AGILE BASED COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT

ABC Management

Output 2 / Activity 2

Guidelines: How to develop new cases and contexts?

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1. Introduction

The Competency Assessment based on Work Contexts method (CAWC) of the Agile Based Competency Management project (ABCM), in its final available version, includes:

※ 20 competencies,

※ 5 aspects related to each of these competencies,

※ 1 mother case for each one for these aspects,

※ 10 contexts at Managers´ lever and therefore up to 50 contextualised cases at this level, per competency,

※ 09 contexts at team member´s level and therefore up to 45 contextualised cases at this level, per competency,

※ 22 Knowledge pills developed for e-learning purposes.

The choice and description of the most needed competencies on the European market included in our CAWC method derives from a survey and interviews conducted with business practitioners, HRM specialists, and training and consulting experts, as well as from experience and knowledge of each international project partner, their in-depth individual contacts with businesses and scientists, and finally, coming from the review of the scientific literature and practical manuals and from the analysis of available sources like scientific, applied in business management practice.

Basing on all the collected data, the set of the most needed competencies on the labor market and the most frequent contexts has been chosen. Each competency is defined and described according to rules of CAWC, (competency definition, aspects with own definitions and contexts in which situational cases are developed).

Although any organisation can already implement the method as it is designed in its current version, without any additional developments with the guaranty that it will produce the expected results.

However, organisations can also make adaptations at any time to suit their specific needs that may raise from different situations related to business changes (internal or/and external). If this happens, the top management and the HR experts within the organisation need to have some support.

The current guidelines are designed to be used by the organisations to successfully conduct the effort of adapting the CAWC method

2. Background: The situational Judgment Tests (SJT)

The CAWC is a competence assessment method, based on Situational Judgment Tests (SJT). All such tests present the respondent with a situation and a list of possible responses to the situation. The respondent is asked to consider the situation and then make judgments concerning possible responses to the situation. Simulations are based on the assumption that one can predict how well an individual may perform on a job based on how the individual performs on a simulation of the job (for in depth details, see the full explanation of the CAWC method).

CAWC method, similarly to Situational Judgment Tests, is not a set of stories written by a single author who uses his or her imagination in an inspired moment to create descriptions of science fiction character. The situational descriptions need to be validated.

3. Three Stage to develop situations

3.1. Stage one

Situations´ developers conduct a job analysis wherein critical incidents of work situations are collected from experts or in some cases from archival sources. The goal is to gather incidents that deal with specific content domains or constructs related to the job. Upon gathering critical incidents, the test developers then group the incidents, select representative scenarios, and edit the incidents into stems of similar length and format.

3.2. Stage two.

Then, people from the organisation, experts or inexperienced employees, are asked to generate one or more responses to each situation. The role of the experts is to identify the best responses and to generate some less optimal responses. Inexperienced employees are useful because they offer responses with a wide range of effectiveness. After gathering response alternatives, the situations´ developers edit all of the response alternatives in such a way that they span a range of effectiveness.

3.3. Stage three

The last stage is then about scoring the responses. Once the situations are rationally scored, the experts (excellent employees) are then asked to make judgments about the effectiveness of the responses by identifying the best and the worst options. Options identified as "best" are scored as correct and options identified as "worst" are scored as incorrect.

The approach based on Critical Incident technique is beneficial to situations´ development as it:

- Focuses directly on the assessment of situations, which are of major concern for test construction,
- Leads to the collection of situations which are "common and critical" as well as "realistic",
- Serves to build a "representative and heterogeneous pool of examples".

4. The need for developing new cases in organisations

The set of competencies already identified and defined by CAWC is the basis of the whole method. It is the starting point of all the further steps that for the method itself. The 20 competencies already included in ABCM have been chosen by taking into account the previously mentioned reasons.

It is known that competencies are much related to the strategic management process of the organisations. This is the comprehensive management process that defines the business, its goals, both at different levels, and the strategies to put in place achieve them. It appraises the potential of a business and outlines the actions and the resources it needs.

Thus, strategic management requires a deep planning at all levels and functions, including the HR management function, which is responsible for identifying and defining the core competencies so they can form the heart of the company´s HR system. These are then presented in the organisation´s Dictionary of competencies.

