific topics. This gives a more systematic and purposeful image for the study, and enables better understanding of the current state of matters.

The nature of qualitative data is complex and multilevel, and it is rich in terms of various expression opportunities (Alasuutari 2011: 84). This enables the data to be analyzed by diverse angles. However, as the data is being interpreted by an individual, maximal objectivity is not possible to be reached, and thus, there are always some subjective elements in the results, and this causes margins of error in qualitative study.

The ultimate aim of the interviews was to let the interviewees examine the themes of the study widely and from somewhat surprising angles. Since the representation of diplomats was so diverse, all questions listed became not asked from every interviewee because it was not meaningful in certain situations. However, all the three themes were discussed

comprehensively with every interviewee, and everyone gave their perceptions concerning the themes.

Since the number of interviewees (16) represents so small a percentage of the total amount of Finnish diplomats (approximately 530), any generalization is impossible to be made. However, the representation of varying backgrounds and ages is something that is considered as a positive aspect, and something of which compensates the small sample. What is more, the analysis focuses on the group of interviewees, without intentions to generalize their opinions as such.

The decision to use multiple citations of the interviewees was considered, as the citations enlighten the analysis of results, and enable the comments of interviewees to be visible, yet anonymous. With full anonymity it was possible for the interviewees to be open and honest with their answers, and the citations chosen are the ones that respect the anonymity. Honesty and trust increase the validity of the answers, and multiple citations chosen support the analysis.

With regard to these circumstances and the setting of this Master's thesis, it would be stated that the study results and the qualitative analysis is fairly reliable and as valid as possible. Generalizations are impossible to be made, yet there is possible to note the unity of some answers, despite the wide range of different types of diplomats.

5. COMPETENT DIPLOMATS SERVED BY SUPERIOR LEADERS

In this section, the empirical material is interpreted, explained and analyzed. Interviewees are cited, and the citations are written in *italics*; however, the citations do not have quotation marks, as they are translated from Finnish to English. As such, the interview included three themes: diplomat's competencies; competency management in Finnish Foreign Service; and training & development. The interviews resulted audio of 14 hours and 27 minutes, and approximately 113 pages of transcribed material. Table 1 represents current details about the interviewees.

Table 1. Interviewees

The interviewees (n=16)	
Women	9
Men	7
Working in Helsinki (Ministry)	9
Working in diplomatic mission	7
Leaders	5

5.1. Diplomat's most essential competencies

For competency management to be successful, an essential element of it is to identify the competencies that are vital for each position, and to create competency profiles. Identifying essential competencies is necessary for the competency development processes, and for the correct allocation of resources. (Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 53.) In this case, as the diplomats are in rotation with regard to their tasks, it was meaningful to find the competencies that are relevant in every task.

As a starter, the interviewees were asked to list five most fundamental competencies that a diplomat needs to have in order to perform well at work, regardless of the position. The unity of answers was somewhat surprising, as well as the fact that most of the competencies listed were indeed a behavioral characteristics and not knowledge per se. All listed competencies are presented in Table 2, in which the competencies have been categorized by utilizing Big Five dimensions (John & Srivastava 1999: 105), and modified them to function as titles for competency categories. Any personality inventory was not conducted; however, since the competencies listed were vastly related to personality and behavioral characteristics, the dimensions of Big Five personality theory appeared to function as convenient topics for the competency areas. The sixth competency area, linguistic competencies, was researcher's addition to the listing. The competencies under the main categories are presented as the most listed ones on the top of the category; however, many of the answers could be interpreted as part of multiple competencies and competency categories, hence it is not relevant to exclusively lean on to the order of the listings, as they are somewhat approximate.

Table 2. Diplomats' perspectives on essential competencies

Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Emotional stability	Openness to experience	Linguistic competencies
gregariousness	open-minded attitude	fast learning and assimilating	flexibility	curious	excellent linguistic skills
wide range of interests	team player, co-operation skills	fast understanding	tolerance for pressure	spontaneous	good self-expression
sociable	discretion	analytical thinking	adaptability	will to learn	language skills
broad perspective	modesty	contextual thinking	tolerance for change	initiative	text producing
adventurous	readiness for everything	being convincing	will for change	innovative	communicative
presence	trustworthiness	ability to prioritize	courage	manysidedness	analytical and high quality reporting abilities
***	***	strong values	self-consciousness	***	***
		patriotism	***		

With regard to the essential competencies, apparently they are more of a behavioral characteristics and motivation that have an impact in superior performance, than the traditional setting of comprehensive knowledge, although that being important as well. The interviews support the statement according to which diplomatic career is more a way of life than just a job, as it strongly involves the private lives within the career development. The three most mentioned competency areas were emotional stability, linguistic competencies, and extraversion, respectively. The most listed competencies were flexibility; social and communication skills; openness to new things; fast adjusting to new situations; fast learning; courage; and linguistic skills.

5.1.1. Extraversion

Wide range of interests, and the ability to combine them, depending on the context – competency that is considered as one of the most essential ones for a diplomat. It seems that the vast variety of centers of interest significantly improves one's ability to perform well in diplomatic career. Varying interests are also required by the nature of the career as such: constantly changing tasks demand commitment for varying topics and subjects. According to some interviewees, it would be a crucial benefit to know something about geography, and history, especially with regard to the states you are dealing with. Closely linked to the range of interests, personal engagement to the work, and personal presence are considered as vital for succeeding.

Moreover, knowledge and facts concerning Finland is at least as important as the interests and knowledge concerning international subjects. Diplomats are sent abroad to represent Finland and Finnish values, thus, it is a crucial element in terms of diplomat's competencies.

Absolutely I want to say knowledge on Finland, something of which you cannot exaggerate when working abroad. I mean the basics: basic statistics; basics of our history; basics of our position on the international co-operation; our relations to Russia and other neighbor states... and the processes, so that you would understand how our society works; how our decision-making processes work; and to what extent you can talk about them abroad. I probably wouldn't have mentioned this at

all, had I worked in the Ministry at the moment; however, here you face mysterious questions on a daily basis.

In this job you have to be able to react and respond to everything – it doesn't have to be the absolute truth, but not answering, it is the biggest mistake.

5.1.2. Agreeableness

This competency area is important for effective performance and co-operation with colleagues. The interviewees strongly stressed discretion as one very important a competency: discretion as a diplomat, and discretion as a colleague. Open attitude in terms of future tasks was something that the interviewees emphasized since it is not always possible to get the post one had applied for. Career planning is extremely important, yet it does not always follow the exact plans one had; even so, the interviewees who had experienced transfers they had not applied for told that those missions taught very much, and those learnt things they have been able to take with them to their new work tasks. With an open attitude, working as a diplomat is easier and more convenient.

You shouldn't calculate too much... What I've seen during the years I've worked in the Ministry is that it is worth being omnivorous with regard to posts, receiving states, tasks, and the durations of the postings. It is much easier with an open-minded attitude.

Moreover, diplomats are obligated by law to transfer accordingly with the Ministry's suggestions. However, according to the interviewees, in real life it occurs only in situations in which a diplomat has served the maximum number of years abroad and is obligated to come back to Finland. In addition, it is also in the interests of the Ministry to find posts most suitable for everyone in rotation.

5.1.3. Conscientiousness

Closely related to the knowledge on Finland, the certain level of patriotism and common basic values were vastly recognized competencies for a diplomat. Even abroad diplomats work for Finland, promoting Finland's interests, constructing the national image of Finland, and enhancing business opportunities for Finnish companies.

The ability to proportion things... For instance, I examine affairs precisely, objectively, but most of all, from the Finnish perspective, so that I will be able to produce analysis and information that is beneficial for Finland, and the Finnish society, and business life.

The fact that diplomats are civil servants, and somewhat closely attached to Finnish Government, is something worth mentioning. Some interviewees pointed out humbleness and modesty as in readiness to serve the Government and promote its interests, even if the political outlines of the Government would not correspond to those of an individual diplomat. This actualizes especially in unstable circumstances, such as in front of major reforms.

5.1.4. Emotional stability

We grow our roots in the air, like orchids do.

We make ourselves at home wherever, and with whoever.

The most listed competency of all was flexibility. The whole career demands flexibility in various dimensions, such as varying tasks, varying living and working conditions, adapting personal life alongside with the job. Those moving with their family, it requires flexibility from all members of the family. Flexibility is vastly tested in the primary phases of diplomatic career, to make sure that changing conditions both, at work life and also in private life, are suitable for the applicants. Closely related to flexibility, there is the ability to rapidly adapt in these changing conditions, and the ability to adopt new things effectively, focusing on essentials. Creating routines is not considered as relevant within this context.

Being flexible involves also the readiness to move abroad and change posts. It is clear that every diplomat has to work within the diplomatic missions; however, apparently it seems that there are two types of diplomats with this regard: those who prefer working abroad, and those who prefer working in the Ministry, in Helsinki. Reasons to that can be

various: family situation, personal interests, or something else. There are also families who do not move together, and thus the rest of the family stays in Finland whilst the diplomat moves abroad. That affects to individual's flexibility and to the adaptation into the new environment and culture.

