

# Management competencies for the development of heads of department in the higher education context: a literature overview

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## Abstract

*The increasing changes in and demands made on higher education institutions in the 21st century have had a considerable impact on the roles and responsibilities of heads of department (HODs), and have led to increasing emphasis on the development of core HOD management competencies. The aim of this study was to identify the management competencies deemed necessary for HODs to function effectively within the higher education context. A systematic review of the management literature was conducted. A qualitative data analysis revealed forty managerial competencies that could be clustered under 18 higher-order dimensions. A survey revealed that HODs deemed leadership, financial management and project management to be the most important higher-order dimensions required to function effectively within their roles. The information obtained in this study could potentially serve as a foundation for the development of an HOD training programme in the South African higher education environment.*

**Key words:** *competency framework; head of department; higher education; management competencies; management development; management dimension*

## 1 Introduction

The post-apartheid era has seen major transformations in the higher education arena, requiring academic heads of department (HODs) to act as leaders of change and transformation (Simon 2007; Smith & Hughey 2006). The changes in the higher education environment are especially evident in the shift from collegialism to managerialism (Deem 1998; Simon 2007), and perhaps best epitomised by the statement Paul Simon made in his transformation agenda (Simon 2007): “*Once upon a time there was an ocean. But now it is a mountain range. Something unstoppable set into motion. Nothing is different, but everything changed.*” Parker and Wilson (2002) confirm the shift from collegialism to managerialism in their study of western universities. They state that owing to mass higher education and knowledge growth, universities of the 21st century will recognise major changes in the role of HODs. Government and public demands for greater accountability and more efficient

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management at universities are to be heard in both New Zealand and Australia. As a result of the shift from collegialism to managerialism, greater demands are being made on academic personnel (Simon 2007). HODs have to function not only in their academic capacity but also as managers.

However, researchers such as Filan (1999) and Raines and Alberg (2003) mention that for the past few years very few academic members of staff in the higher education environment have been required to function as managers, and therefore those academics who have been placed in managerial positions (such as HODs) probably do not have the necessary skills. According to these authors, it is a matter of concern that many universities provide little to no formal training for HODs. It has become clear from the literature that most HODs with no prior experience of management assume their role without the benefit or advantage of any leadership or managerial training. The result could well be a lack of clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, as well as of role conflict and stress (Gmelch 2004; Hare & Hare 2002; Raines & Alberg 2003). Tucker (1992) is of the opinion that this confusion might result from the variety of roles an HOD has to fulfil, and that the responsibilities differ from university to university and from department to department.

Aziz et al (2005) posit that higher education institutions are experiencing a need for managerial training as the majority of managers only occupy their positions as a result of their academic qualifications and/or length of service. Holding a management qualification, degree or MBA does not necessarily qualify anyone as a professional or competent manager. This is true in business and even more so in academia (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Romen 1993; Filan 1999). Only when the management qualification is coupled with the right values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and managerial competencies, and when these are displayed and practised at work, can it be said that one has the makings of a competent professional manager (Aziz et al 2005). In the light of the foregoing it is apparent that it is necessary to train HODs in specific managerial competencies.

Given the limited resources allocated to higher education institutions and the need to prepare new and existing HODs for their position and responsibilities before they assume their role, it is important to be able to focus on the competencies they require to fulfil their role effectively. According to Aziz et al (2005), efficiency in management competencies will ultimately lead to successful and efficient task accomplishment. As a result of the limited, general and standardised management training and development programmes in higher education institutions, a framework of management competencies for training purposes has become vitally important. A management competency framework for the training and development of HODs could guide higher education institutions towards the most efficient and cost-effective way to develop effective managers in line with the transformation agenda that emphasises managerialism. The right knowledge, skills and abilities (linked to the required management competence) can contribute to the achievement of most of an HOD's essential tasks and responsibilities (Aziz et al 2005). Emphasis therefore needs to be placed on the managerial role an HOD needs to fulfil and the competencies necessary in order to function effectively within this managerial role. In the light of the foregoing, the purpose of this study was to identify the management competencies HODs deem necessary in order to function effectively within the higher education context. The information obtained in this study provides a putative foundation for the construction of an HOD training programme in the South African higher education environment.

## **2 Current theoretical perspectives**

### **2.1 Historical development of the position of department heads**

According to Vacik (1997), little research has been done on the historical development of academic departments and the role of HODs. However, a review of the literature indicates that the position of HOD was first formalised in the period 1870 to 1925. The development of this position was influenced by various factors, including what Dyer and Miller (1994:4) call the reconstruction period, vocational education, a new interest in philanthropy and development, and a move from society based on agriculture and land interest to one based on industry. Other events that contributed to the development of the role of HOD were changes that took place within higher education institutions, and industry politics. In the 1890s, departments began to develop and increase in number. The number of HOD positions grew rapidly with the development of departments, and more specialised heads were required to oversee the newly developed academic units or departments of institutions. Booth (1982:4) describes an academic department as the "basic administrative unit of a college or university" and goes on to explain that the key aspect of the department is its "monopoly over teaching, research and service within a particular realm of knowledge". Du Toit (2007) presents the academic department as a combined structure of governance, a mixture of elements of collegialism and managerialism in varying degrees on the one hand, while also functioning as an administrative structure on the other. In light of this, the position of an HOD was imbued with authority and power (Booth 1982; Du Toit 2007; Lyons 2008; Osborne, Sandberg & Tuomi 1994).

According to Lyons (2008), the development of the role of HOD has not been without its problems. In most tertiary institutions, few academic staff 20 years ago could have expected to be a head of department and most of the individuals who did serve a period as HOD were experienced in this field. However, today many staff members can expect to serve a term as HOD and many of them have little experience of this role. Lyons (2008) argues that the changing role of universities in the 21st century may further influence the way in which the management role of the HOD is structured. It has therefore become imperative to explore the role of universities in the 21st century.