However, organisations are constantly merged into an environment that pushes them to adapt and change constantly. Therefore, they may have the need to include new competencies that are not already defined in the CAWC method in order to use it. The following are some of the most classical factors and situations considered as being triggers for introducing changes in the competency framework of the organisation:

▓ Introduction of the business in new markets
▓ Development of new activities and products
▓ Introduction of new legal framework at national, regional or even international levels
▓ New business practices between the company and its clients and/or providers
▓ New practices between the company and the public administrations

5. Step by step approach to developing new cases in CAWC

The following is a step by step approach that allows developing new cases when needed by companies:

5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.7
Identify & define new competency	Identify and define 5 new aspects for each competency	Identify and define 1 context for each aspects	Develop situational cases and response options	Define a rating scale and rate responses	Define comments	Design suitable Knowledge pills

5.1. Identify and describe new competencies

Following the previously mentioned reasons that may lead to needing the introduction of new competencies, The first step consists of identifying the new competences and defining them as clearly as possible. Each new competence should have its own definition.

For example a possible definition of "COMMUNICATION" competency (as defined in CAWC) is:

The ability to listen, understand and give clear messages to others in proper way, time and to right persons.

It is important to take into account that for one same competency could be defined in different ways from an organisation to another. Therefore, each organisation should focus on its values, business vision and mission, its processes and its objectives to define its competencies.

5.2. Identify and define 5 new aspects for each competency

After defining the competency, 5 aspects should be created. Following the previous example for "**Communication**", we can define the 5 aspects for this competency in the following way:

Nº	*ASPECTS* of the "COMMUNICATION" competency in CAWC	Definition of the *ASPECTS*
1	Listens actively in order to understand others viewpoints	They obtain real, thus 100 % in accordance with the intentions of the interlocutor information. At the same time, they ensure that their interlocutor achieves the same result.
2	Keeps speaking and writing structure to create logic and coherent form, accurate to the content	They communicate in a clear and coherent manner; they achieve high coherence in reading their intentions by the interlocutor/ interlocutors.
3	Ask questions and uses paraphrases to clarify and understand the others side intention.	Uses verbal and non-verbal support contact, doesn´t interrupt the interlocutors speech.
4	Adjust language, visualization and example to the receiver, in speaking and writing communication	They make use of so called „language adaptation", in order to be understood correctly they adapt vocabulary and illustrate their messages so that they are clear to the interlocutor. That way they diversify interlocutors on the basis of their needs and perception skills.
5	During discussions focuses on finding the most profitable solution	Conducting the conversation, they focus on mutual exchange of information which is the base for the both parties' standpoint. In discussion, although they try to persuade the other party to their point of view, they do not do it at all costs; their most important goal is to reach the most satisfying solution for the both parties

As we can see in the above example, it is important to consider that aspects are particular items of each competency, that are related to the specific tasks that need to be fulfilled in relation to the corresponding competency. Therefore, it is important to include in the team that defines them people that have a deep knowledge of the specific jobs positions within the company.

5.3. Identify and define contexts

Contexts consist of the particular environment in which the professional fulfills his/her job position. In the CAWC method, the contexts have been defined at two levels:

※ Level / Position in the organisation, expressed in terms of:

- Management position "Manager"
- Non-management position "Team member"

※ The corresponding work contexts / department in which the aspect of the competency is observed. The following 10 functions have been used in the CAWC:

- Sales - Board - HR - Production - Logistics - Back office - Finance/accounting - Quality - Marketing - IT

We believe that there are two options for introducing new contexts, when it is needed within the organisation, although both options require new development in the CAWC tool itself. These are:

- By adding other/new departments that may be created at a time.
- By adding other responsibility lines to cover the hierarchical structure of the company.

5.4. Developing situational cases

First of all, it is crucial to state from the beginning that cases are developed in two different stages:

※ **Mother cases**: At this stage, the case that is developed is quite general and only takes into account the competency for which it is being developed and the specific aspect to which it is associated.
This could be considered as an intermediate outcome to prepare the next stage.

※ **Contextualised cases:** At this stage, the mother cases are developed deeper taking into account the contexts, already defined.

When creating the situational cases, taking into account the following factors may be of great help:

- The current reality of the organisation is a key factor. This reality is what makes the method and the assessment tool of a value to the organisation.
- Those topics that the organisations would like to improve at behavioural level. If the HR department, in conjunction with the other departments, have already identified areas of weaknesses, this would be an occasion to use this information.