One important aspect of flexibility is mental flexibility, which is linked to adaptability, as in adjusting to new working and living conditions, to new tasks and to new environment, but also adaptability as in situations in which the post is not the one you had dreamt the most of. Some interviewees talked about team players who adapt to situations even though they had had something else in mind when in rotation.

I think the first thing that comes to my mind is that you are ready, rapidly and unpredictably, for new situations and cases... like if you were blindfolded and thrown into cold water, you would be able to swim back somewhat elegantly... being the kind that seeks stability and steadiness does not promise very pleasant a career.

5.1.5. Openness to experience

Diplomats have to perform varying tasks within their career, and thus, some sort of adventurous nature might help when changing posts. According to the interviewees, a competent diplomat is versatile and initiative, as well as innovative with new openings and ideas; furthermore, it is curiosity that strives and motivates to continue.

*I'm like Indiana Jones in a closet, *laughs*. This is like a safe adventure to me. I know well myself: I would never leave for a desert to have an adventure because I would not know what should happen there. In this job you know there is the safe context around the things you do.*

In autonomous work being initiative is the essence of effective job performance. Spontaneity is needed i.e. in case of surprising changes in schedules, or in surprising turn of events. Being initiative involves being innovative in some sense: to make new openings and suggestions for actions, and to correctly react in sudden crisis situations, for instance.

For diplomats, openness to experience as a competency area is closely linked to the open-minded attitude towards somewhat more unexpected posts and tasks, something that was not planned in advance (see 5.1.2.). The interviewees vastly acknowledge the fact that they can perform such diverse tasks within one career.

5.1.6. Linguistic competencies

This vast group of more specific competencies was presented in some ways by every interviewee. According to most interviewees, the openness and the courage to go to new places and new situations, and to make new contacts and acquaintances is vital for a diplomat to succeed in their work. Getting along with varying kind of people in diverse situations is also important. Especially in bilateral context, diplomats work as a link between different quarters.

I don't have to be a specialist in every possible field, but I do have to know where to find that specific information or a person who knows the answer.

Consequently, networking and communication skills are very important an asset in diplomats' competencies. On the international stage it becomes clear that language skills are essential when communicating with people, hence the language requirements in order to get in. Some diplomats appreciate foreign languages more than others: some interviewees argue that fulfilling the official language requirements is sufficient, while others stress the importance of being able to communicate with the local language of the receiving state.

I would say, broadly, articulacy, but I don't want to say language skills; hence, I want to stress that I do not mean language skills in this. Of course it is nice for a diplomat to be fluent in eight different languages; however, in my opinion, it really is not a premise for this career.

Language skills in uncommon languages are a nice bonus but not necessary; however, in some situations it can be very beneficial and open doors for new possibilities.

Articulacy was presented by every interviewee in some way. On a daily basis, diplomats produce analysis either in literal or in oral form, thus, the ability to produce analytical output efficiently, focusing on the most vital points, is essential. One of the important competencies, according to the interviewees, is the ability to perform confidently, in front of an audience or other colleagues, even with incomplete knowledge of the topic. Being convincing seems to be the essence of diplomatic communications.

You get the information as given, and then you should be able to express it, as if you were a great specialist of the topic. It is difficult, especially in situations in which the others are facing the same kind of challenges. Actually, it is some kind of a game, and everyone knows that the information they have is from somewhere else. This happens especially in multilateral negotiations: people represent the opinions of their own capital, and discuss as experts – of course you have to have an idea of the topic, but in most cases, the actual expertise is somewhere else. It is tricky and challenging.

A shy person cannot handle this in a successful way. In my opinion, you have to be sociable, communicative, ready to perform in front of people, ready to give speeches, and to approach people in various occasions – because it is our job to create networks so that we would know as many people as possible, to be able to connect the Finns with the locals.

5.1.7. Changes in competency perceptions

After listing the most important competencies, diplomats were asked if their perceptions and opinions in terms of important competencies have changed within their career; or if the competency requirements of the organization have changed within their career. These questions divided the interviewees into two groups: to those who did not see any changes, and to those who had experienced some sort of change with respect to their perceptions and the requirements. Hence, it could be stated that the experiences are very personal.

Those who had noticed changes, experienced that the changes concerned mostly their perceptions of personal competencies. More precisely, knowledge on the most important personal competencies has increased and clarified within the career; furthermore, the independence of the work has surprised some of the interviewees, and the level of taking advantage of one's personal competencies. The reason for this type of development was

linked to working abroad, within the diplomatic missions. Adapting to new environment is crucial, and the way it is experienced, varies individually. A major message that the interviewees addressed, was the basic set of fundamental competencies that does not change that much, and that the experiences in life sharpen the idea of one's strengths and important competencies.

Hire an attitude, teach the substance.

There are, however, some substantial changes that affect diplomats' work and personal life. Concerning work, changes in the international setting and the positioning of Finland has evolved, for instance, within the European Union membership, and other attaches to major international organizations. In addition, overall safety in the world is constantly changing, which makes career planning more demanding. Digital revolution has also had an impact in diplomats' life, both at work and outside work. To support the change, there are tools and development on attitude on this.

The world has changed: there is the physical world and the digital world, and you have to stay active in both.

Another challenge today is to keep families together, which is not an issue of diplomats exclusively. Those who have worked longer careers noted the difference from the early years to this day: there is a substantial difference in terms of percentage of women working in diplomatic career. Diplomats or spouses, women want to have a decent career alongside with men, and today, it is not unusual if the family of a diplomat lives in Finland while the diplomat works abroad.

With regard to the Ministry, there are changes in leadership, and increasing effort to improve employees' co-operative skills in the work community. Efforts on improving the quality of leadership comprise training, coaching and mapping leadership potential among those who wish to work as leaders. Traditionally in the Ministry, proceeding to the leadership tasks has been the natural way to proceed within the career; however, there are people who do not want to be leaders but they wish to work as senior specialists, and

in this way proceed in the career. Development of the specialist career has been started, yet it needs a lot of contribution and input to change the system.

5.2. Competency management in Finnish Foreign Service

5.2.1. Core competencies of the Foreign Service

Strategy and vision are the basis for organization's core competencies. The competencies of organization's employees should serve the core competencies. The interviewees were asked, what their opinion is concerning core competencies of the Foreign Service. The answers concerned both the strategic objectives of the Foreign Service, and the practice of the Foreign Service, for instance, the rotation.

Foreign Policy and Security Policy, as well as international relations between Finland and other states are considered as core competencies of the Foreign Service; however, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs does not have an exclusive right for international affairs anymore, as the other Ministries manages their own field of expertise, also on the international stage. Still, the interviewees argue that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has competitive advantage on international affairs, because of the strong legitimacy and a long history in international affairs.

Interviewees argued that there are several distinctive features between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and other Ministries: firstly, there is the competence to manage international affairs; secondly, rotation and unique job descriptions compared to the ones of other Ministries; thirdly, strong, common values and competencies to perform well and to succeed in varying tasks and to stay objective.

The interviewees considered their own competencies with regard to Ministry's core competencies, and saw themselves as a part of a bigger picture, as actors who implement the strategies of the Foreign Service. Confidence and adaptability to new, changing roles increase as years increase within the career. What is crucial, according to some

interviewees, is to admit that there is always more information than what is possible to govern.

5.2.2. Job description involves also the diplomat

The interviewees were asked if they have had possibilities to participate in formulation of their job description and their professional objectives, and if there have been possibilities to include own interests to the professional objectives. Answers were divided into two major opinion groups: to those who considered that there are many possibilities to affect job descriptions, and to those who stated that the job description is given as it is, and there is little possibilities to include own interests. However, the impact of leadership is a crucial factor in the objective setting and hearing subordinates.

Personal objectives are set in discussions between a leader and a subordinate. Some interviewees consider that there are greater possibilities to affect one's objectives, and some see the objectives set somewhat obvious, even if they have been in the process. Small diplomatic missions, some of which Finland has a lot, are seen both ways: on the one hand, there are a number of obligatory tasks that has to be taken care of, and on the other hand, for a diplomat, there are seen to be possibilities to choose some of the fields that are followed more intensively, while some of them are required by the Ministry. Some interviewees stated that in the Ministry, the objectives are more strictly given than in missions; and as the amount of experience increases, there should be more trust on the diplomat as a specialist, and thus, more possibilities to affect one's objectives. According to some interviewees, the Ministry has evolved to be more conversational concerning these themes.

5.2.3. Leadership in the Foreign Service

Competency management has to be implemented at every level of organization; however, for an employee, leadership is the most visible part of competency management implementation. Hence, the importance of leadership is indisputable in this sense. The interviewees vastly described their perceptions on good leadership, and what

competencies they considered as important. The answers were possible to divide into three categories: expertise and management of excellence; leadership competencies; and personal competencies. The interviewees acknowledged good leadership skills as the most important; however, the heads of mission, and the directors of department at the Ministry, traditionally have reached their position with years of experience, and certain level of expertise, professional excellence.

As leaders directly stand above their subordinates, they are the implementers of HR processes in organizations; thus, they need a set of tools to promote competency management on daily basis. According to the interviewees, performance appraisals are one of the most concrete tools. Diplomats work fairly independently, with a vast self-direction; nevertheless, the answers that the interviewees gave described a leader who is an example to the subordinates; has excellence and experience; is a coach of the group; shares information and responsibilities; is trustworthy and easy to approach; and has emotional intelligence, and discretion to give space to the subordinates to work while appreciates their expertise. The leaders of diplomats are also diplomats; therefore, they are familiar with the tasks and positions of the subordinates.

