

A Jungian Guide to Competences

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The competences analysis offers a means of clarifying a range of organizational issues by the means of a common framework. Once having decided (or revisited) the organizational vision and mission, decided from this the strategy and structure of the organization, then allocated jobs to achieve the overall mission, the key competences required to do these jobs can be determined. Individual ability can be measured against the required competences and appropriate training given if needed. Thus there is, or should be, a continuous link between organizational purpose and the activities and skills of everyone in the organization.

There are, however, a few problems in practice with this all-embracing approach. To begin with, it proves remarkably difficult for senior management to agree on a clear vision. The list of competences that often provide a starting point for selection of key competences seem to be generated at random. There is no clear overall model in these lists to guide thought processes. The selected lists of competences that emerge do not take into account the mutually contradictory nature of some of the competences ("must see the whole picture" versus "must have an eye for detail", to give a rather extreme example). There are no clear developmental or training models to help individuals to decide how they should tackle competences. Finally, no account is taken of individual preferences or motivation to use the identified competences in everyday work activities.

All this is surprising as there already exists a clear framework and map of competences which answers all the above issues. The problem with this model is that it is usually presented purely in the context of individual growth, and often in language that is difficult for the business world to relate to. It is the model of functions that Jung developed in his theory of psychological types in the 1920s[1].

The purpose of this article is to examine how Jung's model can help the competences user. The pure-bred Jungians may well find it somewhat sacrosanct to use the model in this way but its explanatory power is so great we cannot afford to neglect it. The starting point will be a description of the functions that Jung defined. Then their relation to competences will be examined and the development model examined.

THE JUNGIAN FUNCTIONS

Jung suggested two key factors in looking at what he called personality. The first factor is our orientation towards the inner or outer world. The outer world is that of "objects", things that we perceive as being external to us. The inner world is one of ideas, of values and of feelings. It is subjective, but according to Jung it also exists as a shared world of ideas. He called it the collective unconscious, but it can be seen as having a great deal in common with some modern ideas of organizational culture and Karl Popper's mental world with it existing in its own right.

The second factor is that of the "functions". Jung defines four functions, sensing, intuition, thinking and feeling. These do not exist in the abstract but in combination with the first factor that Jung defined. If a function flows towards the external world it is said to be extroverted, if it flows towards the inner world it is said to be introverted. By taking the four functions and allocating them to both extroverted and introverted mode, eight possible combinations can be seen, as shown in Figure 1.

Extroversion and introversion refer to attitudes but these can only be seen in respect of the combinations given above. To talk of someone as extroverted is therefore inaccurate: the function must be defined as well, such as extroverted sensing. This is crucial to the discussion of competences that will follow. Extroversion does not imply sociability: to go

Extroverted sensing	—	Introverted sensing
Extroverted intuition	—	Introverted intuition
Extroverted thinking	—	Introverted thinking
Extroverted feeling	—	Introverted feeling

FIGURE 1.
Jungian Functions

back to the above example, someone with extroverted sensing would be drawn to the external world of things rather than people, like many engineers for example. The functions and their orientation can be plotted as in Figure 2. The functions will now be examined in more depth.

Sensing is the practical function. According to Jung it uses the five senses to pick up concrete data and facts. The extroverted sensing function does this in the world of outer reality. People with this function to a developed degree would be practical, down to earth, and ready to take concrete action to achieve their aims. They would be highly skilled in anything that required manual dexterity or physical prowess. Obvious examples of people expected to use this function well would be engineers, sportspeople and craftspeople.

The introverted sensing function is also concerned with facts, concrete experience and detail. However, because the orientation is towards the inner world of subjective reality, people who use this function will abstract sense impression from the outer world and are able to remember and manipulate these in their minds and memories — e.g. fashion designers, who can remember details of clothing or can visualize what a dress made up of a particular fabric would be like.