### **2.2 The role of universities in the 21st century**

Dyer and Miller (1999) note that higher education institutions have experienced substantial change and growth. Yang (2003) notes that globalisation is transforming the functioning and nature of higher education worldwide. According to Yang (2003), higher education institutions need to become customer focused, embrace the marketplace and function as full business enterprises in order to survive in the global competitive environment. In view of the changes that have occurred in higher education, Yang (2003) believes that it is necessary to balance the new demands on the role of HODs with a degree of managerial skill.

Lyons (2008) confirms the changes in higher education institutions mentioned above, and maintains that some of these changes include greater competition for limited resources. As the number of universities grew, stronger opposition emerged from new providers. There was a greater tendency for students and faculties to generate their own funding. There was increased pressure to perform and be held accountable for actions, and new teaching technologies were implemented. These changes have placed tremendous pressure on the universities of the 21st century.

Although there are contrasting perspectives of the changing role of the HOD, certain established aspects are still valued in the 21st century. Some of these aspects include research, the preservation of the tradition of rigorous debate, high academic standards and independent social and intellectual critiques (Lyons 2008). However, various authors (Brent 2001; Lyons 2008; Williams 2001) are under the impression that these valued roles are under severe threat as managerial control is becoming part of the university owing to the commercialisation of higher education institutions.

### **2.3 Roles of the HOD**

Parker and Wilson (2002) state that HODs need a certain set of competencies in order to be effective within their roles. They contend that it is crucial to understand and identify the role of an HOD in order to understand the competencies necessary for the effective management of a university. They further argue that it is imperative for all HODs to have a clear understanding of what their roles entail in order to be adequately prepared to make the transition from lecturer to academic head. Several authors have commented on the variety of roles that HODs need to perform. Different authors have, however, emphasised different roles within the higher education institution. These roles can be categorised as academic, administrative, managerial and leadership roles.

#### *2.3.1 The academic role*

The academic role includes teaching classes (Gmelch 2002; Lyons 2008; Sharma 2003), dealing with faculty affairs or academic staff (Lyons 2008), as well as the following: serving as departmental official or representative (Lyons 2008), evaluator (Lyons 2008; Smith & Sorcinelli 2000), facilitator (Lyons 2008), faculty or academic staff developer (Gmelch 2002; Lyons 2008; Sharma 2003), programme developer (Gmelch 2002; Lyons 2008; Sharma 2003; Smith & Hughey 2006), and researcher (Gmelch 2002; Hare & Hare 2002; Lyons 2008; Sharma 2003; Smith & Hughey 2006).

#### *2.3.2 The administrative role*

The administrative role includes being an administrator of examinations, admissions, house tests and practicals (Williams 2001), and being a channel of information policy (Lyons 2008; Parker & Wilson 2002).

#### *2.3.3 The management role*

The management category embraces the most roles. These include the following: advocate/politician (Lyons 2008), agent of change (Lyons 2008; Smith & Hughey 2006), anticipator (Lyons 2008), morale builder and maintainer (Lyons 2008; Sharma 2003), communicator (Hare & Hare 2002; Hecht 2004; Lyons 2008; Raines et al 2003; Sharma 2003; Sorcinelli 2000), conflict handler (Parker 2002; Sharma 2003), coordinator (Lyons 2008), delegator (Lyons 2008), diversity manager (Raines & Alberg 2003; Sorcinelli 2000), financial manager (Hare & Hare 2002; Hecht 2004; Lyons 2008; Parker & Wilson 2002; Raines & Alberg 2003; Sharma 2003; Smith & Hughey 2006), handling disciplinary matters (Dyer & Miller 1999), industry-institution interacter and negotiator (Parker & Wilson 2002; Smith & Hughey 2006), officer in charge (Hare & Hare 2002), performance manager (Hare & Hare 2002; Lyons 2008; Parker & Wilson 2002; Sorcinelli 2000) planner (Lyons 2008; Parker & Wilson 2002; Raines & Alberg 2003), problem solver (Lyons 2008; Smith & Hughey 2006), quality controller (Hare & Hare 2002; Parker & Wilson 2002), recruiter and selector (Hare & Hare 2002; Parker & Wilson 2002; Sharma 2003), strategic planner (Hare & Hare 2002; Parker & Wilson 2002; Smith & Hughey 2006) and time manager (Gmelch 2002; Lyons 2008).

#### *2.3.4 The leadership role*

The leadership role includes the role of adviser-counsellor (Lyons 2008; Smith & Hughey 2006), mentor and coach (Raines & Alberg 2003; Sorcinelli 2000; Williams 2001), motivator (Hecht 2004; Lyons 2008; Smith & Hughey 2006) and risk taker (Smith & Hughey 2006).

According to Yelder and Codling (2004:319), leadership and management are closely integrated in the academic context. These authors are of the opinion that both the academic leadership role and the management role require aspects of leadership, which in this sense cannot be written into a job description as a function. Leadership may be more appropriately regarded as a quality that an individual brings to the position. Furthermore, they emphasise that HODs are vested in a position and the managerial role which incorporates leadership should therefore be emphasised.

Gmelch (2002) notes that in order for an HOD to fulfil his or her role effectively, certain skills need to be present. Skills can be learnt formally through seminars, workshops and lectures, and these skills can further be practised through simulations, case studies, role-playing and action planning. Acquiring these skills will ultimately result in an HOD having the necessary competency to perform his or her role. HODs as managers therefore need certain competencies to function effectively in their roles (Hecht 2004). According to Hecht (2004), it is important to explore the differences, if any, between management competencies in the corporate sector and the competencies of managers in higher education institutions.