Table 3 represents interviewees' perceptions on important competencies in leadership. The competencies are not listed by the order of frequency, but in random order. Leaders of the Foreign Service are provided several tools to enhance good leadership; however, in the answers there are multiple competencies that are affective on daily basis. Consequently, according to the interviewees, informal actions in leadership are surprisingly important in diplomats' work, albeit the work was also described as independent kind. In the table the competencies are categorized in three main competency areas, and the listing is made approximately, not representing the frequencies of certain answers.

Table 3. Interviewees' perceptions on essential leadership competencies

Expertise	Leadership	Personal competencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - excellence in substance - prioritizing abilities - identifies the department's needs - decision making - experience - taking responsibility of the substance - professional advisor - clear information sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leading by example - coaching - encouraging, supportive - empowerment; sharing responsibilities - equitable, fair - supportive - sharing feedback - dialogue - appreciates the expertise of the subordinates; gives space - paying attention - easy to approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - getting along with people - social skills - trustworthy - motivation - emotional intelligence - discretion - hard working - humane - openness - emphatic - sympathetic

Multiple answers stressed the motivation of leader to perform well in leadership tasks: the engagement in leadership, and acknowledgement of the group, as well as individual coaching and advising are essential. Leaders need both management competencies and leadership competencies in order to lead a competent department. Leaders' management competencies include taking responsibility of the substance, ensuring that the strategy is correctly implemented, decision-making, and sharing the information effectively. Leadership competencies that the interviewees listed comprised elements of coaching activities, leading by example, and being easy to approach. Diplomats highly appreciate the professional experience of their leaders; the ideal leader is a top-level diplomat in terms of experience in substance, and in the same time he/she is a supportive leader who appreciates the potential of the subordinates.

In tasks of such independent nature, the importance of competent leaders is extremely emphasized. The interviewees appreciate leaders who support, coach, and give a good example, whilst sharing the responsibilities and giving space for subordinates to work. In the theoretical part, tools for competency management were i.e. performance appraisal,

training, orientation, and mentoring, as well as coaching. Perhaps the most concrete tool for leadership is the discussion alone with each subordinate, in which there is a possibility to get to know the subordinate as a professional, and as a person, and to deepen that relationship year by year.

The most important tool for leadership that a leader has is his/her competencies in the matter. As a professional organization, diplomats appreciate the professionalism, and the excellence of their leaders. According to the interviewees, a leader is the explicit head of the team who takes the final responsibility of the decisions and results. In parallel, leaders are supposed to be easy to approach, to be encouraging, supportive, and coaching; to share responsibilities and feedback, as well as promote dialogue among the colleagues. As personalities, leaders ought to be open, trustworthy and sociable; moreover, they should be able to put themselves in another's place, as in show empathy and emotional intelligence in diverse situations. As subordinates acknowledge their leaders' professionalism, they expect their leaders to appreciate their expertise and give space in performing tasks.

Feedback is considered as a crucial tool for leadership to connect with subordinates. In Foreign Service, there are multiple channels to give and receive feedback. For a leader, TAKE discussions (tavoite- ja kehityskeskustelu), barometer for job satisfaction, and 360-degree feedback are the formal ways to receive feedback from subordinates and colleagues (360-degree involves colleagues and leader's own leaders). The interviewees experienced that they have sufficient channels to give feedback, both directly and indirectly. They acknowledged as a competency for a leader to give feedback, not only during TAKE discussions, but also in everyday workplace situations.

Discussions in which leader and subordinate set objectives, give and receive feedback, and accomplish performance appraisal, are called TAKE discussions. TAKE discussions are conducted once a year. There is a certain form that tells the structure of discussion, and apparently, it is quite strictly followed, according to the interviewees. The form of the discussions contains questions concerning job description; objectives for the future; employee's perceptions on the working environment; career plans; and development

needs. The form for performance appraisal includes following themes: performance of the employee; the professionalism and qualifications of the employee; working methods; the attitude of the employee towards development; and leadership competency evaluation. The interviewees were asked to evaluate the usefulness of the discussions in terms of development and improving performance, as well as interaction between a leader and a subordinate.

The interviewees agreed on the importance of communication between a leader and a subordinate, and that communication should occur more than once a year. As ordinary days are hectic and filled with work tasks, TAKE discussions are a valuable moment to sit down and reflect one's competencies, set future objectives, assess the work community and leadership, and go through the performance appraisal. Most interviewees think TAKE discussions as an effective way to give and receive feedback. However, the element of performance appraisal was seen as implausible and powerless, as it has a negligible effect on salaries, because of the scarce resources. Thus, the assessment cannot be conducted properly, as the grades given have to stay within the limits of the salary resources. That is why some interviewees stated the performance appraisal should be conducted some other time, separately from the objective setting, as it is too dominating an element when they are kept together.

For the TAKE discussions to be successful, it is vital for both participants to be well prepared; moreover, the attitude of a leader towards the TAKE discussions was considered as the most significant factor in successful TAKE discussions. Especially in bigger diplomatic missions or in bigger units of the Ministry in which a leader has several subordinates, TAKE discussions are one of the rare occasions for leader and subordinate to have a private conversation on subordinate's thoughts, competencies, development needs, and future objectives. For a subordinate, it was considered as very useful a moment to take a pause and reflect one's work and tasks on annual basis.

It's just a must to think why I am doing this, and where I get the directions from; and how I fit as a part of the bigger picture; and the objectives, and my own development... so it's obviously very important a tool, and of course, a fantastic opportunity to communicate with the leader.

On the other hand, TAKE discussions are, on certain level and by some interviewees, considered as somewhat inflexible an instrument. For the most part, it is because of the performance appraisal and the limits concerning the assessment of subordinates' performance. Some interviewees showed skepticism towards the system, since there is no realization of the things that have been agreed on.

I think most of them are just talking and talking, but it doesn't lead to anything. Neither the boss, nor the employee do not seem to understand the idea of the discussions... They just make sure they answer all the questions and that's it.

There were very good experiences, good experiences, and some worse experiences in terms of TAKE discussions; however, most interviewees stated that there could be more focus put on competencies and development needs, and the emphasis is too strongly put on performance appraisal which does not function as it should be in motivating towards better performance.

Those who worked with leadership tasks, considered TAKE discussions as the essence of leadership, and an effective tool to reach also those who are shy and more passive individuals. All in all, reaching and empowering subordinates is an acknowledged way to enhance the process of change. The interviewees argued that it is best conducted by clear and effective communication, and information sharing, and engaging employees to the process, as in making them feel that they own the process and thus are essential links within its realization. The interviewees also considered the atmosphere to be in crucial role.

In terms of development and improvement of competencies, it is, again, one of leaders' responsibilities to co-operate with the upper level management, and subordinates, to assure they have decent possibilities to develop their professionalism. The interviewees considered their leaders to participate in the process by allowing them to participate in trainings and seminars; by inviting them to meetings and gatherings which otherwise would not be part of their tasks; and by giving advice and sparring when needed.

Trainings are highly acknowledged in the Ministry; however, the interviewees saw the lack of time and irregularity of schedules as the greatest restrictions to participate in most additional trainings.

With regard to leadership in the Ministry, leadership tasks have been a natural part of proceeding in the career. This was seen as a challenge, as not all leaders wished to become leaders, nor were interested in leadership tasks. Today, leadership potential is tested among those who are interested in leadership tasks. For those who wish to have a specialist career, there are some efforts from the Ministry's end: to develop the system of specialist career for those not interested in leadership positions. The future leaders are trained and coached, yet these procedures are fairly new activities in the Ministry.

Leaders operate as links between the higher management of the Ministry, and their own subordinates. As the Government's austerity measures indicate the cutting of resources in public sector operations, the interviewees were asked if they had observed some changes the savings policies have had in their field of profession. The answers could be divided in to major dimensional ways. Firstly, the ones who had experienced changes in their work and objectives related to it; and the others who did not see any significant changes in their work due to the savings policies. Secondly, there were the ones who considered the savings policies have had a positive effect in the operative efficiency of the Foreign Service, and the others who feel they have got some additional pressure with their work, due to the savings.

Since there are so great a variety of tasks for diplomats, it is clear that in practice there are some posts that are more impacted by the savings policies, and some posts in which there is almost no difference. Those who currently worked abroad, considered the biggest changes to be in the Ministry, whilst in missions abroad there are cuts in resources: tighter budgets; more scrutiny on official journeys; and, according to some interviewees, more administrative tasks to operate in missions than ever. Organizational changes include i.e. reforming the structure of diplomatic missions (closing and merging embassies) and departments as well as units in the Ministry; and prioritization and de-prioritization of resources accordingly with the Ministry's strategic objectives.

The interviewees react to the savings policies in various ways: some see them as a stressful and somewhat discouraging tone in the professional context; conversely, some see them as a point to pause and rethink the system, its resources, needs, and priorities. As a researcher's observation, there was a slight trend in the division of opinions of this question: those who had worked or currently work with administrative tasks or leadership tasks, mentioned more often their positive attitude towards these type of reforms.