Intuition is the active creative process that sees links and possibilities between patterns in different areas. It is concerned with overall patterns and hence meaningfulness. The

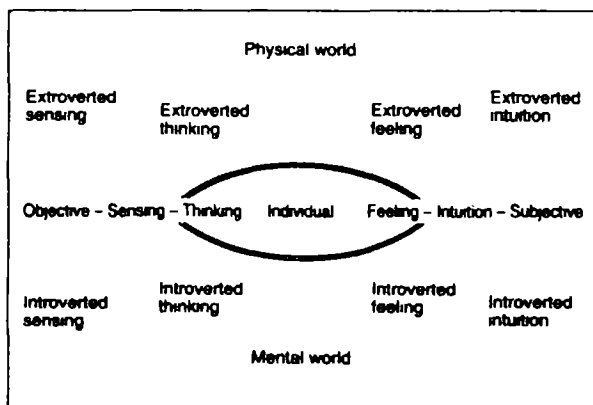


FIGURE 2.
The Jungian Functions in Relation to the World

intuitive function has to move away from concrete reality to develop an imaginative vision of the future in order to function as it should. The extroverted intuitive function looks to apply possibilities in the external world, whether this be of things, ideas or people. Thus people with this function will be skilled at seeing new opportunities and gaining insights into situations. They generate great enthusiasm because of their commitment to their vision. However, stable situations will be suffocating to them because this eliminates possibilities for change. They may repress facts that do not fit in with their intuitive visions. Margaret Thatcher may well be a good example of someone who exemplified all the positive aspects of this function. Often these people are the great political and business leaders.

The introverted intuitive function is about finding patterns within the inner subjective world of ideas and values. This is the function that sees creative links between different thought systems, for example. Those people with this function well developed are not to be found so much in business but they certainly exist in pure research and anything that involves developing radical new ways of looking at the world.

The thinking function looks for logical and rational analysis. Activities have to be supported by the intellect, that is, thought through and planned. Decisions have to be "right" with clear criteria. The extroverted thinking function is concerned with understanding and organizing the world according to the power of logical and universal truths and principles. It is used by applied scientists. Planning and organizing is their forte; needless to say, many managers have this function to a well-developed degree. Their standards and principles are clear and to the point.

On the other hand the introverted thinking function, although also concerned with rationality, uses the thought processes to analyse and understand rather than apply. People with this preference have to get to the bottom of things. This can make them very good objective judges and highly skilled at understanding complex principles and procedures. Their critical thinking skills would be brilliant. Systems analysts, accountants and academics may well possess this function to a high degree.

The feeling function is concerned with values rather than emotions, such as fairness, honour and trust. Things, ideas, people will be evaluated against these values without the need for logic. In fact logic is antithetical to the use of this function.

The extroverted feeling function looks to the values of those in the external world — other people. People using this function will try to work within these values and have an agreed consensus on them. They will be keen to be with people, to communicate and discuss common areas of interest, to motivate, to ensure that all live up to the agreed values. As a consequence, people with this function developed fully tend to be good at dealing with others. This would include categories such as nurses, industrial relations people and similar occupations. It most assuredly does not include many managers, at least in the industrial and commercial sectors.

The introverted feeling function operates on values but this time values as exhibited in the inner world. People with this function will be interested in others' values in so far as they relate to their own and may make excellent counsellors. However, they will often have a problem in sharing these feelings with others and may be misunderstood. Their competence lies in caring for others' wellbeing on an individual basis; not in a sociable sense but an empathetic way. Priests and religious members often have this competence.

Whether these functions exist in the form given by Jung is debatable; however, they do provide a useful map to explore the way we operate. What is clear from Jung's descriptions is that proficiency in one area may well, by definition, suggest deficiency in an allied area. Thinking, for example, can be inimical to Feeling. How these functions relate to the commonly accepted competences in general use will now be explored.

Competences are often grouped in the following way:

- personal effectiveness/personal characteristics;
- communication/interpersonal skills;
- analytical skills;
- leadership/management skills;
- professional/technical skills.

Leaving aside the last category, competences under each heading can be subsumed under each of the Jungian functions. Most of the communication and interpersonal skills competences can be classified in terms of extroverted feeling, for example. Analytical skills will come under both extroverted and introverted thinking. Leadership and management skills are divided between thinking and feeling skills, with the ability to paint a vision for the organization and to identify opportunities as extroverted intuition. Detailed precision work or practical flair would come under sensing.

This is not usually how people see the functions — they regard them more usually as “personality” characteristics. However, Jung emphasized that in a person each function could be: underdeveloped — not using the function enough; balanced — using the function appropriately; overdeveloped — using the function too much.

When a function can be used in an appropriate way in either the external or internal world then it is under control. However, if it is underdeveloped then it is not available for use appropriately. Often functions like this, labelled “primitive” by Jung, are used clumsily. For example, if extroverted feeling is underdeveloped in a person, their use of it may result in alienating people. Similarly, people may try to use one skilled function all the time — using extroverted thinking, for example, to deal with people, which will bring disastrous results as well.