#### **2.4 Study objective**

The specific objective of this study was to explore the literature in order to identify a set of management competencies deemed necessary for HODs in the changed higher education context. In addition, this study aimed to identify the higher order competencies that HODs at a South African higher education institution deemed most important for their managerial role. Notwithstanding numerous publications on management competencies, there does not seem to be a clear indication as to which competencies it is most important to train HODs in to enable them to function effectively in a managerial role. In the context of the present study, the term managerial competence is viewed as the blend of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours that HODs need to carry out their tasks successfully. Managerial competence depends on both skill and knowledge, based on understanding. Competence includes the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to new tasks and situations (Warn & Tranter 2001). The practical value of this study lies in the insights that can be derived from the literature and that could be employed by higher education institutions to construct a training framework for HODs in preparation for their managerial role.

### **3 Research design**

#### **3.1 Research approach**

A broad systematic review (Petticrew & Roberts 2006) of the literature on managerial competencies was undertaken. Mouton (2001) refers to three typical applications of a non-empirical study, namely critical literature reviews, state-of-the-art reviews and integrative literature reviews. The first focus of this study was to do an integrative literature review and develop a conceptual framework of managerial competencies for HODs. The second focus of the study was to determine the competencies that HODs

deem most important for their managerial roles. A quantitative method was used (questionnaire) in order to identify the most important competencies.

## **3.2 Research method**

### *3.2.1 Research boundary*

Only articles published in English relating to management competencies within the corporate sector and in the higher education context were included in the database. In addition, only 52 HODs from a higher education institution in South Africa were invited to participate in the quantitative part of the study. A response rate of 79% was achieved. In a breakdown of the respondents' biographical information it was indicated that 27 of the respondents were male and 12 of the respondents were female. Two of the respondents did not indicate their gender on the questionnaires. Most of the HODs in the sample had worked in an academic environment for approximately 12 years; the average years of service of the respondents in the sample were almost 20 years in an academic environment. These HODs were representative of a variety of departments at the higher education institution.

### *3.2.2 Gathering the data*

The electronic databases that were consulted for the purpose of the literature review included Business Source Complete and EbscoHost. The *Journal for Higher Education* (2004), the *Journal of Life Long Education* (1994), the *Journal of Education* (1999), the *Journal of Training and Development* (2003) and (2006), the *Planning and Change Journal* (2007), the *Journal of Development in Business* (2002), the *Journal for Simulations and Experiential Learning* (2005), the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* (2010), the *Journal of Educational Management* (2000), the *Journal of Higher Education Policy Management* (2004) and (2005), and the *International Review of Education* (2003) were also consulted. Various books were consulted as well and an internet search was carried out, focusing explicitly on the concept of managerial competencies in the higher education and corporate contexts.

A questionnaire incorporating all the competencies identified in the literature review was developed. The list of competencies was structured and the managers were requested to rate the competencies in terms of importance.

### *3.2.3 Analysis of data*

In terms of the qualitative approach chosen, open coding was initially used to analyse the literature content and to identify themes and categories. Categories or themes were intentionally not pre-established to allow for the possibility that research might suggest further themes. This meant that no codes were developed in advance (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont 2002:345). After the core themes had been identified, a process called "focused coding" was used to analyse the data in more detail. The process of focused coding entails manually working through the qualitative data line by line, while focusing on the key themes identified during the open-coding process (Esterberg 2002). A process of axial coding allowed for the refinement of themes, followed by the clustering of identified themes in specific categories and subcategories (Flick, Von Kardoff & Steinke 2004). Next the higher-order categories and subcategories were used as a framework to compile the questionnaire used to capture the managers' perceptions of the importance of the identified managerial competencies. The responses of the managers were then ranked using quantitative procedures.

### 3.2.4 *Strategies used to ensure data quality and reporting*

In view of the qualitative nature of the first part of the research approach, it was necessary to take into account concerns regarding the reliability, validity and objectivity of the study. While it is widely agreed that concerns of reliability, validity and objectivity are inherent in research of this kind (Barnard & Fourie 2007, Mouton 1996, Patton 2002), the nature of the qualitative research paradigm implies a reasonable degree of freedom in the interpretation of data and the resultant personal construction of inferred meaning. Since researchers working within the qualitative research paradigm accept that perfect degrees of reliability and validity can never be achieved, they tend to focus on the following: considerations of trustworthiness or credibility, true value, creativity in the research approach, triangulation and reflection on the research endeavour in its entirety, as well as best practice (Barnard & Fourie 2007, Patton 2002).

To improve the validity and reliability of the present study, the criterion of representativeness of all sources studied (Mouton 2001) was adopted to ensure the quality of the literature review. The review was inductive in nature and databases were systematically reviewed and synthesised to develop a conceptual framework of managerial competencies. The competencies identified from the literature were discussed with a panel of three subject experts specialising in management at higher education institutions in order to gain face validity for the competencies identified. The average agreement rate was 98% (that is, 98% of the factors were allocated to the same theme categories by each subject expert).

As the specific questionnaire developed for the purpose of this study consisted of a list of items only (respondents were required to attach a value to the importance of a competency), the questionnaire had to adhere to face validity. The items in the questionnaire had to belong to managerial competencies necessary to function as an effective manager at the higher education institution. The questionnaire was classified as a perception questionnaire as it relied on the perceptions of the respondents. In addition, the questionnaire was given to subject experts in order to determine and establish the face validity of the questionnaire.

### 3.2.5 *Presentation of data*

The results of the systematic review and the most important higher order competencies identified are presented in tabular format in terms of the identified categories of managerial competencies.

## **4 Findings**

As higher education is increasingly functioning according to the same principles and requirements as the private and corporate sectors, it was assumed that the competencies required for managerial effectiveness should correspond to those in the corporate sector. Several authors have commented on the competencies managers need in order to be successful in the corporate or private sector and in the higher education environment.

It is evident from the literature that the role of the HOD and the skills necessary to function successfully in that role correspond to those recognised as important in the corporate sector. Most of the managerial competencies in the corporate sector coincided with the competencies in the higher education sector. Incorporating competencies identified for managers in the corporate sector and the competencies identified for HODs within the higher education context, 40 managerial competencies

(summarised in Table 1) were identified as being important for effective management functioning. These were clustered under 18 higher-order management dimensions, as shown in Table 2. Table 2 also revealed the findings of the higher-order competencies that HODs found most important for their managerial roles. Table 3 summarises the ranked means for each of the management competencies as measured by the questionnaire.

**Table 1**  
**Management competencies**

Managerial competencies	Authors	Corporate management competencies	Higher education management competencies
Administration	Marquis & Huston 2009; University of California 2005; Waggaman 1984	X	X
Change management	Gmelch 2002; Govender & Paramasur 2010; Marquis & Huston 2009; Spangler 1999; Yamasaki 1999	X	X
Client focus	Hirokawa, Barge, Becker and Sutherland 1989; Zimmerer & Yasin 1998	X	X
Coaching and mentoring	Chapman 2006; Spencer & Spencer 1993; University of California 2005	X	X
Communication (questioning, listening, building trust, empathy and mutual understanding)	Booth 1982; Cameron et al 1999; Carrol & Wolverton 2004; Chapman 2006; Dyer & Miller 1999; Filan 1999; Gillet-Karam 1999; Gmelch 2002; Henderson 2005; Hirokawa et al 1989; Mayer 1992; O'Neil & Onion 1994; Pettitt 1999; Spaid & Parsons 1999; University of California 2005; Waggaman 1984; Wardrope 2002; Yamasaki 1999	X	X
Competitor awareness (environmental scanning)	Chapman 2006; Kenworthy & Wong 2005; Waters et al 2003	X	X
Conflict management	Carroll & Wolverton 2004; Dyer & Miller 1999; Filan 1999; Gillet-Karam 1999; Gmelch 2002; Govender & Paramasur 2010; Tshwane University of Technology 2007; Waggaman 1984; Wardrope 2002; Zimmerer & Yasin 1998	X	X
Customer service	Business2Business 2003; Waters, Marzano & McNulty 2003	X	X
Dealing with discipline	Business2Business 2003; Waters et al 2003	X	X
Delegation	Dyer et al. 1999; Gillet-Karam 1999; Marquis et al. 2009	X	X
Developing and helping others (counselling)	Kenworthy et al. 2005; Waggaman 1984;	X	X
Developing others	Henderson 2005; Hirokawa 1989; Gillet-Karam 1999; Marquis et al. 2009; Tshwane University of Technology 2007; University of California 2005; Wardrope 2002	X	X
Directing and leadership	Booth 1982; Cameron et al. 1999; Dyer & Miller 1999; Hales 2001; Henderson 2005; Hirokawa et al 1989; Kenworthy & Wong 2005; Spencer & Spencer 1993; Tshwane University of Technology 2007; University of California 2005; Waggaman 1984; Wardrope 2002; Yamasaki 1999	X	X
Diversity management	Carroll & Wolverton 2004; Hesselbein & Goldsmith 2006; Tshwane University of Technology 2007; Wardrope 2002;	X	X
Emotional intelligence	Cooper & Sawat 1998; Hirokawa et al. 1989; Tshwane University of Technology 2007	X	X
Evaluation of training needs	Dyer et al 1999; Filan 1999; Gillet-Karam 1999; Marquis & Huston 2009; O'Neil & Onion 1994; Pettitt 1999	X	X
Financial understanding and management	Cameron et al 1999; Carroll & Wolverton 2004; Chapman 2006; Dyer & Miller 1999; Filan 1999; Gillet-Karam 1999; Hales 2001; Henderson 2005; Hirokawa et al 1989; Tshwane University of Technology 2007; University of California 2005	X	X
Labour relations	Business2Business 2003; Cameron et al 1999; Filan 1999; Gillet-Karam 1999; Tshwane University of Technology 2007	X	X
Managing relationships	Chapman 2006; Gillet-Karam 1999; Hecht 2004; Hirokawa et al 1989; O'Neil & Onion 1994; Spencer & Spencer 1993; Wardrope 2002	X	X
Mentoring and coaching	Carroll & Wolverton 2004; Gillet-Karam 1999; Gmelch 2002; Govender & Paramasur 2010; Marquis & Huston 2009; Pettitt 1999; Yamasaki 1999	X	X

Monitoring and dissemination of information	Govender et al. 2010; Hales 2001; Waters et al. 2003	X	X
Motivation of teams	Business2Business 2003; Carroll et al. 2004; Gillet-Karam 1999; Pettitt 1999; Wardrope 2002; Yamasaki 1999	X	X
Negotiation	Booth 1982; Dyer & Miller 1999; Gillet-Karam 1999; Gmelch 2002; Hales 2001; Henderson 2005; Pettitt 1999; Tshwane University of Technology 2007; Waggaman 1984; Wardrope 2002;	X	X
Organising and restructuring of departments	Spencer & Spencer 1993; Waters et al 2003	X	X
Organisational awareness	Hirokawa et al 1989; Tshwane University of Technology 2007	X	X
Performance management	Chapman 2006; Spencer & Spencer 1993; Waters et al 2003	X	X
Planning (prioritising and organising)	Booth 1982; Chapman 2006; Dyer & Miller 1999; Filan 1999; Gillet-Karam 1999; Hales 2001; Marquis & Huston 2009; Mayer 1992; O'Neil & Onion 1994; Pettitt 1999; University of California 2005; Waggaman 1984; Yamasaki 1999	X	X
Presentations to groups	Chapman 2006; Waggaman 1984; Wardrope 2002	X	X
Problem solving	Booth 1982; Carroll & Wolverton 2004; Chapman 2006; Govender & Paramasur 2010; Hales 2001; Marquis & Huston 2009; Mayer 1992; O'Neil & Onion 1994; Pettitt 1999; Waggaman 1984;	X	X
Project management	Chapman 2006; Govender & Paramasur 2010; Tshwane University of Technology 2007	X	X
Quality control	Hales 2001; Waters et al. 2003	X	X
Recruitment, selection and induction	Cameron et al 1999; Hirokawa et al 1989; Marquis & Huston 2009; Spangler 1999	X	X
Risk management	Business2Business 2003	X	X
Stakeholder focus	Chapman 2006; Hales 2001; Hirokawa et al 1989	X	X
Strategic planning	Kenworthy & Wong 2005; O'Neil & Onion 1994	X	X
Strategic management (planning, formulation and implementation)	Filan 1999; Gmelch 2002; Marquis & Huston 2009; Mayer 1992; O'Neil & Onion 1994; Pettitt 1999; Tshwane University of Technology 2007	X	X
Team leadership and management	Cameron et al 1999; Kenworthy & Wong 2005; Gillet-Karam 1999; Hecht 2004; Mayer 1992; Tshwane University of Technology 2007; Spencer & Spencer 1993; Wardrope 2002; Yamasaki 1999	X	X
Time management	Filan 1999; Henderson 2005; Lyons 2008; Marquis & Huston 2009	X	X
Using and developing knowledge	Business2Business 2003; Chapman 2006; Hales 2001; Rowley 2000; Waters et al 2003	X	X
Using information and information technology	Booth 1982; Chapman 2006; Filan 1999; Hales 2001; Hirokawa et al 1989; Mayer 1992; Pettitt 1999; Spangler 1999; Tshwane University of Technology 2007; Wardrope 2002;	X	X

#### 4.1 Strategic management

According to Bean (1993), strategic management begins with an analysis of the environment. Several environmental factors, such as human resources, products and services, culture and climate, policies, technology, the infrastructure, customers, markets, social factors and the public sector, competition and the economy, need to be considered when doing strategic planning. Analysis of the internal and external environment is crucial when planning and formulating strategy within an organisation. Bean (1993) emphasises the importance of the next step after the strategy has been formulated, namely implementing the planned strategy. Ehlers and Lazenby (2004), as well as Analoui (2007), divide the strategic management process into strategic direction

and environmental analysis, strategy formulation and strategy implementation. Strategy planning and formulation, strategy implementation and environmental scanning and analysis can therefore be clustered under the dimension of strategic management.

#### **4.2 Time management**

Time management is a means by which one can organise and use time and other resources effectively in order to make the most of them. Clements and Gido (2006) suggest that an effective measure in managing one's time is to make a to-do list. This will assist in the day-to-day planning of all tasks and activities. Landsberger (1996) also suggests that creating a daily/weekly planning list will help you to prioritise and organise tasks and activities. The competencies of day-to-day planning and time management can therefore be clustered under an overall time management dimension.

#### **4.3 Leadership**

Ivancevich and Matteson (1990:387) define leadership as an attempt to influence the activities of followers and state that "motivation plays a vital role in the influence a leader will have on his/her followers". Influencing someone's motivation means getting them to want to do what you know must be done. Robbins (2003:314) defines leadership as "the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals" and links leadership to the ability to motivate people to do something. Therefore, motivation seems to be a vital talent for a good leader. Counselling subordinates effectively and helping them with their problems will have a positive effect on the organisation in the long run (Ivancevich & Matteson 1990). As leaders play a role in creating the long-term vision and success of an organisation, they should be able to counsel subordinates. According to Bisbee (2007), counselling is a leadership issue and to be an effective counsellor leaders need to respect employees, have a degree of self-awareness and show empathy towards the subordinate being counselled.

Childs (2004) suggests that emotional intelligence is a vital quality for today's leaders, since they have to face many challenges. The necessary degree of emotional intelligence will help a leader in his/her difficult role. Heathfield (2008) points out that being able to delegate is another key aspect of leadership. She argues that if tasks are not successfully delegated to subordinates, the team will become inefficient and demoralised. Overall leadership of team members, motivation of the whole team and individual team members, one-to-one counselling with subordinates and team members, delegation of tasks to the team and the team members as well as emotional intelligence are all competencies that can be clustered under the dimension of leadership.

#### **4.4 Communication**

Callahan, Fleenor and Knudson (1986) describe communication as a vital tool that can be used by management for sharing and circulating information and gaining a common understanding. A significant component of a manager's role is to communicate, whether by conducting meetings or facilitating discussions. Clements and Gido (2006) confirm that oral and written communication, effective listening, meetings, presentations and report writing are the key to business communication. According to Robbins (2003), communication serves the functions of control, motivation, emotional expression and information. He divides communication into three basic methods: oral communication, written communication and nonverbal communication.

As early as the 1980s, Callahan et al (1986) emphasised the integral role that information technology was already playing in communication in organisations. They expressed their concern that computers were impacting on organisations at an extreme level. However, on a positive note, they pointed out that computer and information technology was helping managers at all levels to gain a better understanding of their organisations and how they operated as a whole (Callahan et al 1986). General communication skills, monitoring and dissemination of information, effective use of IT, planning and running meetings and effective follow-up, business writing and creating and giving effective presentations to groups are competencies that can be clustered under the dimension of communication management.

#### **4.5 Performance management**

McNamara (2008) defines performance management as a process by which one continuously monitors performance in the accomplishment of the organisation's mission or goals. According to McNamara (2008), performance management can be divided into four key phases. The first phase consists in drawing up the actual performance agreement between employer and employee. This involves planning the performance of tasks as well. The second phase consists in implementing the performance agreement and coaching the employee or team. The third phase involves continuously tracking whether the employee or team is still performing as initially planned or agreed. The final phase in the process involves rewarding the performance of the individual or team. A reward aims to direct and reinforce effective and desired work behaviours by allocating appropriate rewards to employees, whether financial or nonfinancial (McNamara 2008). Performance management which incorporates planning, implementation and follow-up and rewards performance is a competency that can be clustered under the dimension of performance management.

#### **4.6 Industrial relations**

Tustin (1994:13) defines industrial relations as:

*an interdisciplinary field of study which concerns itself with the continuous process of control over the dynamic individual and collective relationship between workers and management in organisations, functioning within the wider environment, with a view to determining the conditions under which it is done so that the needs of both parties are addressed.*

This "interdisciplinary field" consists of various components. Tustin (1994) summarises some of these components as collective bargaining, conflict handling, negotiation, mediation and arbitration in order to deal with disciplinary issues, handling strikes and lockouts, handling grievances, addressing poor performance and addressing worker dissatisfaction. According to Bendix (1992), industrial relations can be broken up into several practices. These involve the employer-employee relationship, relationships with representative bodies, collective bargaining, industrial democracy and workers' participation, negotiation, dispute settlement and industrial actions.

Finnemore (2002) and Grobler, Wörnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield (2010) confirm that negotiation and tasks such as handling disputes and grievances and dealing with discipline all fall under the dimension of industrial relations. The competencies of handling grievances and disputes, dealing with issues of discipline, negotiation and conflict resolution can therefore be clustered under the dimension of industrial relations. Although handling matters such as the above is more likely to be the responsibility of

the human resource manager, the HOD still needs to have an overview of the concepts should it be expected of the HOD to be involved in some of the phases.

#### **4.7 Training and development**

HODs are expected to create opportunities for the training and development of the organisation's academic staff members. Training can take various forms: coaching an individual or team or serving as mentor are some of the methods through which training can take place (Harrison 2009).

#### **4.8 Change management**

Cummings and Worley (2005:1) define change management as "a process that applies behavioural science knowledge and practices to help organisations build the capacity to change and to achieve greater effectiveness, including increased financial performance and improved quality of work life". Cummings and Worley (2005) also note that the restructuring of organisations forms a vital part of change management: structuring and organising departments includes moving from traditional ways of dividing up the organisation's activities into more integrative and flexible forms in order to increase productivity and work satisfaction.

Whenever a department is not functioning optimally, the department as such or the tasks within it should be rearranged in order to ensure maximum productivity. This implies rearranging or restructuring the department. Van Tonder (2004) is of the opinion that this process falls within the ambit of change management. Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) confirm that managers are responsible for designing the organisational structure. According to them, managers are the ones responsible for dividing overall tasks into smaller jobs and dividing total activities into smaller tasks, thus structuring the tasks and responsibilities of departments. As managers are the ones responsible for structuring departments, they also have the authority to restructure departments for maximum benefit and productivity (Ivancevich & Matteson 1990). Restructuring involves changing some of the original departments and forms part of change management. Managing change and renewal, and organising and structuring a department for maximum productivity, can be clustered together under a change management dimension. The emphasis should be on effective response to change.

#### **4.9 Financial management**

Johnson (2003) refers to financial management as a dimension that includes preparing a budget, projecting revenues and monitoring cash flows, controlling and managing funds, monitoring finances and reports and controlling and comparing costs. Since the competency of financial and commercial understanding incorporates all the key elements of financial management, this competency should form its own dimension of financial management. Financial management should include not only managing finances but also the generation of finances.

#### **4.10 Relationship management**

Verhoef (2003) contends that relationship management is an important variable that will ensure effective relationships within an organisation and influence customer development outside the organisation. Managing interdepartmental relationships with peers and subordinates as well as managing external relationships with stakeholders and suppliers therefore forms part of effective relationship management.

#### **4.11 Project management**

According to Clements and Gido (2006:6), project management usually involves four factors which include the scope of the project, the costs involved, the schedule and customer satisfaction. They describe the scope as the actual work that must be done to satisfy the customer that the deliverables “meet the requirements or acceptance criteria agreed upon at the onset of the project”. The acceptance criteria relate directly to the agreed-on quality of the project. The cost of the project is the actual amount that the customer has agreed to pay for the acceptable delivery of the project. The schedule of the project relates to the time that is agreed on for the project to start and finish. Project management that incorporates planning, time, cost and quality management therefore forms a dimension on its own.

#### **4.12 Recruitment and selection**

The natural flow of a recruitment initiative involves attracting talent to the organisation as a first step, that is, recruiting and interviewing individuals and selecting the most appropriate individuals for the position make up the first part of the recruiting effort. After a recruit has been appointed, the new recruit needs to be introduced and oriented in terms of the organisation and organisational culture. Induction and orientation therefore form the second part of the recruitment effort. Only after these steps have been taken can one say that a position has been effectively filled with the right recruit and the recruit is part of the business and business process (Grobler et al 2010). Attracting talent includes recruitment, interviewing and the selection and effective induction and orientation of new staff members. Emphasis should also be placed on the retention of staff.

#### **4.13 Problem solving and decision making**

Huitt (1992) introduces problem solving and decision making as a process for making effective decisions. Any organisation encounters problems and faces critical decisions, and introducing an element of creativity allows for innovative new ideas and solutions to a problem.