These kind of actions challenge leaders' tasks to keep the subordinates motivated and well-informed in front of new policies and systems. The interviewees particularly emphasized the importance of information in reforms as the most important tool to motivate and engage the subordinates.

Our administration talks a lot about the fact that we are now in a situation in which there are no possibilities to reduce the personnel from the network of diplomatic missions without conducting structural reforms.

In my opinion, efficiency aims are always welcome, whether there were good or bad times. There is no such organization that could just swell and spread. It should always be thought that what is the productivity of this, what are the benefits of this, and do we get value for money.

5.3. Professional development

Professional development starts at the early stage of individual's career. For new employees, there is orientation that should take place alongside with new tasks. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs offers orientation course called Kavaku which is part of the centralized recruitment procedure of the Ministry. Kavaku is a vast set of advanced orientation activities, and also comprises training programs for specific competencies required in diplomatic career, such as negotiation and argumentation skills.

Among the interviewees, centralized recruitment was seen as a convenient, cost efficient, and equality rising a way to recruit future diplomats. It enables diplomats to have a reference group to lean on to, as the system of rotation changes colleagues in every few years. Today, the elective committee is not political, as it used to be in the past; something of which was considered as an equality rising aspect during the process. As an orientation process, Kavaku aims to interview the whole organization and its processes to future diplomats, to create generalists and give prospects to participants.

Diplomats are encouraged to participate in trainings, especially with regard to developing language skills. However, the interviewees raised the issue of limited time and complex schedules that may vary in a short matter of time – engaging to something regular may cause challenges as the working schedules are not solid. Many of the interviewees consider that if there was more time, they would participate more in trainings and courses.

5.3.1. Mentoring program in career planning

Diplomatic career has proven to be a long-lasting type of career: according to the interviewees, there are only a few of those who have left the diplomatic career; therefore, it could be concluded that the recruitments of the Ministry have been successful, and the Ministry has been able to identify the right kind of people with required competencies. However, a successful recruitment system is not enough to keep employees satisfied: attention has to be paid especially on career planning, and, according to some interviewees, it has been improved during the recent years in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Since 2008, the Ministry has annually offered mentoring program as a part of career planning. Mentoring aims towards personal development, so those selected to the program had to search a mentor for themselves. According to the interviewees, it was a common way to find a mentor inside the organization, yet some wanted to have a mentor outside the Ministry. Of the 16 interviewees, six had participated a mentoring program once or twice.

According to the official statement of the Ministry, mentoring program is primarily for those with aims towards leadership tasks or current tasks as a leader. However, the interviewees showed it is not a necessity, and there are advantages also for those with a future objective as a leader, but also for those who currently aim to develop as specialists. The interviewees, who have taken part to the mentoring program, have had positive experiences concerning the program; however, a successful mentoring requires a good chemistry between a mentor and a protégé, and naturally, careful planning. Mentoring in the Ministry enables those involved to the process to decide the topics and themes freely.

Ministry's mentoring program represents traditional mentoring, that is, it is possible only in Helsinki, and those working abroad cannot apply to the program until they are back in Finland. E-mentoring is not formally acknowledged for the program. However, as also the interviewees pointed out, informal mentoring occurs among colleagues, albeit it is not as organized and planned as the official mentoring program.

I was fairly young a civil servant back then, so I didn't aim towards any sort of leadership conversations. To me it was more like career planning. I got really good tips on where to apply, and since my mentor had been my leader earlier, he/she knew what kind of employee I am, so we discussed very openly on various options with regard to my career.

Both of my mentors have been civil servants of the Ministry. They are more experienced, and I chose them because we have some specialties in our organization, so I wanted to have a mentor who understands it and is able to support in terms of the unique nature of our career. Some have mentors outside the Ministry, which I think is good because there are always new thoughts and perspectives.

Whether it has been career planning, general discussions on the career and on the Foreign Service, or current, or future leadership tasks, the interviewees saw mentoring as a positive tool that has plurality of benefits in diplomat's career prospects.

5.3.2. Self-managed orientation with the mentality of learning by doing

Diplomatic career is an inclusive type of career, and it strongly involves diplomats' families, especially in rotation to diplomatic missions. The interviewees emphasized the importance of adjustment in rotation, so that the private life would settle in the new environment. They saw the aspects of private life, and the families' adaptation as the most challenging parts in transfers. The interviewees who worked for the administration, were more confident with the support of the system, with regard to adaptation of private life outside the office. Those who have had longer careers, stressed the fact that transfers become easier and easier the more they are experienced, since they occur within the same organization.

Another challenge the interviewees pointed out was the lack of decent orientation before new tasks, especially with regard to transfer of tacit knowledge of each post. The Ministry offers some training before new missions; however, the training remains rather focused on technical competencies. The position specific training is completely left on the leaving diplomat's responsibilities; naturally, the diplomat who is starting in a new post, has a responsibility to be active in terms of orientation requests. The interviewees told varying examples on their experiences on orientation, and expressed a wish for more systematic procedure in it.

In fact, the ability to survive multiple transfers and varying tasks can be considered as one of diplomat's essential competencies: the independency and the courage to start creating and transforming the position as one's own is a demanding task. Together with adaptation in general, diplomatic career requires certain self-management. The interviewees were asked to describe themselves as personal self-managers. The question resulted somewhat interesting reactions among the interviewees. It was presented as a way to hear in practice how the interviewees actually do their work, while the first question of the interview explored the opinions of the interviewees. Answers were each unique, yet they had some correspondences: great ambition which sometimes turns towards strictness and self-criticism; perfectionism as in high quality results; prioritizing,

as there are always too many tasks to handle; on the other hand, a meticulous way to work; and a reflective way to manage one's work.

Time management appears to be something that ties the interviewees together, despite the various types of answers to this question. The answers also showed the engagement that these diplomats have made with their work.

I feel that I'm pretty well organized in a way that I am able to prioritize and to be productive and efficient; and I love to-do lists! So I would say that I'm rather good manager of my work. It goes well, sometimes maybe even too well, but the clock gives me the challenge as there is not enough time.

In my opinion, I am pretty precise, and I stress a bit when I have work to do: they must be done by the given time limit. On the other hand... I'm not like... I mean, when I have work to do, I have to do it efficiently, but then I relax... I'm not a workaholic who needs to work all the time... and so far, it has gone pretty well.

*Really unrelenting! *laughs* I am extremely result-oriented, ambitious, and demanding; and I really like my job, so that makes me pretty unrelenting to myself, as in that I have to make things right and be productive, and I have to result visible and effective work, and set the bar high as in successful results.*

Learning by doing appears to be the most essential way to learn in the Foreign Service. The interviewees described their work, especially in missions abroad, as a vast field of possibilities to which they have options to affect and to engage with. The main frames of each post are given, and then it is possible for a diplomat to design and form it as he/she wishes. The orientation for new tasks occurs between the leaving and the arriving civil servant, and thus, there are a variety of ways to conduct the orientation. The interviewees expressed their experiences on orientations, some of which were excellent, and some had no actions at all. The Ministry strongly recommends all transferring civil servants to write a letter of orientation to their followers, and it is left to leaders' responsibilities to monitor whether these letters have been written.

The importance of orientation letters is significant, as there are no possibilities for the leaving and the arriving civil servant to meet, unless they do it on their own time. The interviewees considered the face-to-face meetings as the most valuable and useful way to

conduct orientation. This is particularly a problem for a small-size Foreign Service: the resources make it impossible to have to civil servants working for the same position, even for a short term period. In this type of system, the initiative of civil servants becomes crucial, and on some basis, increases the level of learning by doing.

Interestingly, orientation to new cultures is almost completely on civil servants' responsibility. The Ministry offers country reports, and in cases of position in a receiving state of high security risks, there is training for crisis situations that is obligatory to take. Will to self-development is striven from motivation. Albeit this study is not about motivational questions, it was considered as a relevant question in interviews, as the career length of diplomats is extraordinarily long and unified. Well-engaged employees are a result of successful actions in HRM. The history of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs shows that in the past, it has not been like it is today.

There has been struggle in pay system, in the career development structure, and inadequate training of diplomats; moreover, many of the problems were seen as the reason of unpredictable growth of the Foreign Service in certain time periods. The Ministry has reacted to these issues, and during the past decades there are multiple reforms to enable better functioning and more fascinating Foreign Service. (Soikkanen 2003; Soikkanen 2008.)

5.3.3. The mines of motivation

The greatest motivators the interviewees gave are that they feel they do meaningful work and perform varying tasks. As a concept, meaningful work includes i.e. working with topics, such as those with a strong value basis, that are personally important to interviewees; and the possibility to promote Finland's interests, and interests of Finnish companies. The interviewees feel they work with topics that are extremely important, both nationally for Finland, and globally.

Even though the rotation is a stressful period of time, it is also a significant source of motivation for the interviewees. Rotation enables varying tasks, varying colleagues,

varying working environments, and varying countries as well as varying cultures. Rotation, and thus, varying tasks, enable diplomats to become multiple skilled generalist, or multiple skilled specialist in certain field of diplomacy, something of which the interviewees considered as a crucial motivator.