From a practical point of view, this step of the process (developing situational cases) requires not only an in depth knowledge of the internal organisation prevailing in the company but also a high level of expertise in relation to the activity of the company and also about the specific contexts related to each function (finance, Marketing, HR, Logistics…).

Developing new cases can be performed in-house under the format of a one day workshop, where a group of professionals including key people from the HR department and selected employees/managers from different departments. This work can be organised in the following way:

1. Identification of the critical information related to the new competency: definitions, aspects, task… and drafts the first outputs.
2. Analysis, selection and fine tuning of the cases and a presentation in comprehensive matrix.
3. Discussion and based on the final conclusions, the final set of cases is produced.
4. Integration within the ABCM system.

5.5. Defining response options

This step is about creating the response options (three for each case) that represent potential behaviours (reactions). All cases should end with a question that invites to consider possible behaviours.

On the other hand, when generating the response options (or reactions), it is important to take into account that the key element is to think about "behaviours". The questions that may be asked are:

- How would you react?
- How would you behave?
- What would you do?
- How would you respond?

Following the previous example of "COMMUNICATION" competency, the above two points can be presented this way:

Competency	COMMUNICATION			
Aspect (Aspect 1)	Listens actively in order to understand others.			
Mother case	You are taking part in a meeting. The subject matter is close to your competences. Your partner is presenting his/her point of view in a very long and vague way. What do you do in such situations?			
Context	Sales team member			
Contextualised case	You are taking part in a meeting related to sales. The subject matter is close to your competences. Your partner is presenting his/her point of view in a very long and vague way. What do you do in such situations?			
Options of responses				
Nº	Max.	Min.	Grade	
A			4	I ask questions during listening to him/her and paraphrase the meaning of the speech. I just want to know the intentions of the other side. I try to bring out the concrete issues of his/her speech and to get know his/her point of view.
B			3	I do not interrupt despite of his/her way of speaking, because I don't want to so annoy my partner. So I make notes to talk with him/her after the meeting and try to sort things out and understand his/her point of view.
C			1	Because the subject matter of the meeting is close to my competences, I interrupt longer parts of the speech and I finish the sentences by my own, so I speed up the time of the meeting.

From a practical point of view, this step of the process (defining response options) can be undertaken in-house by the HR department professional or by an external team of expert consultants who will work in conjunction with the HR department. In this case, a committee can be created and the work could be organized in the following way:

5. The team of expert consultants can first meet with the HR people in order to compile critical information about the topics and get to start drafting the initial ideas of options.

6. After a deep analysis, the consultants suggest a comprehensive set of responses for each of the competences/contexts to the HR department.

7. This is then discussed and based on the feedback received from the HR department people, the consultants produce the final set of response options that matches best with each context and competency.

8. These are then integrated within the ABCM system.

5.6. Defining a scoring scale

Then subsequent to the situations and the response generation, a scoring key is to be developed. It determines the effectiveness of participants' responses and allows the creation of an overall test score for each participant.

There are three basic approaches to scoring key development:

- **empirical scoring keys** which are developed based on each item response's relationship to one or more external criteria (e.g., respondents' job performance);

- **expert-based scoring keys** that require a sample of subject matter experts who determine each item response's effectiveness in relation to its situation;

- **theoretical scoring keys** for which an underlying theory is applied to evaluate the effectiveness of item responses.

This scoring key is already developed in the CAWC method and it includes three levels of rating. The participant during the scoring phase makes himself/herself acquaint with the case and then chooses two responses: one which is the closest (max) and one which is the furthest (min) to how he/she would behave.

Each response (reaction) is ascribed a certain value. The values are not visible to the participant until the survey is finished. The values are as follows:

- 4 for the most proper reaction;

- 3 for the insufficient reaction;

- 1 for the wrong reaction.

Continuing the example presented above, the responses for one of the Communication competency aspects is shown in the above table.

5.7. Define comments

Once all aspects, contexts and cases designed, it is important to prepare the comments that will form part of the Knowledge pills to be made in the last phase.

The comments are feedbacks to be given to the participant to help him understand the implications of his responses in specific situations related to his job. These will help him develop a Personal development Plan, during the workshop to which he will attend.

In the CAWC method, 3 comments are provided for each case, one for each response option. The comment is only shown for the response option that is rated as MAX and explains the consequences of the choice made.

The table below shows all the comments that have been produced within the CAWC, for each one of its 5 aspects and the different combinations of response options. They can be used as an inspiration for developing new comments for new cases to be created.