#### **4.14 Awareness management**

Policy awareness provides representations of policies in order to facilitate compliance with stated rules, and enables accountability when rules are broken either intentionally or accidentally. Several policies deal with quality management and the standards and procedures that need to be adhered to in managing a department's quality (Hare & Hare 2002). In addition, every organisation should have a set of human resource policies dealing with issues such as employment equity, employee disability and sexual harassment. Finally, every organisation is required to adhere to specific health and safety issues relevant to the industry sector. Every manager within an organisation needs to be aware of all of the policies and rules in order to implement them successfully (Grobler et al 2010).

#### **4.15 Customer management**

In order to stay in business, every organisation needs customers, whether it is for a profit organisation or a non-profit organisation. Maintaining an effective working relationship with customers is therefore of vital importance for every business. In order to satisfy its customers, an organisation should provide strong customer care and

service (Waters, Marzano & McNulty 2003). Furthermore, customer focus should refer to both internal customers and external customers (Waters, Marzano & McNulty 2003). Internal customers in a higher education context could refer to academic staff such as the lecturers and senior lecturers, whereas the external customers could be the students. The competencies of internal and external customer care and service should therefore be clustered together in a customer management dimension.

#### **4.16 Risk management**

Wrona (2008) divides risk management into seven separate steps. According to this author, step one of the risk management process is to have each person involved in the planning process individually list at least ten potential risk items. Step two involves collecting all the risks and compiling them into a single list. The next step is to assess the consequence of each risk on the list. Step four of the risk management process is to divide the initial team into subgroups. Each subgroup is responsible for identifying the triggers for the list of risks identified. Step five would be to identify possible preventive actions for these triggers. During step six, the subgroups create a contingency plan that includes the project risks together with the actions one can take to prevent the trigger or steps that one can take should the risk occur. The final step in the risk managing process involves determining the owner of each risk on the list: this makes it possible to assign accountability and responsibility for managing the risks to certain individual members or teams (Wrona 2008). Risk management therefore includes identifying both the possible risks and the means of preventing or dealing with the risks should they occur.

#### **4.17 Diversity management**

Grobler et al (2010) define diversity in the way used in this context as having three principal meanings. Diversity can refer to employment equity/affirmative action; to the recruitment and selection of ethnic groups and women; and to the management of individuals sharing a broad range of common traits. It is evident that diversity in terms of these meanings needs to be managed. Special attention should be given to managing cross-cultural issues, especially in the post-apartheid era. Managing diversity and cross-cultural issues within a team and a department therefore makes up the dimension of diversity management.

#### **4.18 Administration management**

Every organisation and department has its share of administration that needs to be done. A manager is responsible for reporting on performance and financials, monitoring the department and its members, and maintaining and developing reporting systems (Marquis & Huston 2009). Administration management is therefore an unavoidable dimension of every manager's job.

**Table 2**  
**Summary of management dimensions from most to least important higher-order dimensions**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Competencies within dimension</b>
Leadership	Leadership of overall team and individual team members Motivation of overall team and individual team members One-to-one counselling of subordinates and team members and helping others with their challenges Delegation of tasks to team or team members Emotional intelligence (self-development, self-control, compassion and humanity, seeking responsibility and personal growth)
Financial management	Financial and commercial understanding (especially budgeting, cost control, and financial reporting)
Project management	Project management (in terms of planning, time, scope and quality management)
Change management	Managing change and renewal Organising and structuring department for maximum productivity
Problem solving and decision making	Creative problem solving and decision making
Performance management	Performance management (planning, conducting, and follow-up, for team and self) Rewarding performance of team and team members
Time management	Day-to-day planning (prioritising and organising tasks and activities) Time management
Strategic management	Strategic planning and formulation Strategy implementation Environmental scanning and analysis
Customer management	Customer care and customer service management: external Customer care and customer service management: internal
Communication management	Communication skills (questioning and active listening, building trust, empathy and mutual understanding) Monitoring and dissemination of information Effective use of IT (especially communication, planning and reporting systems) Planning and running meetings and effective follow-up Business writing (letters, reports, plans, project plans) Creating and giving effective presentations to groups
Training and developing	Training and developing others (coaching and mentoring) Assessing training needs of team and individual team members
Industrial relations	Handling grievances and disputes Dealing with issues of discipline Negotiation and conflict resolution
Administration	Administration, reporting performance and financials, monitoring, maintaining and developing reporting systems
Diversity management	Managing diversity and cross-cultural issues in team and department
Risk management	Risk identification and management
Relationship management	Managing interdepartmental relationships with peers from internal departments Managing external relationships with key external stakeholders and suppliers
Awareness management	Quality awareness and management, according to quality standards and procedures Employment and HR policy awareness and management, according to policies (equity, disability, harassment, etc.) Occupational health and safety awareness and management, according to policies
Recruitment and selection	Attracting talent (recruitment, interviewing and selection of new staff members) Effective induction and orientation of new staff members

**Table 3**  
**Ranked competencies in order of importance**

Importance to job	Mean
Leadership of my overall team and individual team members	4.23
Motivation of my overall team and individual team members	4.15
Performance management	4.12
Quality awareness and management, according to policies (equity, disability, harassment, etc)	4.03
Managing change and renewal	3.90
Financial and commercial understanding	3.90
Project management	3.90
Communication skills	3.88
Effective use of IT	3.85
Creative problem solving and decision making	3.83
Strategic planning and formulation	3.80
Organising and structuring my department for maximum productivity	3.78
Strategy implementation	3.77
Time management	3.75
One-to-one counselling of subordinates and team members	3.75
Day-to-day planning	3.73
Monitoring and dissemination of information	3.73
Emotional intelligence	3.70
Customer care and customer service management: external	3.68
Training and developing others	3.65
Delegation of tasks to my team or team members	3.65
Customer care and customer service management: internal	3.63
Negotiation and conflict resolution	3.60
Handling grievance and disputes	3.55
Managing external relationships	3.53
Administration, reporting performance and financials, monitoring and developing reporting systems	3.53
Managing diversity and cross-cultural issues in my department	3.53
Risk identification and management	3.51
Rewarding performance of my team and team members	3.50
Planning and running meetings and effective follow-up	3.50
Employment and HR policy awareness and management	3.50
Dealing with issues of discipline	3.49
Assessing training needs of my team and individual team members	3.49
Environmental scanning and analysis	3.45
Managing interdepartmental relationships	3.43
Creating and giving effective presentations to groups	3.33
Business writing	3.29
Attracting talent	3.28
Effective induction and orientation of new staff members	3.26
Occupational health and safety awareness and management	2.93

## 5 Discussion

The specific objective of this study was to explore the literature in order to identify a set of management competencies which HODs have deemed necessary in order to function effectively in the higher education environment. It is evident from the literature review that HODs need an extensive range of management competencies (as shown in Table 2) to be able to fulfil their roles as academics, administrators, managers and leaders effectively in the 21st century higher education environment. These include the

following set of higher order managerial competencies: leadership, financial management, project management, change management, problem solving, performance management, time management, strategic management, customer management, communication management, training and development, industrial relations, administration, diversity management, risk management, relationship management, awareness management and recruitment and selection. The second part of the study revealed that HODs within a South African higher education institution found leadership, financial management and project management to be the most important management competencies for their managerial role.

In terms of the academic role, the literature emphasises the role of academic staff developer (training and development) (Lyons 2008). The emphasis on competencies relating to administrative matters highlighted the importance of the administrative role of the HOD (Lyons 2008; Parker & Wilson 2002). Most of the identified competencies were related to the management role of the HOD, highlighting the shift to managerialism in higher education. These include the following competencies: financial management, project management, change management, problem solving, performance management, time management, strategic management, customer management, communication management, industrial relations, diversity management, risk management, relationship management, awareness management, and recruitment and selection. Harrison (2009) states in this regard that managers have to use a range of skills that cannot be easily categorised but that must be integrated into their practice. Such skills have been termed “overarching management competencies” since by nature they go far beyond the functional.

The findings also point to a distinct difference between the managerial and leadership roles of the HOD. While the managerial competencies encompass a range of overarching competencies, the leadership competencies point to skills associated with the role of motivator and the ability to influence a group towards the achievement of goals. According to Yelder and Codling (2004), leadership and management are closely integrated in the academic context. They are of the opinion that both the academic leadership role and the management role require aspects of leadership, which in this sense cannot be written into a job description as a function. The academic leadership role is therefore regarded as a quality that an individual brings to the position. Yelder and Codling (2004) furthermore emphasise that HODs are vested in a position and the focus should therefore be on the management role of HODs, which incorporates leadership. The study confirmed the importance of the focus shifting to a managerial role as the most important competencies identified by the HODs in this study are management and leadership competencies.

## **6 Practical implications**

The findings of the study may be used to inform HOD management training and development programmes in higher education institutions. The framework can help higher education institutions to outline the training programme for effectively preparing their HODs for their managerial role. If implemented correctly, effective training could decrease most of the problems experienced by HODs. As the HOD will be more aware of what is expected from him/her, role uncertainty will decrease. Heightened role awareness and clarity may lead to a more realistic view of the position and greater self-confidence. As a result, the stress experienced by HODs could also decrease, which could increase job and personal satisfaction for the individual and improve productivity and efficiency for the whole institution.

From the literature and the findings, the proposed framework for HOD training suggests 18 competency modules. Although leadership, financial management and project management were found to be the most important competencies, it is suggested that an effective and comprehensive training framework should include all the managerial competencies identified in the literature. These competencies (modules) serve as the foundation of the training programme and include leadership, financial management, project management, change management, problem solving, performance management, time management, strategic management, customer management, communication management, training and development, industrial relations, administration, diversity management, risk management, relationship management, awareness management and recruitment and selection.

## **7 Conclusion**

It can be concluded from the findings of this study that apart from the traditional academic and administrative roles, the role of the HOD has evolved as HODs take on expanded managerial and leadership responsibilities, some of a strategic nature. Considering the comprehensive nature of the repertoire of managerial competencies required, it is suggested that the identified competencies serve as a guideline to construct a training framework for the development of HODs.

The limitations of the present study should be interpreted in the light of the stated purpose and objectives of the study. By using Business Source Complete and EbscoHost portals to access documented, published, peer-reviewed and accredited South African journals, other research-related national and international publications and unpublished research were excluded. Interpretations of the findings should therefore be limited to the boundaries defined for the present study, and no broader generalisations regarding the management competencies required in the higher education context should be made. In addition, the sample was drawn only from one distance learning higher education institution in South Africa and can therefore not be generalised to all higher education institutions.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings provide valuable preliminary insights that add to the body of knowledge concerned with the evolution of the role of HODs in the South African higher education context. The insights derived from the findings can be employed by academics and researchers in the field to plan future research directions. Such research directions should take cognisance of the challenge to those responsible for preparing HODs for their role and the changes taking place in the higher education context. It is anticipated that the role of an HOD will remain challenging and stressful if he/she is not well prepared for the responsibility attached to the post. The better the research base is in terms of defining what to prepare an HOD for, the better the result and outcome of the preparation of an incumbent for the role of HOD will be.

In terms of future research, it would be valuable if researchers could determine whether management competencies would differ for HODs functioning within a distance education institution and HODs functioning within a residential institution. Empirical research can be undertaken to determine HODs' perceptions regarding management dimensions.

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