By serving one employer, you can have multiple careers.

When asked about personal development, the answers reflected development in confidence on one's competencies and abilities to survive outside the comfort zone; and development in a sense that the perspective broadens within the career. In every position, there is something that is possible to take with as the rotation occurs, and these experiences, being able to apply learnt skills and competencies in a new position, is seen as personal development among the interviewees. Learning from colleagues and leaders has been a significant way to learn; in addition, positive attitude towards learning and development was also listed as a factor that enables development in the first place.

Every single position teaches you something. Some more, some little less; however, the diversity of tasks and positions... you just have to develop yourself and improve your competencies. And I think it is nice.

5.4. Visions on competent diplomats

This study aimed to find characteristics of Finnish diplomats, and, indeed, found many of them. Finnish diplomats are a profession of competent and proactive civil servants that cannot be described in just a few sentence; moreover, the definition of competent is a multidimensional term. This study aimed at finding a relevant competency profile for diplomat with varying positions. The question "What are competent diplomats made of?" was presented as the last question of the interview, and it resulted conclusions for interesting discussions. This sub-section intends to give the word to the interviewees' perceptions, and acts as a conclusion for this section of study results.

All competent diplomats are not necessarily made of same sort of Lego bricks, and they shouldn't be.

The comments of the interviewees represent somewhat unified sentiments on the topic; they also strongly correspond with the fundamental competencies listed in the very beginning of the analysis.

Competent diplomats? Umm.. It could be of sharp mind, and of polite output.

Competent diplomats are made of courage, flexibility, curiosity... and of great global interests.

I'd say they are made of patriotism...and maybe also of tolerance, and of ability to change... of curiosity.

Umm... they are courageous, and good in self-expression. They are proud of their homeland, and they also care about the rest of the world.

They are made of courage, love of adventure, openness... and of a hint of ambition! It is not needed insanely, yet it is vital for winning yourself and breaking routines. Somehow, being a multiple skilled person is very important. I mean, both knowledge and other abilities, like interpersonal competencies are crucial... The ability to find right kind of information, to process it, and to report it in a correct and understandable way... These are the essential competencies, in my opinion.

I have to say that they are made of positive Barbapapa mass. I mean the kind of modeling clay that is always willing to be shaped, and that sees something good in everything, and won't become embittered even if the plans do not come true the way one had planned. It means you follow your heart and head wisely. Hah, this is the ideal situation to me.

I would say... interpersonal competencies, and the constant will to learn new, and understand new things.

They are made of open mind, and initiative as well as being interested... and also of communication skills... and of analyzing skills.

It is absolutely listening skills that count: if you are not able to listen to what the opposite side has to say, and I don't mean hearing in a physical sense, you are not able to get any results from your actions. In addition, courage to stand one's ground in every situation; competent diplomats are also made of empathy in a sense that

they won't look down on others, and empathy in a sense that one understands and respects the culture of the receiving state, and takes responsibility on one's actions, the results and the influences of one's work.

This goes back to the fundamental competencies: it is all based on interactions with people: a competent diplomat is a good judge of human nature, and gets well along with people. One has to be a good listener, and thus, is competent in communication and other interactions.

One has to have broad interests towards the surrounding world, and the will to make a difference... a will to wander is also essential.

The idea of a competent diplomat truly has evolved during the history of Finnish diplomacy: especially, since the Kavaku training was launched. During the first decades of Finnish diplomacy, diplomats were a profession that was highly acknowledged by social grounds. Ever since the establishment of Kavaku training, the diversity of applicants, and the chosen ones has increased. Among diplomats, the appreciation of their work remains extremely high.

Can I say of common sense? Sometimes I am annoyed by the polished sound of the word diplomacy, and how this profession has changed some personalities. Not all of us are keen on operas and classical music, or do wine tasting as a hobby; what on earth happens so that some of us become snobs, and adopt some kind of elitism in their lives. If you have a normal common sense; you have been raised well back at home; and you have a wide general knowledge, to me, it is all you need... sincerely.

At some point, way back in the past, this was highly distinguished a profession, and the employees had very similar backgrounds. Nowadays this is, in many ways, business as usual. And I must say it is very good this way, it should be like this.

A competent diplomat appears to need certain behavioral characteristics as the most important competencies. This might be one reason for aptitude tests in the recruitment process. Wide range of interests create the motivation, which enables managing the substance. Competent diplomats also need competent leaders, and the mutual appreciation. At their best, leaders motivate their subordinates towards more ambitious

goals and towards professional excellence. In addition to competent leaders, inspiring and supportive colleagues enable professional development.

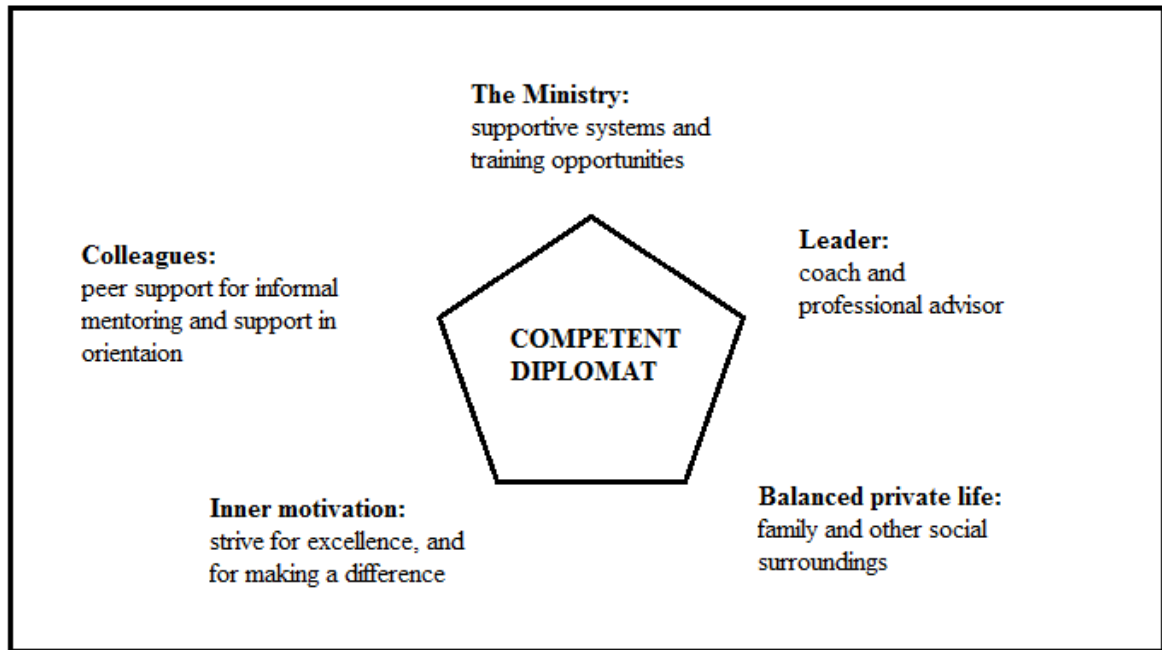


Figure 4. Factors in creation of a competent diplomat.

With the wide interpretation of empirical material, there are five major assets that competent diplomats need in superior performance, and it is presented in Figure 4. Generally, these “corner stones” could be applied to any profession imaginable, yet in this context, the supportive role of all these is emphasized, especially in situations of working abroad in diplomatic missions.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the practice of competency management in Finnish Foreign Service, and give the word for diplomats with varying backgrounds and lengths of career. The ultimate aim was to find characteristics for competent diplomats, and explore the level of competency management in Finnish Foreign Service. The empirical data was collected by interviewing 16 diplomats of varying ages, backgrounds, and lengths of career. The results reflect perceptions of the interviewees on the topic, and assess the practice of competency management.

6.1. Summary and analysis of the study results

“Why then should the competencies of individuals be assessed? The answers relate to the utilisation of competencies, the planning of development actions, and the encouragement of personal learning. Competence development is not just strategically important, but also important for the allocation of resources. Identifying the competence areas that need to be developed and where management needs to focus more resources is of paramount importance.” (Laakso-Manninen & Viitala 2007: 53.)

The reasons for this study were in the unique nature of diplomatic career, and the small number of research made on this topic. The citation above proves the essence of competency management, and the importance of the topic. Diplomatic career involves civil servants with varying backgrounds, engaging them to constant rotation of work tasks to be performed around the world. Due to this reason, it is fairly demanding a task to form a task-related competency framework that usually is a part of competency management. Hence, this study aimed at forming a general framework that contains the most essential competencies accordingly with the responds of the interviewees. The results were categorized in six competency areas that, apart from linguistic competencies, strongly relate to personal and behavioral characteristics. Surprisingly the answers did not emphasize pure knowledge on the substance that much, but rather the interests towards international affairs and the ability to search and find relevant information. The Ministry rather hires attitude, and then teaches the substance to those selected.