From the definitions given the functions can be viewed as innate preferences, which people are motivated to use, but with differing levels of ability. Furthermore, these functions will be more appropriate in certain situations than others. All this gives us a clear framework to develop the key work competences within each. Not only that, but there is a wealth of research literature telling us the effects of these combinations of preferences/competences in areas such as teams, types of organizational structure that people with different competences will be happiest working within, decision-making strengths and so forth[2].

Furthermore, there are large collections of population breakdowns by Jungian functions. These are only preferences collected by use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator[3] but preferences may give an indication of the competences of the occupational populations examined. For example, clinical psychologists have a very high preference for intuition rather than sensing. If this is seen, in competence terms, as the ability to identify meaningful patterns from intangible data, then it can well be regarded as a key competence which all clinical psychologists would need. British managers[2] are overwhelmingly sensing. Again, extrapolating from preference to competence, this would mean that most of their abilities lay in practical matters. They are also largely thinking and low on feeling — this suggests a possible low level of ability in dealing with people.

The functions can also give us insights into areas such as teamwork. Those who are familiar with the Belbin Team Roles, for example, can see parallels between those roles and the Jungian functions[4] (See Figure 3).

DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCES

The functions that Jung puts forward are only the beginnings of his developmental model since expanded by many others[5]. Simply stated, his view is that we all develop high levels of competences in certain preferred functions which we try to use to the exclusion of the others. This is quite acceptable in the early stages of adult life when we should be building on our strengths. Also, the purpose of education is to provide a common cultural framework within which we can all communicate. As we grow older, then, the need for more individual development becomes manifest. People need to develop different functions, ones which hitherto they had been loath to use, and in which they are usually unskilled. Resistance to doing this is often high because of the degree of discomfort this will bring. Individuals will only do this as a result of a crisis in many cases. Burnout, for example[6], or stress[7].

Jung makes the point that certain functions by definition exclude others. For example, high competence in sensing would make it difficult to have high levels of skills in intuition functions and vice versa. The same could be argued for thinking and feeling functions. The areas which can be regarded as "incompetent" in individuals he called their shadow — no mysticism needed to understand its usage.

So going back to competences in general, Jung's model would suggest very strongly that there are certain competences that would not be found linked together. Doctors with high analytical skills (thinking function) are unlikely to be competent in dealing with people (feeling) initially. Companies can save themselves much effort when putting together ideal lists of competences for particular jobs by remembering this. To expect equal competences in opposing pairs would mean that only those past midlife who have struggled to develop balance in all areas would be the source of potential candidates — a good reason to hire those in the latter halves of their lives, the only disadvantage being that they might not accept the limitations of younger, more specialized, and hence biased, individuals.

Extroverted sensing	—	Company worker
Extroverted intuition	—	Resource investigator
Extroverted thinking	—	Shaper
Extroverted feeling	—	Chair
Introverted sensing	—	Completer-finisher
Introverted intuition	—	Plant-innovator
Introverted thinking	—	Monitor evaluator
Introverted feeling	—	Teamworker

FIGURE 3.
Belbin Team Roles and the Jungian Functions

CONCLUSIONS — WHY ARE JUNG'S IDEAS NOT USED?

The Jungian model does appear to provide a clear framework for anchoring debate and questions about competences in general. Why then has it not been used in this way? On one hand those who are familiar with the model tend to safeguard it strongly in terms of keeping its usage "pure", and only to be used in individual psychological development and personality theory, instead of seeing it as a set of competence statements. The latter approach would render it simple and easy to apply, while still maintaining the comprehensive nature of the model.

The empiricists of the competences approach, on the other hand, object to any implication of mysticism, especially in uses of words like personality, self and shadow, which Jungians are apt to throw around. Hence they tend to shy away from Jung's ideas which is a pity given the sheer descriptive power of the model. Thus the wheel is either re-invented or else not even thought of. Jung thought of himself as a scientist, a gatherer of facts. Would that more could do the same.

Finally, there is one overwhelming reason why so many find it difficult to work with these ideas. Jung's model implies very strongly that very few of us are perfect, are able in all competences. It suggests that to reach this stage is a long and arduous process that will occupy us all of our lives. This alone is a very difficult assumption for most people to accept.

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