Aspect	Response options	Score	Comments for the "COMMUNICATION" competency
1	A	4	In the described situation, if you choose the following strategy: „I ask questions during listening to him/her and paraphrase the meaning of the speech. I just want to know the intentions of the other side. I try to bring out the concrete issues of his/her speech and to get know his/her point of view", you will respond the most effectively from the point of view of the quality of communication. Knowing what questions to ask, i.e. open, not aggravating questions, not only improves understanding of your interlocutor's message, but it also gives your interlocutor some clues that may help clarify it. This response gets the highest score in the multiple choice test.
	B	3	In the described situation, if you decide to: I do not interrupt despite of his/her way of speaking, because I don't want to so annoy my partner. So I make notes to talk with him/her after the meeting and try to sort things out and understand his/her point of view" you will respond more effectively, since you are making sure that the atmosphere of the meeting is good, in other words, that the conditions are favorable for successful communication. But will it really help you improve the quality of communication? Not necessarily. If you continue misinterpreting the particular elements of your partner's message, you may never get to see the whole picture. This response gets the average score.
	C	2	In the described situation, if you decide to: Because the subject matter of the meeting is close to my competences, I interrupt longer parts od the speech and I finish the sentences by my own, so I speed up the time of the meeting." , you will most likely inhibit the improvement of the quality of communication. Why? Despite your good intentions, your partner may feel like you're correcting him or her, patronizing or pointing out his or her incompetence, which may evoke many negative emotions. From the point of view of the rules of communication, your colleague is your interlocutor: your partner, sender, receiver, while emotions, especially the negative ones, are not helping you, to say the least, in making your communication more precise. For these reasons, this response gets the lowest score.
2	A	4	If you decide to respond in the following way: „If I know the goal of the presentation and the audience as well, I start with creating a presentation structure: what to say at the beginning, how to expand topics and eventually the part dedicated for questions, and finally - how to sum up. Then I can fill in the structure with the content" , you will respond most effectively. Why? Actions listed in this example allow you to (1) concentrate on the reception of your message, in other words, on how to maximize the understanding of your message by recipients, (2) anticipate most of the difficult questions, and (3) select the right elements of your message to ensure that it becomes interesting to your audience. This response gets the highest score in the multiple choice test.
	B	3	In the described situation, if you decide to: „If I know the goal of the presentation and the audience as well, I start with preparing the main points - the crucial

			information which are to say. There is nothing more I can prepare, because presentations create really spontaneous situations. The key to presenter's success is in fast and proper reactions for the unexpected questions and behaviors" , your presentation will be more effective, since you at least have made the effort to collect the key information. It is hard, however, to expect that this response is enough in the described spontaneous situations, such as difficult questions from the audience or lack of interest in some of the issues. This response gets the average score.
	C	2	*In the described situation, if you think: If I know the goal of the presentation and the audience as well, that is enough. I'm a professional in my job, so I'm prepared enough. The knowledge about the goal gives me extra hints what is to point out, if I want to achieve it. By the same token, the knowledge about the audience prompts me how to behave when the presentation will run" , you will most likely end up preparing a poor presentation, poorly thought-over and one that is probably concentrated on making your point more so than on making your audience understand your point. For these reasons this response gets the lowest score*
3	A	4	*In the described situation, if you decide to: I will ensure about the accuracy of the information. I decide to introduce specialized language from the very beginning of the training, to let the employee get used to it quickly. I also prepare examples for any potentially incomprehensible terms and I think how to explain them using the language clear for out of the company people" ,you will respond most effectively. Why? You concentrate on improving the recipient's perception by focusing not only on language comprehension, but also on providing examples, which greatly improves the chances of understanding your message precisely. After all, the quality of message is a measure of the quality of communication. This response gets the highest score in the multiple choice test.*
	B	3	*In the described situation, if you decide to: : „I will ensure about the accuracy of the information. I decide to introduce specialized language from the very beginning of the training, to let the employee get used to it quickly. If he/she doesn't understand any term I'll try to explain it using examples or simpler language." , you will respond more effectively, since you have taken the effort to solve the communicational problem, so you have concentrated not only on the message, but also on the ability of the recipient to understand it. However, you are still reactive as far as your reaction to problems with communication is concerned. In other words you're still putting out a fire, instead of preventing it. This response gets the average score*
	C	2	*In the described situation, if you decide to: „I will ensure about the accuracy of the information. I decide to introduce specialized language from the very beginning of the training, to let the employee get used to it quickly. I expect that the employee will reach out to the meaning of incomprehensible terms on his/her own. It will make it easier to learn them faster in that way", you will most likely fail to make it easier for other people to understand the message; you will also discourage them by acting not only against clarity but also against motivation. For these reasons this response gets the lowest score.*
4	A	4	*In the described situation, if you respond with an open mind and decide to: I present my opinion about the issue and I listen to my friend's one. I ask questions to understand better the source of his/her opinion. Then I let my friend to get the same knowledge from myself" , you will respond most effectively. Why? You have decided to learn what the other party's opinions are based on and make sure that the other party learns the same thing about you. A successful completion of this stage will allow you to start the discussion based on the real grounds, not on the basis of what you imagine the other party believes and why. Later on, if you make sure that your discussion has a common, positive goal, you stand a better chance of concluding the discussion constructively, even though you and your partner still hold different views. This response gets the highest score in the multiple choice test*
	B	3	*In the described situation, if you decide to: „I present my opinion and ask the friend to do the same. But if I hear something that I can't agree with, I'll argue at the same time because I never want to leave any problem issues without any explanation" , you will respond more effectively, because you will get more information, compared to what you already have in your mind, and you will allow the other party to do same. However, the moment both of you start to argue before hearing the other party's opinions and their grounds, your emotions and eagerness to prove you're right will prevent both of you from gathering all the information. This way your*