By exploring the general competency framework for diplomats it is possible to create frames for competency management actions. The theoretical part of competency management was presented as various steps towards professional development. General competency framework of diplomats can be closely linked to the core competencies of the Foreign Service, as the competency framework can be utilized in order to select future diplomats to perform activities accordingly to the strategy and vision of the Foreign Service.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has traditionally had a monopoly on international affairs, on bilateral and multilateral co-operation, and on Foreign Security and Defense Policy; today, the responsibilities on international affairs and co-operation between states is somewhat divided between other Ministries, as they manage their field of expertise also on the international stage. The interviewees still consider these questions as core competencies of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, due to the long history of expertise in these matters. The diplomats saw themselves as a part of a bigger picture, each contributing to promotion of Finland's interests.

Core competencies of an organization provide guidelines for individual competencies so that they would best serve the organizational objectives. Consequently, alongside with core competencies, individual competencies should be identified and assessed so that there would be any development as a result. Competency development requires the identification of competency gaps, as in finding something that needs development. In the case of Foreign Service, constant competency assessment has to be emphasized since the rotation regularly changes the situation.

Personal learning and development are strongly attached to good leadership, as leaders are the implementers of competency management actions in practice. Throughout the history of Finnish diplomacy, leadership tasks have belonged to the professional development of diplomatic career. The interviewees noted the significant difference in the level of leadership in the Foreign Service during the recent years, and the reasons can be traced back to the times in which there were leaders who did not wish to be leaders.

Today, the Ministry offers coaching, training, and testing of leadership potential for those who wish to become leaders. Leaders are provided various channels of giving and receiving feedback, and support for TAKE discussions with their subordinates. For those who are not interested in leadership tasks, there should be a possibility to be promoted as high-level senior specialists. Some of the interviewees stated this issue is recognized in the Ministry, yet the development of the system is at its early stage.

Leadership competencies are not inborn, but obviously some people have inner motivation for leadership tasks; moreover, leadership competencies are possible to be developed, and indeed they must be developed alongside with other individual competencies in professional life. Leaders are responsible of their teams' performance and results, and thus they need a toolkit of actions to help their subordinates to increase their competitive potential.

To the extent of interviewees' narratives, the importance of leadership is crucial for diplomats in effective performance and professional development. They appreciate a responsible leader who co-operates with subordinates in issues, and has emotional intelligence with regard to the work community. A competent leader is supportive, able to make decisions, and leads by example; in addition, a competent leader is an extreme specialist of the substance. Position-related objectives are examined, modified and set in TAKE discussions between a leader and a subordinate. TAKE discussions were considered as perhaps the most significant tool for leaders to improve co-operation with their subordinates. The part of performance appraisal received the most criticism as demotivating and insufficient manner, as it does not make a difference in diplomats work because of grades forced onto a certain level.

In this study TAKE discussions are somewhat exclusively examined, yet they take place only once a year. The leadership as such actualizes in everyday situations: good leadership was vastly considered to occur in informal conversations with the leader, and the possibilities to participate in trainings. The interviewees acknowledged coaching activities as part of good leadership, something of which the theory approves. With empowering actions, by sharing responsibilities, and by discussing about development

needs with individuals it is possible to create a supportive atmosphere in competency development, and to strengthen the relationship between a leader and a subordinate.

The interviewees, some of which have leadership tasks, saw that their leaders promote their professional development by allowing them to participate in trainings, and by including them into their work (meetings, events, occasions etc.) on some additional levels. Some interviewees acknowledged open and informal discussions with leaders, as in sparring the subordinate with the ideas and initiatives concerning issues and questions in their work.

Professional development of diplomats starts in Kavaku training which can be considered as an advanced orientation period for future diplomats. The overall principle in the Foreign Service is the mentality of learning by doing, and learning from colleagues. The transfer of tacit knowledge occurs within the rotation, mostly between the leaving and the arriving civil servant of each position. The Ministry offers some training on technical matters before the transfers occur; the task-related questions must be discussed with the leaving civil servant of the position. This causes a problem when there are obstacles in contacting or reaching the leaving civil servant.

The importance of orientation is crucial when starting in a new position in new working environment. Training enhances employee's abilities to superior performance, and comprehensive orientation enables faster settling into new routines and tasks, as well as to the new organizational culture. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs offers online training in increasing amounts, which ameliorates training possibilities of those working abroad. The official orientation of the Ministry for new missions is focused on technical competencies, and not on cultural changes. Moreover, task-related orientation is left on diplomats' responsibilities to operate. This is a result of a small-sized Foreign Service with limited resources. However, web-based applications could be utilized more broadly in training solutions.

The operation of moving to another receiving state, change workplace, change tasks, change home, organize the day-to-day affairs in both private life and work life, and adjust

in the new cultures is a massive exertion that has to be done somewhat regularly. The interviewees emphasized the private life matters as the most demanding part in transfers. There is little cultural orientation offered by the Ministry, so it is on every diplomat's responsibility to get to know the upcoming culture. Some interviewees argued the transfer to be more demanding for the family than for the diplomat itself, as the family is the one that is thrown into "cold water" with a loose safety net: diplomats have their work, the mini-Finland, and their colleagues to which they can rely on.

With regard to the answers of the interviews, there is a great need for more systematized rotation as in supportive manners. There is the existing framework for transfers: the exact dates to start in new position, some assistance in the organization of the daily affairs, and training for technical tasks offered by the Ministry. However, there is demand for more specified support especially in assistance on the daily affairs to help in adjustment in a new country. Faster adjustment outside work provides more efficient and more productive a diplomat in shorter time.

The transfers of experience and tacit knowledge are effectively transferred in mentoring. Mentoring has also proven to be beneficial for career planning, and in finding the essence of one's work tasks. As a tool for competency management, mentoring might be the most involving kind in terms of employee engagement, as mentoring occurs in separate sessions between a mentor and a protégé, and there are clear objectives set on the program. The aim of mentoring is made to be beneficial for both parties and not just for the protégé. Mentoring could be considered as a regular step in individual's career development prospects, it could be repeated regularly as the career develops.

Ministry's mentoring program has resulted positive experiences among the interviewees, especially with regard to career planning and the development of professional identity. Among the interviewees there were those who had a mentor inside the Ministry, and those who had a mentor outside the Ministry. Both ways to choose the background of the mentor were argued relevantly and the mentors were chosen to best serve the protégés' objectives and aims towards the program. The answers emphasized the positive experiences from both sides of mentoring relationship. None of the interviewees had acted

as a mentor; however, the most experienced interviewees stated they had thought about becoming a mentor. Participation to mentoring program is possible only in Helsinki, and thus, the possibilities of e-mentoring are not exploited in the Foreign Service, despite the technological instrument civil servants utilize every day and which would be applicable also in e-mentoring.

As learning something new is a major part of diplomats' work, there has to be great motivation to regularly orient in front of new tasks and new working environments. In fact, some interviewees pointed out that being a civil servant of the Foreign Service is a way of life rather than just a job, since they make certain sacrifices concerning their private life, and in return they get adventures and interesting tasks to perform. The variability of tasks was actually considered as one of the biggest motivators for the interviewees. Change resistance is low, since the job itself contains regular change.

Diplomacy has a history of centuries, and even today diplomatic matters are strictly regulated by international agreements, laws and orders (see UN 1961 & Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015a). The hierarchy of the system is essential in every matter, and diplomats are expected to follow the hierarchy they are a part of. During the interviews, the hierarchy of the Foreign Service was brought up several times – some even compared the system to the one of Defense Forces: diplomats are the ones sent abroad to complete certain missions, and regularly seconded to some other receiving state. It is a challenge in global world that demands extreme flexibility to combine the traditional structure of an organization with somewhat strict hierarchy, and to motivate employees to do as they are told to do.

In terms of today's trend in being flexible and ready for transformations, the rather inflexible system of Foreign Service sets pressure and challenges in the private life balance of diplomats. The interviewees with children emphasized the challenge of keeping the family together during missions abroad, since there are multiple challenges for spouses to work abroad. Moving abroad for several years often means that spouses have to give up their work, or stay in Finland working; giving up work indicates i.e. a stop in pension accumulation. Added together with today's individualist atmosphere in

which a decent or perhaps a superior career is sought, there are various challenges foreseen for the Foreign Service to keep their diplomats motivated, and for diplomats to keep their private life in balance.

Reflected to the theory presented in this thesis, competency management is recognized in Finnish Foreign Service both on organizational level and on individual level. The importance of leadership in competency management actions is indispensable; and thus it is extremely important to coach leaders' competencies for superior leadership performance. Leadership is serving the subordinates, and thus acknowledging them individually. With regard to leaders as servants, some interviewees brought up the idea of management by walking as a style of leadership: leader approaches the subordinates and not vice versa. This way leaders become more easily approachable; moreover, it is a modern way to lead in a traditional profession.

Consequently, the importance of leadership becomes crucial in competency management, albeit competency management is highly emphasized to be a strategic choice in HRM. Leadership is essential because of the implementation of the competency management practices. They are the supporters and encouragers of their subordinates' development, and the most of it occurs every day at ordinary situations and conversations. Hence, competency management is mostly informal actions, yet they must be raised into awareness. Leaders' attitude towards competency development reflect to their subordinates. Those performing leadership tasks considered their position as very important and rewarding with regard to the results. They feel responsibility over their subordinates, and strive for better functioning leadership, thus they also lead themselves towards competency development.

In the aftermath of economic crisis, there are several difficulties for Finland to get back on its feet in terms of economic development. Consequently, the Government's austerity measures reach the Ministries and the funding of several projects. With tighter budgets and reduced human resources there must be strategic prioritizations in order to reach the results wanted. The most recent strategic HR objectives of the Foreign Service indeed emphasize the inevitable process of prioritization and de-prioritization for more efficient

Foreign Service. However, considerably many interviewees did not see that many changes in their field of profession or changes in tasks.

Competent diplomats are made of courage; good self-expression; good interactive skills; politeness; sharp mind; empathy; and flexibility. Competent diplomats have strong values and the will to serve their home country. To perform in superior way, competent diplomats need supportive network around them: they need the full support and trust of the organization; they need the motivation and the advice of their leader; they need their competent colleagues for peer support and sparring; and they need a balanced social life, wherever they live. Most of all, the inner motivation for the work is the essence of being a competent and successful diplomat.

In conclusion, this study explored some crucial facts regarding competent diplomats: they have varying backgrounds; they are extremely motivated by the unique nature of their career; and a great part of their competencies are enabled by their surroundings, such as families, leaders, and colleagues. Factors such as attitude, personality and behavioral characteristics matter more than educational background. The organization provides the frames for their competency development, and their leaders are trained exclusively to respond in today's leadership demands, and to give maximum assistance in competency development. Competency development is an ongoing process that ought to be taken seriously by all members of the organization, since the engagement to the process enables competent workforce that stays on the crest of a wave.

6.2. Evaluation of the reliability, and suggestions for future research

The reliability of this study leans on the variety of literature in temporal dimension, and in the type of their nature, since they are originally written for both public and private sectors. The reliability of the empirical material is justified with diverse interviewees and the open form of interview. Qualitative analysis aimed at forming and examining the state of competency management in Finnish Foreign Service by utilizing the narratives of the interviewees. This brings value to the analysis, as the analysts are the ones inside the

system: they gave anonymous perceptions which can be considered somewhat reliable. The interpretations are made by an individual, and thus some subjectivity naturally exists, yet the analysis has been made carefully by utilizing appropriate tools. Naturally any excessive generalizations cannot be made since the number of interviewees was considerably small, and furthermore, it was not the purpose of this thesis.

The literature concerning competency management in public sector has been published in the early years of 21st century: however, considering the time being, studying competency management would be useful and important in order to public organizations to improve their performance and productivity. Competent workforce is something to strive for, and it seems today's organizations are aware of it. Competency management asks effort on managerial level; and most of all, assets for superior leadership in order to engage all employees in rethinking their competencies and identifying competency gaps.

For future research there are multiple options to choose, and angles to change. As this study provides mainly an introduction to competency management in Finnish Foreign Service, any possible dimension of it could be deepened and more studied. The study of this kind would be interesting with a larger number of sampling, and with some quantitative dimensions included. The Ministry has put effort on the quality of leadership in the Foreign Service, and thus, there are several instruments launched during the past years. In addition, the mentoring program is also somewhat new structure in competency management, and in the future it would be interesting to examine its affections on diplomats' career planning and competency development.

From the administrative point of view, there is demand for research on good governance in the Foreign Service. One of the trends today is efficiency and productivity. The interviewees pointed out that there are a lot of administrative tasks and bureaucracy to perform (especially in missions abroad) which are a considerably big part of diplomats' working hours. This being the case especially in small diplomatic missions in which there are only a few civil servants working. This raises the question whether it is possible to lighten the amount of bureaucracy, and in that way increase productive working hours of diplomats.

As a profession, diplomats have often been described as an enigmatic and slightly a cliquey group of civil servants. The reasons to these statements may be caused by i.e. unawareness in terms of the substance in diplomats' work; the high social status that diplomats have had throughout the years; or the small amount of public diplomacy between the Foreign Service and the citizens. However, today there are possibilities to easily reach ordinary citizens with the help of technology and social media, and in this sense, the Foreign Service is fairly active. By bringing the Foreign Service closer to citizens, it generates transparency which inevitably changes the negative tone of people's attitude. Some of the interviewees talked about elitism and the feeling of superiority among the profession, and recognized the change during the past years towards more positive.

Public diplomacy of Finnish Foreign Service is also an interesting area for future research: public diplomacy for foreign states, and public diplomacy for Finnish citizens. With public diplomacy it is possible for the Foreign Service to create an image of Finnish diplomacy and of Finland as a country to other Finns and other cultures. Building an image requires planning, governance, and responsible actions in the field. Hence, good governance results successful public diplomacy if it is organized well. The use of digital tools might be a great revolution also in Finnish diplomacy, even more than it is in its current state.

Studying competency management within a profession that has a unique nature of task rotation was interesting and motivating a topic, since it challenges both the management level of the Ministry and the civil servants to ponder the important competencies required for superior performance. In addition, the interviewees stated the importance of the topic, and emphasized the need to challenge the current structure in order to achieve something more efficient in terms of competent Foreign Service that serves also the employees working for it.

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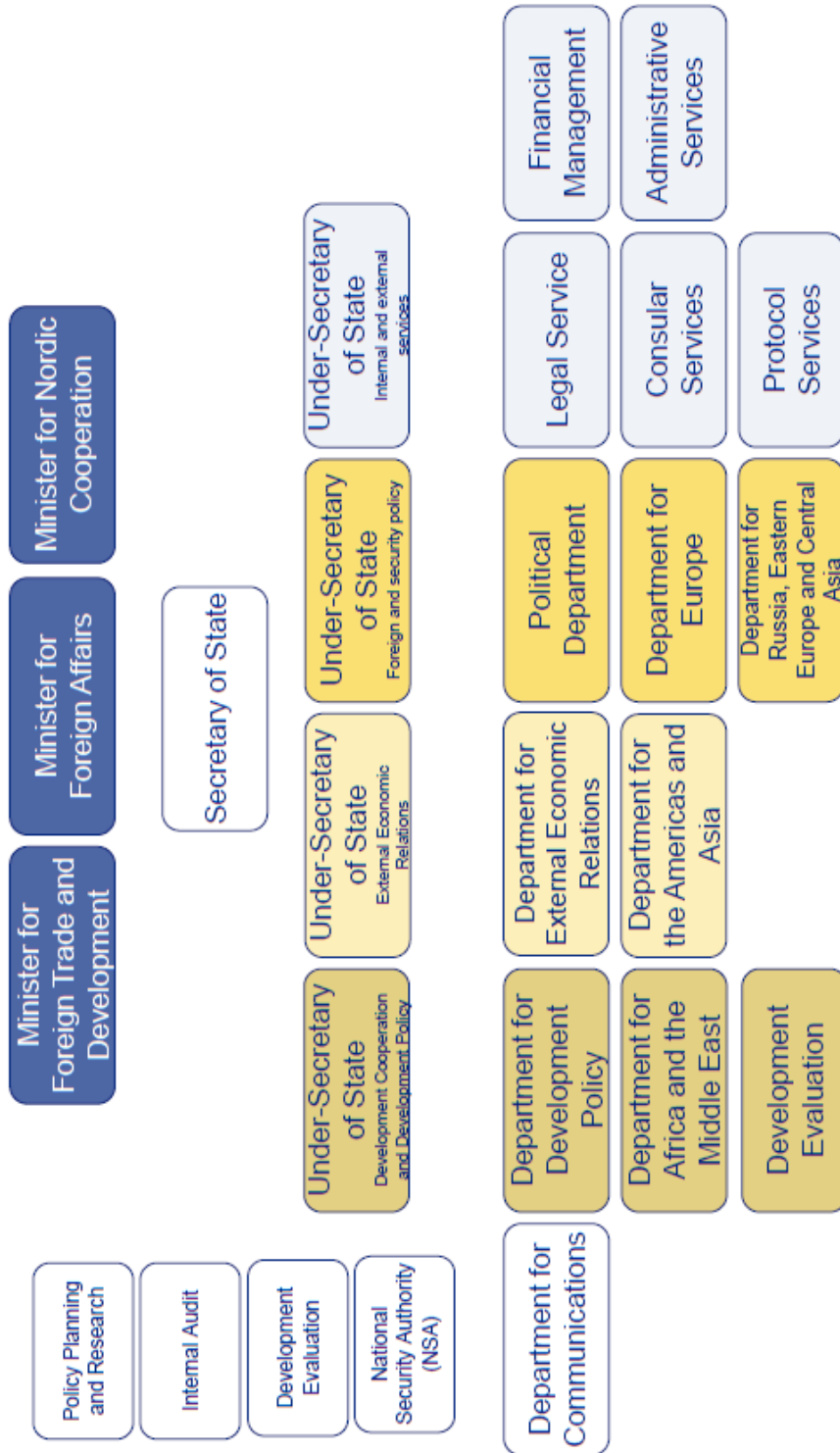
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APPENDIX 1. Organizational structure of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs



APPENDIX 2. E-mails sent to the interviewees

Hei,

Olen Noora Kallinen, julkisjohtamisen ja kansainvälisen hallinnon opiskelija Vaasan yliopistosta. Teen gradua osaamisen johtamisesta Suomen ulkoasiainhallinnossa ja etsin haastateltavia tutkimukseeni. Ministeriöstä suositeltiin Sinua. Tutkimukseni kohdistuu nimenomaan diplomaattiuralla olevien virkamiesten kompetensseihin, ja toivon löytäväni haastateltaviksi mahdollisimman eritaustaisia ja uralla eri vaiheessa olevia diplomaatteja. Haastattelu voidaan toteuttaa joko Skypeen tai muun vastaavan ohjelman välityksellä; voimme myös sopia tapaamisen Helsingissä, mutta sen pitäisi tapahtua viikonloppuaikaan (asun ja työskentelen Tampereella). Arvio haastattelun kestosta on 15–30 minuuttia. Kysymykset koskevat osaamisen johtamisen teemoja, eikä niihin tarvitse etukäteen valmistautua. Vastaukset käsitellään nimettömästi, eikä niitä käytetä muihin kuin tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksiin. Kysymykset esitetään suomeksi, ja vastaukset neutralisoituvat kielellisesti kun niitä käsitellään gradussa englanniksi. Haastattelut ovat siis täysin luottamuksellisia.

Suostuisitko haastatteluun, joka toteutettaisiin helmikuun aikana? Minulle sopivat kaikki arki-illat klo 17:30 alkaen, ja lauantait (13.2.; 20.2. ja 27.2.). Sunnuntait ovat myös vapaana, mikäli niistä joku sopii Sinulle parhaiten. Voit vapaasti ehdottaa Sinulle sopivaa aikaa, niin sumplitaan.

Mielelläni vastaan tutkimustani koskeviin lisäkysymyksiin.

Ystävällisin terveisin,
Noora Kallinen

Hei,

Avaan hieman tulevaa haastatteluani, jotta voit halutessasi pohtia teemoja etukäteen. Keskiössä ovat kompetenssit eli osaamisalueet (taidot, kyvyt, yksilölliset ominaisuudet), joiden avulla henkilö suoriutuu töistään menestyksekkäästi. Gradutyössä tutkitaan diplomaattien kompetenssien johtamista Suomen ulkoasiainhallinnossa. Teoria kompetenssien johtamisesta kiteytyy osaamisalueiden määrittelyyn ja kompetenssikehyksen (competency framework) muodostamiseen, sekä luonnollisesti myös kompetenssien kehittämiseen.

Haastattelu on teemahaastattelu, joka rakentuu kolmen pääteeman ympärille: diplomaatin kompetenssit, osaamisen johtaminen sekä koulutus ja kehittyminen. Olen luonnostellut

valmiiksi kysymyksiä, mutta toivon keskustelustamme tulevan vapaamuotoinen ja rento. Kysymykset koskevat uraasi ja mielteitäsi osaamiseen ja kehittymiseen liittyen. Olen kiinnostunut kuulemaan näkemyksesi diplomaatin olennaisista kompetensseista sekä ulkoasiainhallinnon ydinosaamisesta. Konkreettisista osa-alueista mainittakoon tavoite- ja kehityskeskustelut, esimiestyö, työnkuva, sekä keskeiset koulutukset, kuten Kavaku ja siirtokoulutukset.

Nauhoitan haastattelut myöhempää litterointia varten. Käsittelen vastaukset luottamuksellisesti ja anonymisti. Joudun arvioimaan haastattelun kesto uudelleen: 30–45 min, toivottavasti se sopii Sinulle.

Odotan innolla tulevaa keskusteluaamme!

Ystävällisesti,
Noora Kallinen

APPENDIX 3. Structure of the interview

Perustiedot:

- syntymävuosi
- uran pituus XX, josta ulkomaan komennuksella XX
- koulutustausta, aiempi työkokemus

Teema 1: Diplomaatin kompetenssit

- muodollinen pätevyys (laki)
- muut kompetenssit (ominaisuudet, kyvyt jne.)
 - *Nimeä viisi kompetenssia eli osaamisaluetta (ominaisuutta tai kykyä), joita diplomaatilla tulisi olla työn menestyksekkääseen hoitamiseen ja uralla menestymiseen.*
 - *Onko käsityksesi olennaisista kompetensseista muuttunut urasi aikana? mitä vaaditaan, organisaation kautta tulevat? Ovatko kompetenssivaatimukset muuttuneet urasi aikana?*

Teema 2: Osaamisen johtaminen

- strategian ja vision tunteminen; ydinosaaminen
Strategia ja visio antavat tavoitteet tulevalle ja määrittelevät organisaation ydinosaamisen. Ydinosaaminen erottaa organisaation muista ja mahdollistaa ns. kilpailuedun; ydinosaamista ei voida ulkoistaa.
→ *Mikä on mielestäsi Ulkoasiainhallinnon ydinosaamista?*
→ *Miten oma osaamisesi palvelee organisaatiosi ydinosaamista? Millaisia kehittämishaasteita se merkitsee osaamisellesi?*
- työnkuva; osaamisalueiden määrittely tehtävään
→ *Onko hoitamaasi tehtävän työnkuvaan määritelty erikseen vaaditut osaamisalueet ja tavoitteet? → Ovatko tavoitteet henkilökohtaisia eli sinulle erikseen räätälöityjä vai työnkuvaan liitettyjä? Oletko päässyt mukaan niiden luonnosteluun?*
→ *Miten johdat itseäsi? / Millainen itsesi johtaja olet? Asetatko esim. tavoitteita itsellesi ulkopuolelta annettujen lisäksi?*
- työkalut: TAKE-keskustelu (tavoite- ja kehityskeskustelu, yksi keskeisimpiä)
→ *Onko TAKE-keskusteluissa konkreettisesti keskitytty osaamisalueisiin (vahvuudet, kehittämiskohteet)?*
→ *Ovatko valtion viimeaikaiset säästötoimet näkyneet työhön liittyvissä tavoitteissasi/työssäsi – miten? Miten säästötoimet yleisesti heijastuvat diplomaattien työkenttään?*

→ Miten arvioit TAKE-keskustelujen hyödyllisyyttä kehittymisen tai suoriutumisen parantamisen näkökulmasta? Entä vuorovaikutuksen?

- esimiestyö:
 - Diplomaatit toimivat suurelta osin itsenäisesti, kantaen vastuun omasta toimesta.
 - Millaista esimiestyötä pidät tärkeänä?
 - Millaisia kompetensseja esimiehellä pitäisi mielestäsi olla?
 - Oletko päässyt itse antamaan palautetta suoraan esimiehellesi?
 - Millä tavoin esimiehesi tukee osaamistasi / kehittymistäsi?
- mentorointi
 - Oletko ollut mukana mentorointiohjelmassa?
 - Millainen hyöty siitä on ollut sinulle?
- osallistaminen:
 - Miten osallistaisit ja sitouttaisit kollegojasi tehokkaasti muutosprosesseihin ja muihin yhteisiin projekteihin?

Teema 3: Koulutus; kehittyminen

- KAVAKU:
 - Tulevat diplomaatit rekrytoidaan keskitetysti. Miksi?
 - Onko Kavaku mielestäsi enemmän perehdyttämistä vai uuden oppimista?
 - Millaisia osaamisalueita Kavakulla korostetaan?
- siirtokoulutukset; perehdytys uudessa paikassa

Siirtokoulutuksissa keskitytään laajalti teknisen osaamisen varmistamiseen.

 - Mikä on mielestäsi haastavinta siirroissa, omalta osaltasi?
 - Millaisiin asioihin toivoisit kiinnitettävän huomiota perehdytyksessä?
 - Siirroissa on opeteltava paljon uutta ja totuttauduttava uuteen työ- ja elinympäristöön. Miten käsittelet stressiä? Miten uuden oppiminen tehtäisiin mahdollisimman helpoksi stressaavassa muutostilanteessa?
 - Miten hyvin hiljainen tieto siirtyy tekijältä toiselle työnkierron aikana?
 - Miten kulttuurimuutokset on otettu huomioon siirtokoulutuksissa? Onko se riittävä?
- työssäoppiminen

UM:ssä korostetaan työssäoppimista muuttuvien tilanteiden takia.

 - Miten opit itse parhaiten / Millainen oppija olet?
 - Millä tavalla koet kehittyväsi työssäsi?
 - Mikä sinua motivoi työssäsi?

Loppukysymys: Mistä osaava diplomaatti on mielestäsi tehty?

APPENDIX 4. Interview details

	DATE	METHOD	MINISTRY/ MISSION	DURATION
1	1.2.2016	Skype	Ministry	53 min
2	2.2.2016	Skype	Mission	70 min
3	5.2.2016	Phone	Ministry	48 min
4	8.2.2016	Skype	Mission	50 min
5	9.2.2016	Phone	Mission	45 min
6	10.2.2016	Phone	Mission	70 min
7	11.2.2016	Phone	Ministry	43 min
8	15.2.2016	Skype	Mission	84 min
9	16.2.2016	Phone	Mission	70 min
10	20.2.2016	Face-to-face	Ministry	70 min
11	20.2.2016	Face-to-face	Ministry	40 min
12	20.2.2016	Face-to-face	Ministry	70 min
13	20.2.2016	Face-to-face	Ministry	70 min
14	26.2.2016	Skype	Ministry	24 min
15	1.3.2016	Skype	Ministry	60 min
16	-	E-mail	Mission	-