			discussion will be based on what you imagine the other party believes rather than on what the real issue is. This response gets the average score.
	C	2	*In the described situation, if you decide to: „I present my opinion and try to convince my friend to accept it." , you will most likely fail to achieve anything, because, if your partner's attitude is similar to yours, you will both find it difficult to accept each other's opinion. If, on the other hand, your partner's attitude is less proactive and can be easily convinced to accept your point of view, you will lose the chance to improve the solution you suggested by taking points of view, ideas or experience of someone other than yourself into account. For these reasons your response gets the lowest score.*
5	A	4	*In the described situation, if you stay open-minded and decide to: „I present my prepared arguments and persuade others to accept my idea. I react immediately if I hear counter-arguments, but if I hear any arguments which sound convincing for me, I accept them. I control my emotions and try to pacify others to let everyone use arguments, not emotions" you will respond most effectively. Why? First of all, you will try to persuade others that your arguments are right. Second of all, you will stay open to the arguments proposed by the other party. And lastly, you will make sure that the discussion is based on rational assumptions, which, assuming that everyone will benefit from finding the best solution and creates the best chance of succeeding. This response gets the highest score in the multiple choice test.*
	B	3	*In the described situation, if you decide to: I present my prepared arguments and repeat them several times because I assume that they are convincing and should win finally. However, if I don't meet any positive response, I retreat.", you will respond more effectively, since you have tried to persuade others and make sure that the rules of dispute are observed, because otherwise emotions will inhibit the exchange of rational arguments. However, your attitude, despite the will to back off, proves that you treat discussion like a battlefield where you can either win or lose (hence your decision to back off if your partner refuses to accept your arguments). While in fact, discussion may serve a different purpose than winning; if both parties agree that the purpose of a discussion is to find the best solution, regardless of who designed it, it stands a better chance of succeeding and the success can be shared by everyone. Unfortunately, with this approach, your chances are limited. This response gets the average score.*
	C	2	*In the described situation, if you think: Whether I convince someone to my idea, it proves my professionalism. So I use any of arguments to adopt my solution. I let even advance emotions, because they tell everybody of my involvement in the discussion and support my efficiency. " , you will respond ineffectively from the point of view of ensuring that the discussion is constructive. The purpose of a discussion is not to convert your partner at any cost, but to find the best solution from the point of view of efficiency of your actions. For these reasons, this response gets the lowest score.*

5.8. Design suitable Knowledge pills

Being the competency assessment method presented in a technological desktop tool, it is essential that it is backed by a learning content that helps participants to acquire that knowledge and skills that may need to improve their competences.

Hence, if new competences, including new aspects and new cases (mother and contextualised) are created, this approach will only be considered as completed when their corresponding knowledge pills are created to give the opportunity to the participants to go through a short and attractive course and get the chance to understand better the situation described in the case, gain some knowledge and train proper skills. This course will includes all what is needed to solve the cases in a proper way.

The process of developing any new Knowledge pill is standard and includes the following for steps: