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Reciprocity in Conduct

- Uniting an Intersubjective with a Subjective Interpretational Approach in Ascertaining Employees' Perceptions of Competence Development

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Abstract

In today's HRM research, an organizational perspective of competence development dominates. We were eager to alter this by approaching the concept from an individual stance. The aim of our study is to investigate how the employees' subjective apprehension of their immediate work situation, framed by the organization, affects their perception of competence and competence development.

In order to accomplish our purpose we united a subjective with an intersubjective approach, conducting interviews and observations in addition to an extensive survey. In this respect we contrasted our findings from our case company with data derived from a more comprehensive study including six Swedish organizations.

Competence development is a vast area, in order to study its elements we had to carefully depict and interpret its denotations. We discovered that the perception of competence development is indeed affected by the individually interpreted work situation. Further, we found that a gap exists between individual apprehension and organizational measures regarding competence development. Employees have different needs depending on what stage they are positioned in regarding their career progression; consequently diverse measures ought to be regarded attaining individual development.

In short, we suggest a shift in attention away from the collective viewpoint of competence development acknowledging the individuals' needs.

Keywords: *Competence, competence development, individual perception, intersubjective, subjective, reciprocity, motivation.*

Dear Reader,

Before presenting our findings, we would like to address the reader explaining the background of this composition. Both having comprehensive résumés, we were eager to find an area of interest partly new to us, yet one that we believed to be of significance for many organizations. We worked in collaboration with our prime organization of concern, IKEA, in detecting a focus for our thesis. Our fascination for matters within HRM was moreover a significant motive for why we decided to concentrate on the subject of competence development.

When we embarked on our dual journey in the early spring, we were rather unsure about ourselves as a team. Would we be able to complement each other, completing a treatise that we could be proud of? As the expedition has come to an end, we have learned that our scholastic experiences from three countries corresponded with our multiple work experiences, forming an inimitable synergy.

Hence, in producing this document, close cooperation between us was not just an enabler, but also the indispensable precondition. Taking a small risk of being too critical with each other, there was always one questioning the other. We have tried to be critical, not with a negative connotation, rather as a method of improving the content. We experienced, by working together, that our collective work would mean more to us than our individual contributions. We are thankful for that, and the horizon embracing an entrance into the business community, presents itself clearer and brighter than ever.

Enjoy your journey with us,

Fredrik Engman, 7/1-2002   *John Garshnek, 7/1-2002*
Master of Science, candidate 2002   Master of Science, candidate 2002

Declaration of Gratitude

Although occasionally isolated with the computer screen as the only source of light, we have not been unaccompanied during the last months. Many have played an important part in our progressions allowing us to complete the work now in your hands.

As the Graduate Business School and the Master of International Management Program is our common denominator, we commence by acknowledging the ones responsible with Torbjörn Stjernberg as the conductor.

Stefan Tengblad is a person we have learned from and his experience has indeed assisted us. The opportunity to be implicated in a larger study has been a motivator and a constant point of reference, which is the second reason for why our tutor Stefan deserves our thankfulness.

Ingela Oléhn has served as our main company contact at IKEA, opening many doors within IKEA's vast organization. Far too many for mentioning here of our friends and co-workers at the three IKEA houses in Älmhult, Örebro, and Gothenburg have been the foundation from which we have prospered.

Lastly, we thank our soul mates, Lisa and Madeleine for allowing us to spend far too much time with matters concerning this thesis, neglecting essential parts of normal living.

Yet again, from us to all of you, our deepest appreciation.

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THE JOURNEY EMBARKS

*A*s the journey is about to start, our beginning is intentionally rather broad and general. After the two introductory paragraphs we present the rational behind the chosen topic followed by the focus area, including the problem statement. Further, we elaborate on the purpose and factors constraining our study. We end by illustrating the structure of the thesis.

Competence development has been one of the major issues in Human Resource Management[1] in the last decade. Both practitioners and theoreticians in the field of HRM have proclaimed the development of competence as the key competitive strategy for the future (Bramming & Larsen, 2000). It is easy to comply when most companies of today assert that their most important assets are their employees. As of today, when entering the new millennium and leaving the industrial age behind, the competitive strength of an organization is determined by its ability to attract and develop human resources, rather than optimizing the use of raw materials, machinery and financial resources (Brewster & Larsen, 2000).

However, is the employee actually the center of focus when regarding the area of competence? Usually in organizations around the globe, competence development is more a matter of maximizing profits than developing individuals. Behind the `employees´ individuals subsists and Sandberg (1989) argues that when analyzing individuals' competence, traditional approaches assume that it is possible to separate the individual and the employee, hence in an objective way describing them independent of each other. However, a `reality´ independent of individuals does not exist. Instead, it is the individual's perception of the work-environment that creates meaning and incentive to develop the competencies of the employee. This sense-making activity is manifested in the individual's conception toward the employer and the employer's actions.

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[1] Hereafter, HRM.

Rational Behind Chosen Topic

The top management at IKEA[2] has decided that development of human competence is one out of ten vital pillars for the next ten years (IKEA:1, 2000). Actions have been taken, and the HRM departments have been alerted, consequently an expansion of the HRM functions has occurred. IKEA is such a people intensive organization that without proper care of the employees[3], the company will not remain successful. As IKEA continues to grow with untypical rapidity, seemingly unaffected of economical trends, the issue of HRM related topics amplify in importance. How can IKEA carry on the tradition of developing their employees to be able to fulfill future suitable positions?

"Those willing to assume responsibility are to be found on the warehouse floor, among purchasers, sellers, and office staff, yes everywhere!"[4]

(Kamprad, 1976)

The dilemma is not solely about employing people that would prosper in the IKEA world. Furthermore, it is about monitoring the development of the already employed. This will be the challenge of tomorrow; consequently this is our ultimate focus. To be noted, the human assets[5] are the only appreciable ones. Hence, it is IKEA's responsibility of turning their resources into customer value.

Contradicting the IKEA tradition, recently and simultaneously, five managers from outside the company were hired at one IKEA store. Why did this occur? Do not the employees working for IKEA have aspirations to make a career in

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[2] The name IKEA is normally used to denominate the whole IKEA Group. However, when we hereafter refer to IKEA we usually mean the actual stores, often internally and in this document referred to as `houses´.

[3] Many times referred to as the Ikeans.

[4] Own translation.

[5] Often in recent material described as `Intellectual Capital´.

the company? When studying the competence development plan that IKEA has, it is clearly highly ambitious.

> *"Knowledge makes the job more fun. It concerns interior*
> *decoration and commercial knowledge as well as leadership,*
> *administration and logistics. Because of this, we have launched several*
> *large-scale projects that will make us even better at working together:*
> *Product and sale training, learning the IKEA-way, the leadership-trainee*
> *program, and IRTC (IKEA Retail Training Center) for example.*
> *In the spring of 1997 we started the process of improving team spirit,*
> *leadership and motivation."[6]*

<div align="right">(IKEA:1, 1999)</div>

Is this enough? Monica Lindgren (1996) writes that commitment and loyalty are important influences on an individual's prospects for competence development. This is then again not news to IKEA:

> *"Only if we are secure in ourselves and satisfied with our situation*
> *can we seriously get involved in other people, for example*
> *colleagues and customers."[7]*

<div align="right">(IKEA:1, 1999)</div>

Possibly a rather typical statement asserted by a HR department. We do not proclaim these statements as false, the intentions are intriguing, still the question concerns whether the employees interpret the situation as such.

At the beginning of our research in the area of HRM and competence development we discovered that almost all studies had the perspective of the employer. These studies adapted a strategic viewpoint on how to increase the overall organizational competence, hence resulting in a greater bottom line. We do not oppose or initially criticize this perspective, instead we question were the individual is to be found. We desire to shift the point of focus and discover

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[6] Own translation.
[7] Own translation.

how the employees perceive the concept of competence development at three IKEA stores.

The Focal Destination

Sandberg (1989) writes that he has never come across any definition of the concept of competence, which takes into consideration just how the individual conceives and understands the content of the job task. Competence development never takes place within a vacuum; one always has to consider feelings, attitudes, and future ambitions of the employees.

We agree with Sandberg and feel that it is impossible to analyze what the employees feel about competence development without knowing how they regard and comprehend their work situation. Therefore, we have one main problem statement and then five underlying questions that need an answer in order to reach an understanding of the main research question.

Our problem statement is:

❖ Competence development from an employee perspective.

> How does the employees' subjective apprehension of their immediate work situation, framed by the organization, affect their perception of competence and competence development?

To acquire an understanding of the prerequisites of competence development we seek for answers of the following inquiries:

- ❑ Are the employees satisfied with their working conditions as well as their course of development?
- ❑ Do the employees feel that they can influence their work situation including their development?
- ❑ Do the employees trust and believe in their employer?

- ❑ Do the employees feel that the employer cares and believes in them?
- ❑ Do the employees foresee themselves still present within the company in the years to come?
    - ▪ If so, do the employees wish to develop, possibly to leading positions?
    - ▪ If so, do the employees desire increased responsibility?

Individual apprehension of work situation

Organizational framework

Individual perception of competence development
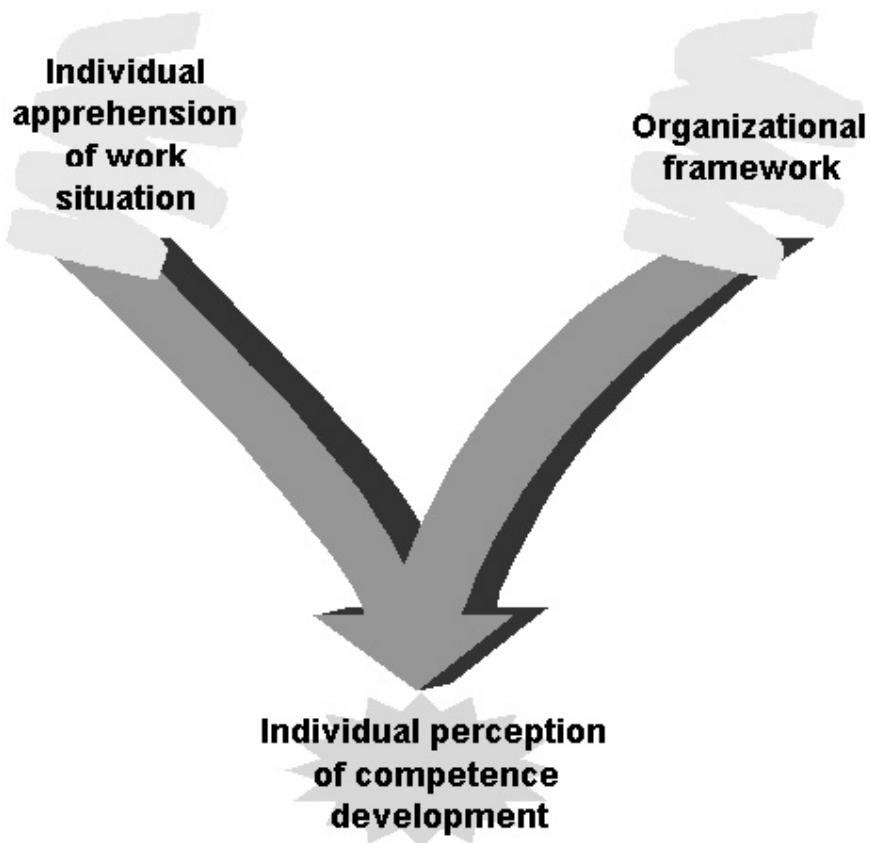
Figure 1, Illustration of the problem statement

The Legitimate Question of *Why*

We are both working for IKEA even beside the completion of this thesis. We want to develop within the organization and ensure that other Ikeans can do the same. Our thesis is one step in that direction; therefore, the employees are the prime stakeholders in this study. However, in a larger perspective IKEA and similar organizations could benefit as well. In this respect our focus is IKEA, nevertheless, our intended learning encompasses a wider spectrum. Competence development is an issue (or should be) for virtually all organizations. The knowledge we gained here can be, at least to a certain extent, used elsewhere: possibly everywhere!

As for you, our readers, we hope that this work will enhance your understanding of the significance and connotation of competence development from an employee perspective. IKEA is in this respect principally just an example of an organization.

Constraining Factors

The IKEA world is an immense one and although our ambitions are towering our concentration remain within the borders of Sweden. IKEA is most often described as an organization with striking similarities wherever one wishes to visit the company around the globe. This way of seeing the situation also seems to be the preferred IKEA version, being a global organization in need of coherence. However, Salzer (1994) argues that the similarities within the IKEA world are indeed superficial and the underlying factors determine much more than the blue-yellow houses[8] do. One could argue that it would have been preferable to involve all the houses that IKEA operates around the world in order to construct a complete picture of the employees' attitudes, however, this is not feasible.

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[8] The IKEA stores or warehouses are internally most often referred to as *houses*.

Initially, we did plan to have at least one non-Swedish house in our study. However, we changed our minds early in our research due to several reasons. The first and most significant was due to lack of time; it takes more time to make a special questionnaire for that specific country and to make travel arrangements. Secondly, it also means larger financial expenditures, which we thought was uncalled for. We also considered that it could be unwise to include another country, since we would then not know what the differences would depend upon. We would then risk greater possible dissimilarities due to cultural variations, such as training and development, employee handling etc. Referring back to Salzer (1994), she proclaims that the similarities between IKEA globally are most frequently less apparent than the resemblance between an IKEA house in Sweden and a non-IKEA Swedish warehouse.

Moreover, regarding geographical limitations, we intentionally selected three houses of particular concern: IKEA Gothenburg, IKEA Älmhult, and IKEA Örebro. Each house has a specific reason for being a part of our study. The selection is based on rather superficial circumstances such as location, size, and when the house was established[9].

Since studies and references regarding IKEA mostly regard the supposedly special culture, we are aware of the fact that it certainly has an affect on the organization. However, we will not focus our attention per se about culture since such an approach would drastically complicate and prolong our journey.

Given that we are concentrating our learning within the boundaries of management, we deliberately disregard most other perspectives that would have been of interest given an altered setting.

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[9] For a more detail description of the three houses and the criteria for our selection, see the chapter: IKEA - the case company.

Mapping the Journey

As the structure of the document you are about to read is quite complex, we at this point present some outlining concerns. In **Figure 2,** we illustrate our journey by chronologically displaying the main sections of the document. We have two methodological parts in this thesis labeled `The Means of Our Journey…´; one prior to the theoretical framework, and the other just before the presentation of the case company. The reason for this structure is to present the method relevant to each subsequent part.

In our analysis we merge our preceding parts, forging them into one. Consequently, the analysis is based on all previous parts, providing us in the conclusion with the necessary platform, enabling us to form our perception of the area scrutinized.
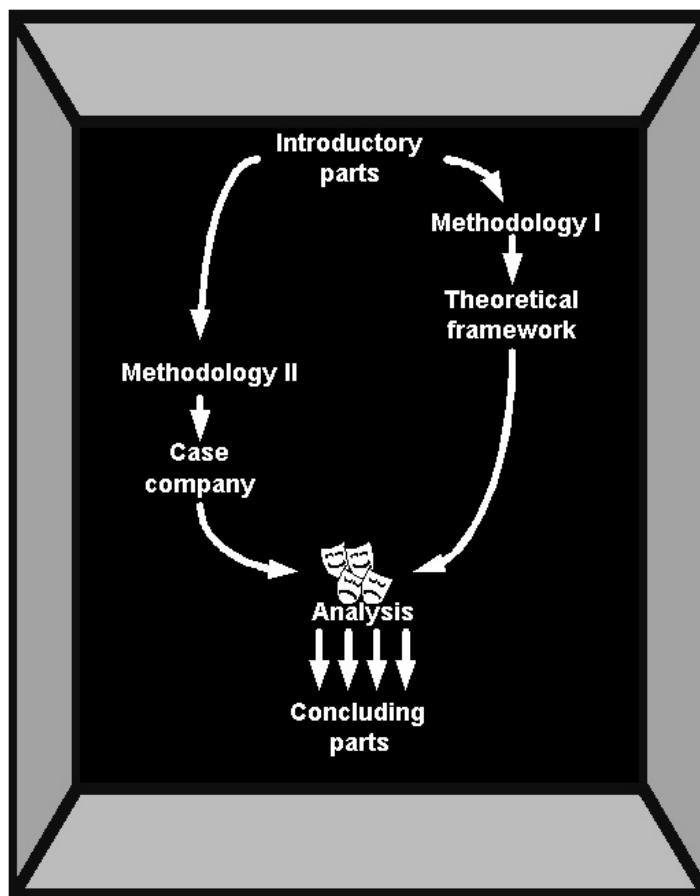
Figure 2, Structure model

THE MEANS OF OUR JOURNEY
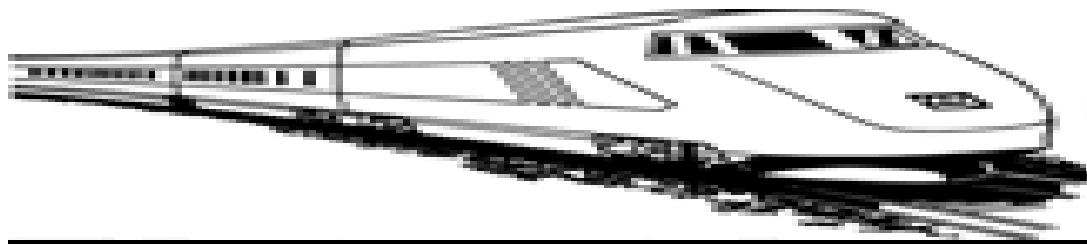
*I*n this first methodology chapter we will explain and motivate the methods of our choice. The reason is to give the reader the necessary background in order to follow our reasoning and structure. We commence with a discussion concerning the notion of symbols in organizations. Thereafter, we discuss different scientific approaches. Within two categories, the two theoretical polar opposites are examined, often resulting in a practical and suitable viewpoint. We continue with a discussion of whether we are biased or not. Finally, we discuss the validity of our study. In the chapter called `The Means of our Journey – a continuation´, we will continue with a more practical methodological discussion related to our study, before presenting our case company.

Symbolism in the Realm of Competence

Organizational symbolism is a qualitative approach to the study of organizational life (Strati, 1998). Considering the theoretical foundations of the symbolic approach, namely, the concept of the construction of organizational reality through the negotiation of symbolic universes, and the interpretations of individuals' attitudes and feelings we hope to evade the simplified positivist truth/falsehood dilemma.

Strati (1998) argues that organizational culture is simultaneously subjective and objective. In other words, there is no organizational event that can be isolated and analyzed in terms other than from interpretations that the subjects[10] involved assign to it. We discovered with our interviews, observations, and questionnaire that the same question could lead to numerous, often contradicting, statements from two employees at the same house.

Employees are the organizational actors who are subjects of organizational culture. It is to them that it belongs; it is they who construct it and re-invent it, who enriches it with symbols, who attribute it with value and who draw meaning from it (Strati, 1998). Still, we have deliberately neglected most issues related to culture, since such approach would be an assignment in itself.

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[10] Here, employees.

Nevertheless, we are fully aware of the fact that many prerequisites for competence development are affected by culture-related issues.

"Culture is public because meaning is."

(Geertz, 1973, p 12)

Geertz (1973) states that `socio-psychological tensions´ are manifested in symbolic form. He argues that when studying culture and social systems, thoughts are easily conceived as a public activity instead of a private one. We would prefer to ask straightforward questions to the employees about their perception about competence development, but how would they answer? We do not imply that they would lie or be decisive; rather it is a question about how objective an individual can be about his/her own self? It is not easy to state in today's `knowledge society´ that one is not interested in developing one's employability; rather employees want to give the impression of their never-ending search of excellence. Certainly, we do not propose that this is the universal norm for all employees; our purpose would then be uncalled for.

We see symbols as external sources of information, representative of the social and psychological processes of an organization. We hope to reveal the employees' perception of competence development at IKEA by analyzing their subjective symbolism.

In the Crossroad of Two Paths - Inductive Versus Deductive Method

According to Lindgren (1996) there are two basic sorts of logic in order to reach the purpose of a study: inductive or deductive method. Using the inductive method means discovering something new while the deductive method seeks to confirm a pre-developed theory. However, these are only theoretical polar opposites, and in reality one can seldom use solely one of the two.

Moreover, Lindgren (1996) asserts that it is almost impossible to enter a field of study without any predefined conceptions. One could view the use of theory as one way to confirm a study, and therefore it could be argued that using theory is using a deductive method. We recognize the use of theories as a tool for obtaining different perspectives on the empirical study: helping us to further understand it.

One could regard theories as being something that should be confirmed or rejected. We disagree with Lindgren when she proclaims that the deductive method limits the researcher regarding the willingness to accept new unmatched results. We see theories as a valuable source for understanding and analyzing the result of our study, still not viewing them as absolute truths or a hinder for our progress.

Nevertheless, some researchers argue for a `tabula rasa´[11] approach to science. We do not agree with this, since it would be to discard any earlier findings and this could also limit ones idea of possible answers to the purpose. We will begin by adapting the deductive method, using theories to generalize concepts about competence development. We will also use previous studies and our own pre-understanding of the subject. However, in the later phase we aim to partly generate a new model of the employees' conceived reality, hence using an adapted inductive approach.

An Additional Crossroad - Intersubjective Versus Subjective Approach

The intentions are to investigate how groups of employees perceive competence development. Hence, one might assume that the only alternative would be deep-interviews. We do, however, believe that it is possible to interpret attitudes and feelings by using a quantitative approach in combination with informal interviews. Still, we are not focused on one particular individual's subjective attitudes. We want to study how the group of employees

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[11] Starting with a clean sheet.

conceives the aspect of competence development. Our analysis will be based on several `average employees´ representing various groups at our case company and our conclusions about these average persons will presumably be applicable to other organizations with similar structure.

In the traditional organizational perspective, the researcher tries to find similarities from the sampling. Lindgren argues in her doctorial thesis (1996) that when focusing on the individuals in an organization one should obtain the individual subjectivity, meaning no generalizations. She continues to argue that if one is interested in the individual, one should bring forward the individuals and the different opinions they have. Our aim is to create the intersubjective interpretations through the questionnaires where several individual attitudes and conceptions are grouped together. We will obtain the subjective interpretations by informal interviews where we will receive ideas and thoughts from specific individuals. In **Figure 3** we illustrate our point of view.
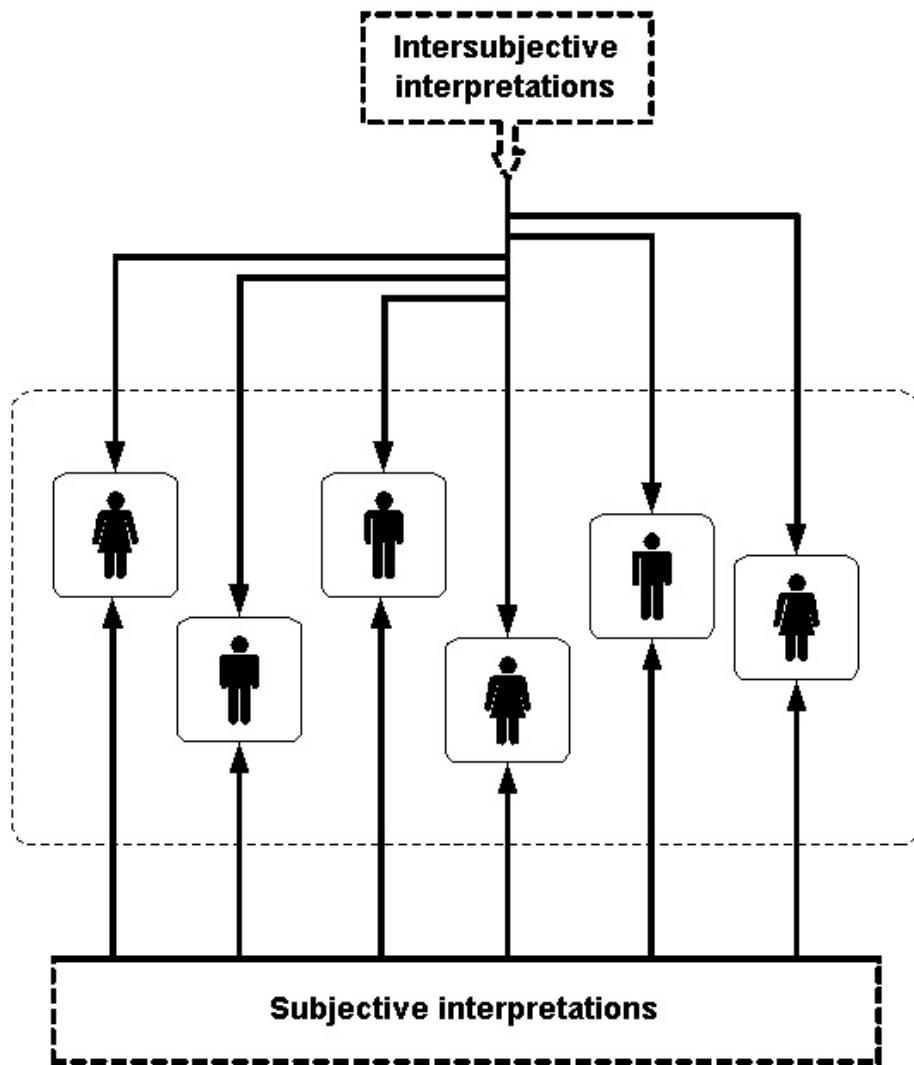
Figure 3, Intersubjective versus subjective interpretations (Lindgren, 1996)

There are two sorts of interpretations that are of interest in this thesis. The first is the individuals' in our survey and how they interpret their reality. The second is how we, the researchers, interpret their interpretations. It is interesting to consider whose view the thesis will actually bring forward. Is it the individuals in our study or ours? Our aim and purpose is to give the view of the individual, but can one be that objective? We will try to answer this as follows.

The Doubtful Notion of Remaining Unbiased

As stated before we are working for IKEA, which we have done for quite some time. We work at the weekends, as well as during the summer months. When working, we have discussed issues concerning competence and competence development with several of the other employees. Therefore, we had a clear picture of our problem area and what we sought to investigate long before we started the actual work of writing the thesis. We have also access to a desk at the office of IKEA in Gothenburg where we have worked at times with the thesis.

Salzer (1994) states that regardless of what approach chosen, one will never produce an `objective´ or `true´ description. Further, she argues that research is engagement, where the researchers and the researched merge into a whole. We agree with this statement, and since we are both already employed by IKEA it would be impossible, even disingenuous, to try to act unbiased. We found support for this in a methodology book by Holme and Solvang (1991), who write that there are two major parts of preconditions when writing a study. Firstly, the researchers have a pre-understanding of the area of study from their education. This means that the researchers can angle the problem in numerous ways depending on their type of background. This could also mean that there are several different ways of defining or even understanding a problem. Secondly, the researcher has certain socially founded preconceived ideas in the way of approaching a problem. This could be due to religious, political or even moral values. We cannot proclaim that we have avoided these pitfalls; nevertheless we are aware of the dilemma.

Validity – Self-confidence Articulated

External validity means that the results of a study can be generalized outside the study to other situations and participants (Mitchell & Jolly, 1996). Salzer (1994) states that she doubts that her study[12] would turn out the same if it were repeated. She even argues that she hopes that the result would not be the same. Hopefully, our research can be of assistance to other future studies. Nevertheless, we do not believe that the result would be exactly the same if repeated. Circumstances change and the researchers preconditions or pre-understandings could be different. Still, as explained further in the following chapters, we have taken considerable efforts in order to make our study scientific.

As soon as all questionnaires were handed in they were transformed into statistical units[13]. From this data the interpretation and analysis will be conducted. Sometimes it is convenient to interpret more than what is actually there, explaining more than is explainable from the material. Usually when executing a study, one has some kind of preconceived theory or thesis (Holme & Solvang, 1991). Therefore, it is easy to interpret the statistical data as `proof´ of this. We hope to avoid this by taking a critical standpoint, and by receiving feedback from our tutor.

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[12] Salzer (1994) studied the perceived identity in the `IKEA World´ with a focus on the various symbols through which employees construct collective self-views.

[13] See appendix 1.
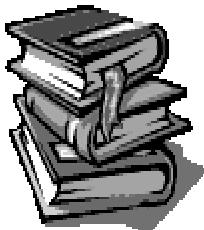
A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION
– a Brief Portrayal of the Theoretical Aspects Foundering the Progression

*N*ow to some theory. A part written just because it is required and preferably neglected by the reader, thus turn the pages quickly until the analysis is found… Stop! Although this is how one occasionally feels when exploring a work, the theory presented here serves as a base for the analysis, in conjunction with the enquired empirical findings. In this sense, the information presented below is in addition an illustration of our learning. As for us, we view this chapter as a summary of the knowledge-base we now encompass, facilitating the coming challenges of understanding and developing both the empirical conclusions and the theoretical aspects.

We commence by discussing several issues concerning competence development that are related to our purpose. Even though the area of competence development is vast, we discovered that few theories or studies were related to our problem area, appropriate to our perspective. Therefore, we have used some theories in perhaps a new or unconventional way, perceiving this as a challenge and a motivator. We discuss the vitality of defining competence and reflect on the subject in a rationalistic contra an interpretative manner. After this, the matter of `how to improve competence´ is discussed. As an end to this chapter, we close with a few concluding remarks, including our definition of competence.

Although the concept of HRM is still perceived as quite modern and relevant in today's Sweden[14], the manner in which it is being implemented is changing. Typically, HRM is perceived from an organizational perspective where the strategies of the HRM departments are a factor of the overall strategies of the company in question. The employees are viewed as just `resources´, used to accomplish the established company objectives.

Some assert that this perspective is losing its reasons in today's business climate. Hällsten and Tengblad (2000) argue that there are three main weaknesses with an organizational perspective of HRM. One: the employees are handled as a resource, which the organization rightfully can shape in any way they feel appropriate. Two: the employees are treated as one unit, not as

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[14] Possibly, for greater parts of the western hemisphere.

unique individuals. Three: the difficulties from central levels establishing strategies translatable to future needs of competence. Lindgren (1996) debates correspondingly, stating that research concerning competence and competence development to be mostly rationalistic with a focus on leading human elements. An organizational perspective aimed at establishing what traits and capabilities a competent person possesses characterizes this form of research. In addition, most research within this field attempt to describe the connection between knowledge and the task to be performed. The main dilemma with these focuses is that it presumes an objective reality that is clearly structured.
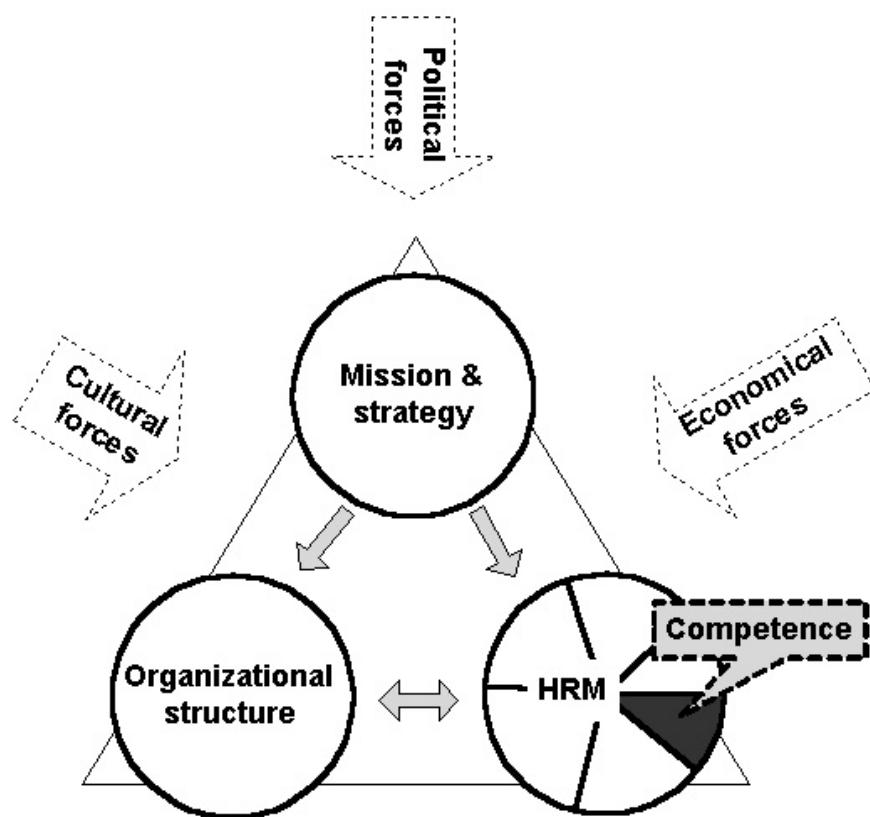
Figure 4, Strategic management and effects of external forces (derived by an idea from Devanna et al (1984) in Tengblad, 1997)

In **Figure 4,** our intentions are not to argue for a new HRM approach, rather illustrating were the theoretical findings in this document are concentrated. Initially, we tend to agree with Hällsten and Tengblad concerning the possibly passé perspective of HRM. Although our intentions do not encompass a development of an updated version of the above-presented HRM model, we

still commence this chapter with a brief discussion supporting our employee perspective.

> *"Concerning that the society becomes more individualized,*
> *competencies more specialized, and managing just more complicated*
> *on a central level, we are reaching a line where HRM's organizational*
> *perspective no longer contribute to the working community, on the*
> *contrary it is becoming a restraining power."[15]*
>
> (Hällsten & Tengblad, 2000, p 3)

Without a doubt, the society of today is moving towards individualization, and organizations ought to follow. It is probably foolish to remain with a proven method of implementation regarding HRM, not considering the need of an adaptation to today's circumstances: "Nothing changes, everything is new"[16].

Some propose for the polar opposite, thus a situation where the individual is solely responsible for his or her own competence development. At first sight the proposal seems promising. Who could possibly know better what competence that is needed than one in `the line of fire´. Still, we strongly question if a person, in prolongation all persons, are capable of successfully nurturing their own competence. Perhaps, an individual with strong self-confidence, being career-focused can manage such a challenge, however, as a result of our study we have come across many situations opposing such methods.

Apprehending Competence

Everyone know what competence is, right? At least everybody is aware of his or her understanding of the concept of competence, right? "Ivar[17] is a very competent fellow," one might assert. He might be, however, what if another person would describe Ivar as "he's a competent speaker" or "it is within Ivar's

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[15] Own translation.

[16] Expression from Telia's commercials.

[17] Hypothetical person, Ivar is a storage system in IKEA's assortment.

competence to decide how to act"[18]. Is the connotation of competence in these respects corresponding with each other? No, hence, we try to understand the differences by once again dissecting the aforementioned expressions.

"Ivar is very competent fellow"

> Here, the word competent (competence) implies that Ivar is superior in overall performance. He is not only good enough, he is outstanding.

"He's a competent speaker"

> In this example, Ivar is explained as a person that can perform the art of speaking on a satisfactory level. In other words, he reaches the accepted minimum of performance.

"It is within Ivar's competence to decide how to act"

> The last situation expresses an allowance to do something. Ivar has the right to decide under these circumstances.

The above examples describe three different connotations of competence. In addition to this, for every example, one individual's understanding of the concept differs from all others'.

A Subjective Settlement

Sandberg and Targama (1998) continue the discussion concerning the significance of determining a conceptual understanding of the underlying connotation of competence. They assert that without an adequate understanding regarding what competence means, it is impossible to succeed in developing human competence. One way of defining the concept of competence is to separate its meaning into two different categorizes. One: this regards all variations of competence a person possesses, i.e. meaning knowledge and practical attainments as capabilities, capacities, and qualifications. Two: this limits the categorization by focusing on the relationship between the person and the work. Hence, this focus allows us to concentrate solely on the interplay

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[18] Idea derived from Bramming & Larsen, 1995.

between the individual and the employer, a relation necessary in order to perform the intended occupation[19].

As much else, the discussion about competence partly derives from Frederick Taylor's accomplishments[20] on scientific management. He had, to say the least, a rational view on science. In short he asserted that, for instance, in the case of IKEA, the `floor-workers´ would be perceived as machines in need of `fuel´[21] to be able to perform the intended work. The forces deciding what kind of `fuel´ that was appropriate and rewarding would be the leading group of people. Today, the result of these movements are three main groupings: the person oriented, the work oriented, and the multi-method oriented. The most dominating one is the person oriented (Sandberg & Targama, 1998). Here, the people advocating such orientation obtain information for their analysis, based on the individual's capabilities in relation to the work performed. Consequently, since our area of concern is the perception of competence among the employees, we strive towards a person-oriented approach.

Rationalistically Restraining Competence

Although the focus is on the perspective of the individual employees, there are certain fundamental concepts of trying to increase human competence that ought to be presented at this point. However, in using an unorthodox angle, viewing the issues of increasing competence through altered lenses, we intend to further explain the theoretical framework, utilized and developed in the analysis. In doing this, we have used one example of such a model from an article published in the Sloan Management Review, as demonstrated below. Although this being merely one example, other works in the same genre follow

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[19] Sandberg & Targama (1998) use the Swedish expression `mänsklig kompetens i arbete´ [human competence at work] to describe this focus, meaning the competence that prevails in performing the work.

[20] Not further discussed here. See: *The principles of scientific management* by Frederick Taylor (1911).

[21] Here: knowledge.

the stream of `strategically increasing competence´ with the perspective of the organization.

According to Ulrich (1998), there are five tools for increasing competence within a unit: Buy, Build, Borrow, Bounce, and Bind. Accordingly, using all five ensures a stable flow of competence[22]. Ulrich undertakes an employer perspective on competence while we have an employee viewpoint[23].

- ✓ ***Buy****ing competence refers to the act of going outside the unit to replace current talent with higher quality.*

    Although necessary to occasionally increase the current workforce when higher quality talents are available and accessible, it involves certain risks. It might drastically alienate the current employee who will resent the management decision. As a consequence, the crucial teamwork might suffer.

- ✓ *By **build**ing competence, the management team invests in the current workforce with intentions of making it more capable and productive. This involves allowing and assisting the employees to learn new skills in an informal or formal manner.*

    The objective of trying to build `intellectual capital´ is usually perceived positively. Typically, a gap exists between the management interpretations of the training that needs to be conducted and the learning the individual employee desires. The risk is then that an enormous amount of money and time is spent on training for its own sake, not for building individual `intellectual capital´.

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[22] Although we believe this to be a rough simplification of `reality´ it assists the discussion in ultimately creating an understanding of competence development.

[23] We have illustrated this by writing Ulrich's tool-descriptions in *italics* and our remarks in normal text format.

✓ In **borrow**ing competence, managers invest in outside vendors who bring in ideas, frameworks, and tools to make the organization stronger.

> Many organizations, especially in these days, rely on consultancy assistance. Effectively used, consultants or outsourcing partners may share knowledge, create knowledge, and design the assignment in a manner that people too close to the work would not have done. Hence, learning to use consultants can be of major advantage; nevertheless, becoming dependent on their input can be devastating. Thus, what is of great importance is to transfer the knowledge from the consultants into the organization and the people therein, in a way forcing the consultants to make themselves no longer necessary. As with buying competence, this might create some hostility among the already employed since the employees might feel that the organization distrust them, seeking assistance from outside.

✓ With **bounc**ing, managers can remove those individuals who fail to perform to standards. If a person have failed to develop new skills and are unqualified for the current work because of incapability of changing, learning, and adapting, he or she ought to be removed from the job.

> Naturally, an effective organization cannot allow underachievers, however, it is interesting to question who bears the responsibility. Why has an individual/employee not developed in the manner that the management planned? Consequently, by bouncing, the organization might lose the wrong people because of their misused skills or depending on management's incapability of separating factual shortcomings from personal matters. Also, if done seemingly incorrectly, it might demoralize the ones who stay within the organization.

✓ **Retain**ing the right employees is critical. Often, investments made in individual talent take years to pay back.

> In order to be able and willing to develop, the employee needs to remain within the company. The fear of losing a job can influence an individual heavily, truly shifting the conditions for competence development. It is also a question of motivation and loyalty. Receiving competence development from the employer can increase motivation and

appreciation of the employees, as well as providing an incentive for remaining longer in the organization.

The discussion above concerns building competence, thus that the company invests in the current workforce with intentions of making it more capable and productive. In theory the concept seems excellent, however, what are the goals? Do the organization aim for personal development per se or is the goal simply to produce a more productive employee in order to comply with company objectives? Questions as these stimuli the coming discussion in the analyzing segments of this work.

A Rationalistic Continuance towards Competence

In addition to earlier discussions with a rationalistic perspective, we now resume with the presentation of our findings, again conceived rationalistic. Sandberg (1994) argues that competence is a sum of different categories: theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, network of professional contacts, capacity to carry out the work, and conception of the work as summarized below and illustrated in **Figure 5**.

Theoretical Knowledge
This category is what could be called the intellectual one. The theories, methods, and facts that the individual needs to comprehend are included under this heading.

Practical Knowledge
This kind of knowledge can further be sub-divided. The first is practical skills, which lead to satisfactory performance in a certain situation. The second one, referred to as tacit knowledge or intimate knowledge, regards the familiarity to the task at hand and the ability to make judgment.

Capacity to carry out the work
This category concerns the individual's physical and psychological features. The physical features mean the amount of work a person can perform. The

psychological relates to the feelings of the individual about his or her performance.

Network of professional contacts

Also this category can be divided into two. Firstly, personal contacts, meaning the people the individual can contact when performing a task. Secondly, non-personal contacts refer to manuals, books, and databases.

Conception of the work

Conception can be seen as the individual's ability of making sense of his or her job. Thus, this category can be perceived as having an integrating function of the others aforementioned.
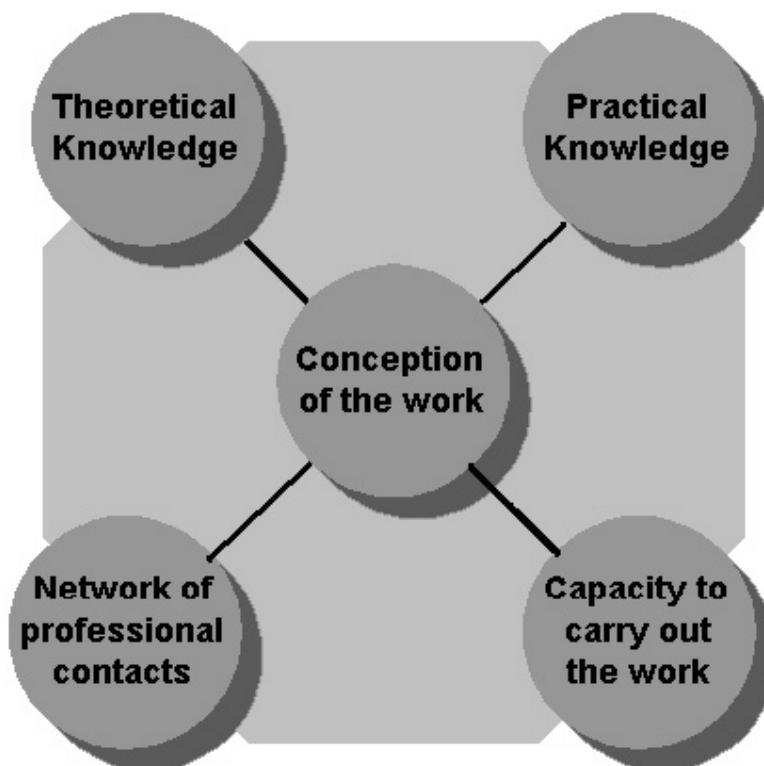
Figure 5, Rationalistic perspective towards competence (Sandberg, 1994)

Sandberg (1994) defines conception of the work as the individual's ability of making sense of his or her job. This category can be perceived as taking an

integrated functional view of all the other parts of the competence aspects in a person. There is a tendency to neglect the middle connecting part, seen to the right. Although one possesses the other parts to a certain degree, in order to actively develop, one need to understand ones own capabilities. However, that sense-making, the conception of the work piece, would integrate all other parts could be seen as utopia. Nevertheless, we noticed a tendency among our research objects that they were not aware of their situation regarding competence, possibly not even about their own full potential.
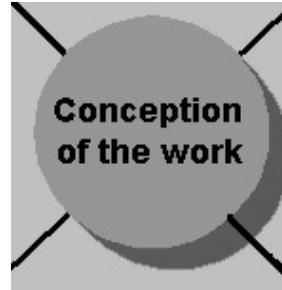
The above way of seeing the parts of competence is part of a rationalistic approach. The positive aspect of the above model is the possibility for people responsible to conduct a more systematical development of competence. Here, each category can be targeted to improve just that part of the individual. However, the `H´ in HRM seems utterly lost in using such approach.

Moreover, there are other limitations of the rationalistic approach towards competence. The selection and definition of categories, for instance, that often has a weak connection to theory and empirical data (Sandberg, 1994). Further, it seems logical that when examining a certain group of people, their understanding of competence should count for something, which naturally, is not the situation with a predefined definition. Lindgren (1996) principally agrees proclaiming that people are different, hence having separated values, consequently their preferences of competence differs. In addition, there seems to be a misconception of the relation between an individual's traits and skills and the actual work conducted. A person might have the capabilities of producing a desired outcome, however, for some reason; the final result is not a product of the person's utter potential. Boyatzis further asserts that it is not sufficient having the key knowledge. It, meaning the knowledge, ought to be used meaningfully enabling the development of competence (Lindgren, 1996).

Adding to this list of limitations concerning a rationalistic approach, it does not matter much how many categories that are constructed for describing competence, it is not possible to demonstrate a `direct´ description (Sandberg &

Targama, 1998). Thus, two individuals can theoretically possess identical `qualities´, still perform the same work differently depending on what `qualities´ they use, and how, in the execution of a task.

The Other Way – Heading for an Interpretative Approach

Contradicting the above-presented rationalistic approaches towards competence, people do not always act and react rationally. How a person views and regards a situation might be of greater importance than the individual's `actual´ attributes. Moreover, in order for an individual to act rationally in any given situation, he or she must be aware of all the variables influencing the `ultimate´ perspective. We find some support for this when Sandberg (1994) proclaims:

> *"…knowledge, skills and other attributes are not externally related to work,*
> *as assumed within the rationalistic approaches, but internally*
> *related to it through the workers' conception…"*
>
> (Sandberg, 1994, p 38)

Hence, the individuals' perception of competence development is, in this respect, more influenced of their sense-making of the concept than rationally based on their `real´ rudiments. Thus, as Sandberg (1994) concludes, in an interpretative approach to competence the most important factor is to "come as close as possible to the workers' own experience or sense making…"[24]

As with `everything´ the interpretative approach also has various weaknesses depending on how one perceives the approach. Somewhat simplified, one can assert that the outstanding strengths with the rationalistic approach are the weaknesses of the interpretative. Hence, the structuring of the essential aspects of the individual's competence is lacking in the interpretative approach.

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[24] Something we practice throughout this work further emphasized in the chapter called `Means of our Journey – A Continuation´. For more information see Sandberg & Targama (1998): *Ledning och förståelse- ett kompetensperspektiv på organisationer.*

The Pieces of the Puzzle in Synergy

Although the debates concerning the conception of competence is intriguing, the ultimate reason for this chapter is to illustrate our pre-understanding of the concept, serving as a common base for following chapters.

A concept habitually expressed when exploring competence is KSA, meaning *knowledge, skills,* and *abilities.* If a person possesses these three qualities, he or she would have the base for executing a particular task in a successful manner. It is rather evident that many theories around competence have a close connection to the KSA standpoint, as seen in **Figure 6**.

This figure illustrates human competence at work as a puzzle, which is unique for every individual. Competence is a factor of many pieces as illustrated in the puzzle. When joined together, the pieces make up the total competence of an individual, hence being competent enough to handle a particular situation.
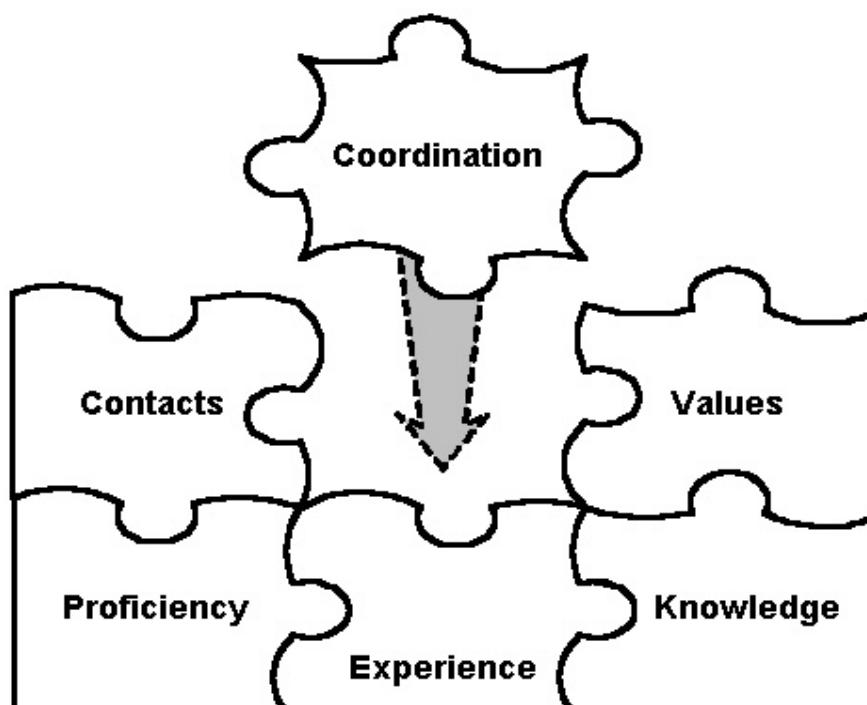
Figure 6, The puzzle of competence[25]

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[25] Idea mostly derived from Keen (1988) and Bergström et al (1997).

The piece called ***proficiency*** represents the ability to handle necessary tools. This includes many physical capabilities, but also abilities such as communicating successfully, many times in foreign languages.

Proficiency is not enough, if one does not have the knowledge required, a situation cannot be handled effectively. The ***knowledge*** piece is a collective visualization for facts and methods. Different situations require altered kinds of stored facts and methods. This piece of the puzzle is highly focused on in today's so-called knowledge society[26] despite the fact that knowledge alone does not make up the entire puzzle. This ought to be reflected on since traditionally this is what is highlighted in the academic hemisphere[27] through formal classroom education.

If perceiving the two aforementioned pieces as the base[28], the ***experience*** section represent how the base has been exercised. Probably the largest part of our learning comes from experiences. Simply expressed, the more situations a person has experienced, the better prepared he or she will be when placed in front of a new challenge.

Information is vital, and the one who possess the critical information has power. A power to influence and build stronger relations, in the puzzle demonstrated as the ***contacts*** piece. Through this person's contacts, he or she cannot only influence a setting, but in addition, reach a higher level of knowledge[29].

The last piece of the puzzle in **Figure 6** already connected is called ***values***. This might not be as concrete as the others, however it is of utter importance. The piece symbolizes the willingness to share fundamental values, to act, and to seize responsibility for one's proceedings.

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[26] The authors do not support this label, not further developed in this thesis.

[27] Here, the authors cannot avoid mentioning the Problem Based Learning -method, utilized in the GBS Masters Programs, where the students are encouraged to actively use their knowledge.

[28] Positioned in the corners of the puzzle.

[29] By many expressed as `knowledge through dialogues´.

In order to fruitfully manage one's pieces of the puzzle, the middle section is a must. One could describe the **coordination** piece as symbolizing psychological power. Power needed to combine and utilize *all* of the pieces to a degree advantageous for the intended task.

One part not presented at that point is the role of the organization. An individual cannot be solely responsible for managing their self-development, without encouragement and assistance from the organization. For this reason, we now introduce an own altered version of aforementioned puzzle. See **Figure 7**.
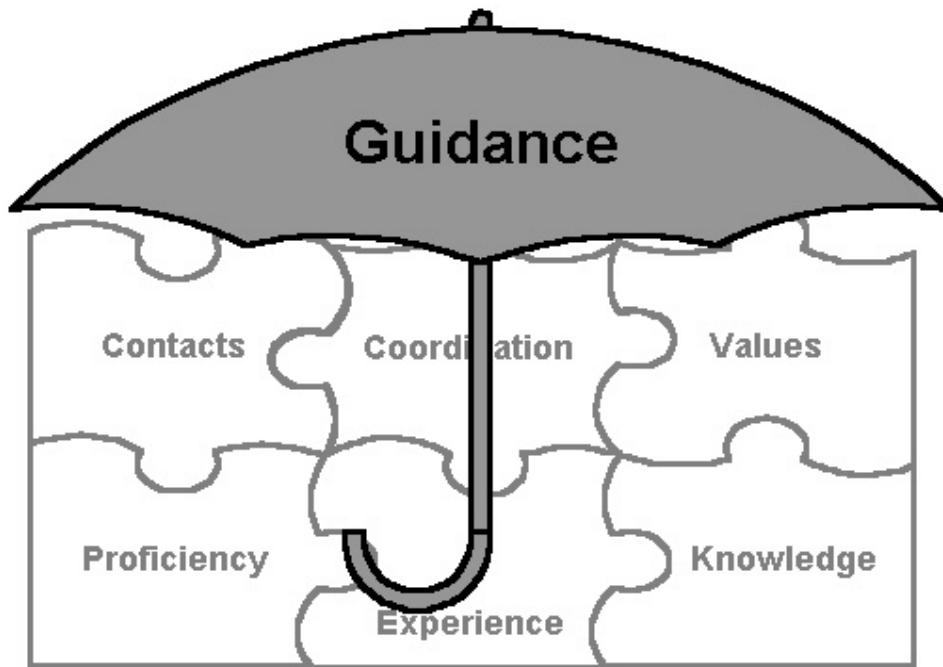
Figure 7, The puzzle of competence, including the role of the organization

Figure 7 illustrates that although a person's competence can seem inclusive with a representation of all the pieces, the influence of the organizations is not integrated. Here, the umbrella illustrates the organization, but of significance is that other factors, as other individuals, can also serve as a source of guidance and encouragement. The rational behind why the organization ought to be involved in forming ones competence is due to two main reasons:

Firstly, the collective experience in the organization has knowledge unreachable for one individual. Hence, the organization has a possibility to guide and motivate the person to successfully nurture ones development.

Secondly, the organization can benefit from guiding a person's development and in doing so, attaining the competence appropriate for the progress of the company.

What the umbrella represents is moreover a form of protection or framework. Thus, allowing the individual to visualize within what borders one is permitted to develop. The organization can consequently focus the attention on the pieces in greatest need. In having our focus on the individual employee, what is of superior relevance is that the individual can receive assistance where it is indispensable.

Although the statements above represent a rather rationalistic stance, we believe its existence can be supportive. To note is that, constructing a universal puzzle of competence is undoable and can even be detrimental. The puzzle is unique for every person and ought to be supervised under such premises.

In addition, the pieces of the puzzle are unequally large and unevenly imperative depending on the situation. For instance, we discovered that the `value piece´ of the puzzle is frequently of greater significance than the other. If one does not have the attitude encouraging development, the other pieces will be of lesser significance. In addition, the puzzle is intended to grow for each individual illustrating personal growth. Consequently, as one piece becomes larger, the others are required to follow in order to fit in the ever-changing puzzle of competence.

Realization of the `Unrealizational´

"To have or be a competent organization is to be an
organization organizing competence."

(Bramming & Larsen, 2000, p 77)

As illustrated with above citation, competence is a complex phenomenon. The meaning of the concept of competence differs from one organization to another, as well as from one person to another. We do not intend to present an unconventional, highly innovating description of competence; rather we aim to highlight our understanding of the same. Consequently, our understanding is the only `true´ one in this format, due to the fact that the analysis and conclusions are based on such beliefs. Still, outside of this work, each and everyone have their `true´ comprehension of competence, as for us, shaped by the various input of others.

In organizations, the shared interpretations of competence are based on various variables that are a factor of the history of the organization. For instance, in the academic setting the word competence is plainly used to describe when a person is qualified for something, as being professor competent. When the concept is used in the working community the word has a different connotation. Here, competence usually refers to that a person is able or capable to manage something.

The `true´[30] definition of competence:

> *Competence is the capability to successfully perform a particular task of present concern, including the capability to identify, take advantage of, and widen the interpretation of one's knowledge. Knowledge is here the foundation for an explicit demonstration of competence in action, leading to a skillful implementation of an act in which one is perceived as qualified, based on own or others criteria(s).*

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[30] Here: `our´.

A Competent Précis

Our `true´ version of competence presented above is what we refer to every time competence, or competence development for that matter, is mentioned. On the other hand, our main purpose is not to define competence, leaving that area of uncertainty to the reader, since we believe all individuals have their own definition of what competence stands for. Attempting to find a universal definition would be infeasible. As illustrated earlier in our example with `Ivar´, one person can also have several definitions of the concept, depending on the circumstances. Still, we feel it is necessary to state what our definition is, in order to provide the reader with the necessary framework for understanding our study.

As stated before, the previous rationalistic views of competence is increasingly being criticized and seems to lose its importance in today's HRM research. Would one at this present time even dare to state that a rational approach is the `correct´ way? We would partially since we believe that the rational approach is not completely outdated; it is more a matter of what focus to accentuate. We believe that some parts of the rational approach, presented earlier, are still valuable. In order to be able to develop an employee towards organizational goals, Sandberg's (1994) competence categorization and the `Puzzle´ (see **Figure 6**) for example, are useful tools for dividing and emphasizing the different competencies an employee encompass. The only dilemma is that if the employee is not sharing this perspective, the whole concept loses its significance and the possibility to accomplish the objectives deteriorates.

Consequently, we consider the use of both approaches to be the unsurpassed method, making the accomplishment and the development of the employee equivalent to the success of the organization. Is this then a realistic approach or only a utopia existing on paper? To be forthright, we do not know since this a theoretical thesis, and not an experiment of a concrete occurrence. Still, we consider it imperative to strive towards an objective.

HARDCORE THEORY

$$\lambda = \text{const.} \left(\frac{m^2}{m^2 - n^2} \right)$$

- the Concrete of the Theoretical Construction

*T*he difference between `theory´ and `a theory´ can be debated for a long time. What has been presented to this point under `A Theoretical Construction´ is labeled `theory´[31], namely material that has been assisting us in our progress. What will follow now are examples of `a theory´, actually two, thus theories that are quite distinct, and frequently labeled `the theory of…´, in our forum called `Hardcore Theory´.

Individual and Organizational Development – a Reciprocal Approach to Competence Development

Developing an organization without affecting the employees or vice versa is difficult, if not even impossible. Arthur and Kram (1989) are concerned about how work arrangements transmit influence from the individual to the organization. Furthermore, they state that the interaction between the employee and the organization supports or hinders the individual and organizational development. The question is, how can this interaction or `reciprocity´ between the two parties contribute to the future possibilities for the employees and the organization?

Arthur and Krams' definition of career is:

> *"The evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time."*
>
> (Arthur and Kram, 1989, p 292)

They claim that this description incorporates all organizational members and suggests a `moving perspective´. We feel that this portrayal of career development corresponds with our vision. According to our view, career is, as we will state several times in this thesis, not only promotion to a position involving managerial duties. Instead, we support a holistic approach, compromising the experiences and the development during the working period.

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[31] According to us, the authors.

Reciprocity between the employee and the organization depend on the prevailing development stage of each of these two parties. Arthur and Kram (1989) argues that the separate outcome of organizational inducement to employees, and to employee contribution to the organizations, must each be satisfactory for an effective and continuing employee-employer association. Hence, reciprocity, as used by Arthur and Kram, refers to the degree to which individual and organizational needs are independently and simultaneously united.

Schein (1978) states that neither organizational efficiency nor individual fulfillment can be accomplished unless there is a better matching of what the organization needs and what the individuals who spend a long time of their lives in those organizations need.

According to Arthur and Kram (1989), there is a convergence of views on how individual needs change as careers unfold. Picturing the individual career as three consecutive stages, each of around 15 years in duration can capture much of this convergence. These three levels are:

- Early career
- Middle career
- Career maturity

The above stages are dependant on the shifting individual needs associated with the preceding stage; consequently these needs are built on one another. Previous need are neither forgotten nor altogether neglected but become integrated into the still developing person. However, these needs and behaviors do not have to evolve and recede in strict order. This is reminiscent of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which will be described in the next chapter.

It is also important to remember that in analyzing the career stages, it is preferable to view them as broad sets of common issues rather than to attempt to link them systematically to particular ages or other life stages. (Schein, 1978)

Early Career, the Exploratory Period

The early career commences when someone begins one's first `real´ employment. Depending on the development and the continuity of this employment the early career stage usually ends in the early to mid-thirties. During this period the, usually young, employee, is faced with the major task of developing job competence and an initial occupational identity. At the same time, the person is usually learning the way of the organization, developing an independent life structure apart from the family of origin, and preparing the ground for the career that lie ahead.

Each of these tasks can be facilitated through work arrangements, and especially through the interest, guidance, and support from the organization. The work should provide opportunities for the individual to learn, to demonstrate competence, to experience acceptance, and protection and to have access to role models for the future career choices. The dominant individual need at this stage is, according to Arthur and Kram (1989), *exploring*.

The essential concern, during this period, is `doing´ and demonstrating competencies in occupational or technical experience. This high level of energy for work is usually accompanied by optimism and a willingness to trust the organization. The creativity associated with this energy is intense and spontaneous, coming out naturally. Arthur and Kram calls the behavior associated with this period *exuberance*.

Middle Career, the Advancing Period

The middle career usually lasts until the middle to late forties. Reaching this period the employee generally has his or her explorations behind, and has developed some focus on the career goals to pursue. These employees are generally most concerned about their personal advancement and recognition. These needs manifest themselves as pursuing greater autonomy from senior colleagues and responsibility over junior ones. The overall purpose of these behaviors is to seek out opportunities to be visibly successful in the

organizations, and therefore on their own behalf. Arthur and Kram (1989) label the dominant individual need of the period *advancing*.

Employees in the middle career period concern themselves with promotion and gaining greater acceptance by the organization. However, this desire is conditional regarding the opportunity for members to associate their own advancement with organizational achievement. Supervision of other employees is preferred but is again provisional on the employee's judgment of the personal rewards to be obtained. Creativity is also offered on similar conditions. Arthur and Kram call this behavior, associated with the middle career, *directedness*.

Career Maturity, the Protecting Period

During the mature career years, usually lasting until retirement, employees are generally faced with the task of securing and maintaining their emergent status, experiencing continued affirmation of their work. Passing on experience to others is also an important need at this stage. In order for these tasks to be successfully accomplished, job arrangements must provide feedback from peers and superiors that one's contributions continue to have significance for the organization. Employees in this stage can also require opportunities to actively mentor succeeding generations and an eventual chance to prepare for retirement by sharing anticipations of this major life transition with trusted peers. Since there are dual components of taking care of self as well as others, Arthur and Kram (1989) label the employee need associated with this period, *protecting*.

The creativity associated with this period is of a `sculpted´ kind, involving constructive resignation to the limitations of any new work, and of accomplishing tasks in the present work environment. Arthur and Kram call this behavior *stewardship*.

Studying Arthur and Kram's explanation of the three stages we question if the foundation for the forward striving career is to obtain managerial[32] duties. Do these steps still provide a valid base for analyzing employees with no or modest

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[32] Here regarding power over subordinates.

managerial power? We believe so, Arthur and Kram also states that in the maturity level, supervision of others is not conditional on any quid pro quo for further external achievement. We question if all employees have a need for further promotion in all, or even any, stages.

An Interactive Approach to Employee and Organizational Development

Organizations offer inducement in attempts to meet the needs of the employee and similarly, employees offer behavior in attempts to make contributions to the organization. Exploring, advancing and protecting were, according to Arthur and Kram (1989), proposed to reflect major needs for individual development. Hence, the intricate question is now, how well the behavioral counterparts of exuberance, directedness and stewardship respond to predictable organizational needs?

Our purpose is to study the employees' perception of competence development. Nevertheless, we believe it is necessary to explain the concept of organizational needs in order to construct the setting where the employees act. Organizational needs emerge from the interplay among the individual members. This would imply, that organizational needs for exuberance, directedness and stewardship would become known from the behavior of organizational members as they pursue their own career needs. Exuberance is mostly about adaptation to the environment, directedness is principally concerned with achieving objectives. Finally, stewardship is focused on maintaining the internal organization.

In short, Arthur and Kram (1989) suggest a matching framework of employee and organizational needs, with each successive need at one level having a reciprocal counterpart at the other. Given the preceding framework, we need to understand that it is through interaction between employee and organization that development takes place.

Individual Development

The development of the employee is dependant on the `fit´ between a person's level of commitment on one hand and the degree of job challenge provided by the organization on the other. Arthur and Kram (1989) discuss a model based on a standpoint calling for a new level of flexibility in employment arrangements. The model[33] uses these constructs as axes for a two-dimensional model of individual-organization career negotiation. The model identifies an area of `fit´ along a diagonal line between the two axes and shows individual growth or development over time as an outward shift along the prescribed diagonal path, see **Figure 8**. The area represents a balance between individual commitment and demand from work; consequently an employee can have a low degree of commitment and still be in the area of fit due to that the work demands are low. As a result, the area of `fit´ is different for all employees.

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[33] Based on works by Bailyn (1984) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975).
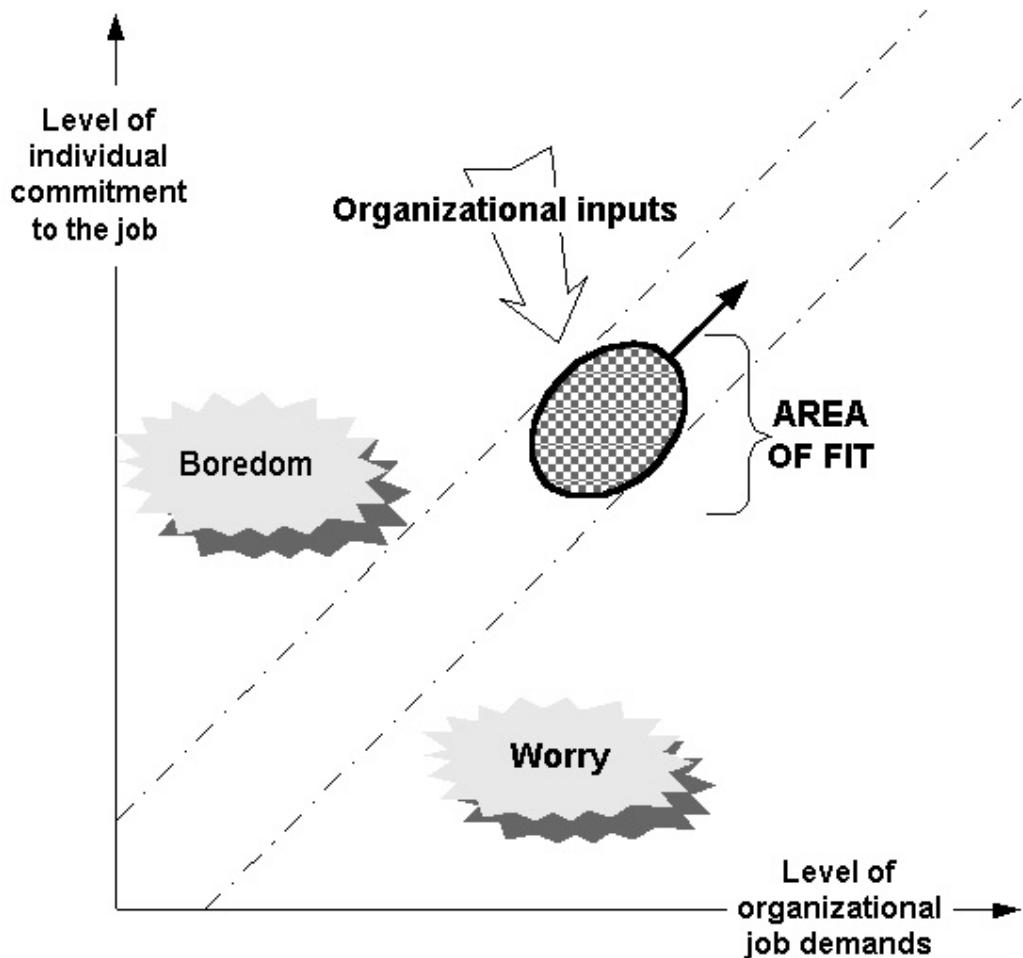
Figure 8, Individual-organizational interaction at the individual level (Arthur & Kram, 1989)

The figure suggests that there are two distinct areas where individual needs are not met. In the first, a person will experience boredom if he or she brings a level of commitment greater than the job challenge available. Conversely, a person will worry if a job demands more than he or she can give to the work situation.

Remembering the earlier definitions of the different needs employees have, exploring, advancing and protecting, dependent on the career level he or she exist in we, as follows, apply this to the model presented in **Figure 8**.

For the employee prevailing in the early career, having the need of exploring, `fit´ will occur when organizational circumstances provide the person with matching opportunity. Thus, `fit´ will occur if the organization allows for the pursuit of major individual tasks, such as developing job competence and occupational identity. On the other hand, if organizational circumstances are not coinciding with the exploring employee's developmental needs, the outcome can be expected to fall into two different categories. (Arthur and Kram, 1989)

The first one is boredom, which occurs when the assigned tasks are uninteresting or if supervision is excessive. Consequently, there will be minor or no incentive to build new competencies. Alternatively, if assigned tasks are overwhelming and/or if relationships with seniors and peers do not provide appropriate guidance and support, the potential for failure, or the experience of failure, will result in considerable worry.

In both these categories, not only will the `exploring need´ itself be discouraged, so will also foundational experiences critical to successful performance, adaptation and further career development.

Concerning the particular need of advancing, present when the employee is in the middle career, `fit´ will occur when the organization provides a different kind of commensurate opportunity. `Fit´ will take place when the organization allows the employee to pursuit major individual tasks such as earning promotion, expanding job possibilities or gaining external recognition of one's achievement. Schein (1978) argues that in the middle career[34] stage, one must acquire self-confidence, however, the major issue is an `ultimate testing´ between the individual and the organization of whether or not they can meet each other's needs in the long run.

Arthur and Kram (1989) states that if the organization is not responsive to the advancing need, work arrangements are likely to be unsuitable. If an employee's job situation denies the opportunity for individual achievement or

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[34] Schein (1978) labels this stage `midcareer´.

obscures recognition of that achievement by others, boredom is the likely outcome. Alternatively, if challenges are unrealistic or if superiors, peers and subordinates have high expectations but do not offer confirmation or recognition, worry is the likely outcome. Then will doubts about one selves competence and value to the organization emerge. This time, both kinds of mismatches will frustrate the individual's advancing need, and both will mean that vital career development functions, usually before or during the `mid-life transition´ will be lacking.

For the employee in the maturity phase concerned with the need of protecting, `fit´ will occur when there is yet a third kind of organizational opportunity. For a `fit´, the organization will need to cater to the employee's own need for career maintenance as well as allow the employee to provide support to less experienced colleagues.

In this stage of the employee's career, boredom will occur if the employee does not come to be viewed as an established member of the organization. Worry, on the other hand, will take place if a person's potential contribution is discounted because of age-linked perceptions or associated attributions about educational or experiential obsolescence. In case of the `protecting need´ being frustrated, this could bring with it a threat to the usual developmental tasks of career maturity and threatens individual performance and adaptation that is dependant on the integration of successive developmental needs up to that time. (Arthur and Kram, 1989)

We believe that the differences between exploring, advancing and protecting implies that there are differences in the way `job fit´ is likely to occur for employees. Hence, a more person-based approach from the organization would seem to be the solution.

Organizational Development

As stated before, our purpose is not to investigate how the organization can develop; still we feel it necessary to clarify the connection between organizational and employee development since we regard them as inseparable.

Arthur and Kram (1989) argue that when an organization is receptive to the career stage needs of the employees, it has the opportunity to benefit from the overall level of commitment it receives. On the other hand, when an organization precipitates individual outcomes of boredom or worry, employee performance, adaptation and development will predictably suffer and the organizational outcomes are likely to be dysfunctional. Adopting the before presented figure, we will now use it to explain the appropriateness of job arrangements, however this time using the organization's perspective.

Now the focus is on the `fit´ between the overall level of commitment brought by organizational members and the set of organizational job arrangements provided in response. The set of matched situations again falls within a diagonal path, representing organizational evolution or development; again there are two areas of mismatch. In **Figure 9**, one can see that in one area, job arrangements generally provide insufficient opportunity for members to respond to organizational needs. Arthur and Kram call the resulting effect organizational *stagnation*. In the second area of mismatch, job arrangements make excessive demands of members on behalf of organizational needs. This area is labeled organizational *paralysis*.
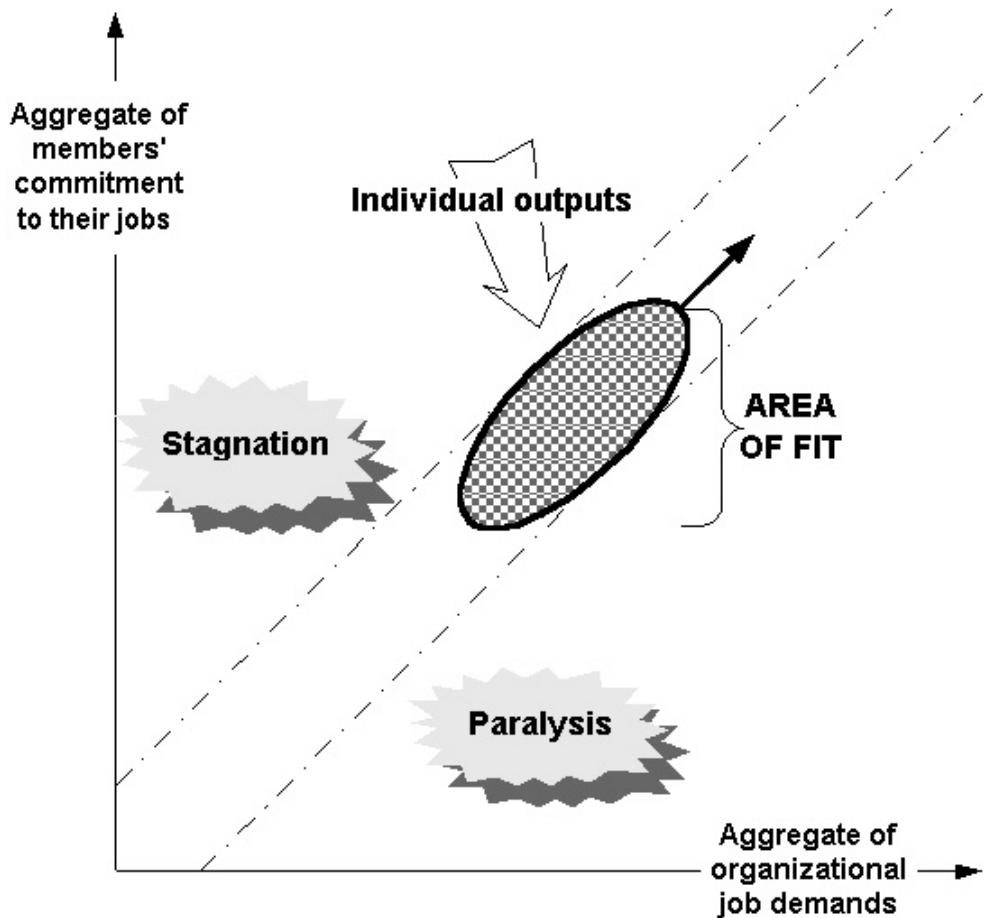
Figure 9, Individual-organizational interaction at the organizational level (Arthur & Kram, 1989)

In **Figure 9**, development attends to organizational issues. Thus, for the particular organizational need of exuberance, `fit´ will occur when job arrangements draw on the raw energy, mentioned earlier, vitality and concern with `doing´ that certain members (usually those in the early, `explorative´ stage) seek to supply. When members are unable to respond appropriately to seek the organization's need for exuberance, two categories of outcomes are likely.

In the first, the organization is denied the kind of energy to explore new or develop existing markets, or even to maintain a presence in existing markets, over time. Under these circumstances organizational stagnation is a likely outcome. In the second outcome category, exuberance is probable to go

unchecked. Youthful energy alone lacks the clarity of purpose or guiding experience to assure continuing success. Short-term achievement can fuel perceived competence and heighten the difficulty of more experienced voices being heard. In such circumstances, organizational paralysis is to be expected. (Arthur and Kram, 1989)

The particular dynamics of the early career must be carefully assessed to ensure that the manner in which individuals are brought into organizations, socialized, and launched on their careers creates an optimal psychological agreement which permits matching of the organization's needs for a high level of contribution and/or innovation with the individual's need for locating his or her particular area of specialization and involvement. (Schein, 1978)

For the particular organizational need of directedness, `fit´ will happen when job arrangements draw on associated desires for identification with, advancement through and achievement by the organization that certain members (usually those in middle career) seek to supply. Here, problems will occur if job planning fail to serve the directedness need appropriately. For example, an organization can fail to develop the strategic opportunities open to it, hence wasting distinctive strengths in new research or established goodwill. Conversely, if directedness comes to dominate, it can be channeled into political (but not necessarily productive) goals of certain members.

Finally, for the particular organizational need of stewardship, `fit´ will occur when job arrangements draw on the desires to remain associated with what has been built, to reach out as mentors and role models to younger generations and to assure organizational continuity that certain members (usually employees in career maturity) seek to supply. Arthur and Kram (1989) argue that it is through job arrangements that organizations succeed or fail to incorporate these properties of stewardship.

On the one hand, if job arrangements do not provide channels to draw on available wisdom and experience, stagnation is likely to occur. Stagnation is probable, in this sense, if enaction, or learning by doing, dominates as a form of organizational activity over proaction, involving the application of prior

learning. On the other hand, when stewardship is allowed to operate unchallenged and without active questioning from junior members. Such `top-down control´ allows modest room for new questions and knowledge to influence the organization's course and implies paralysis.

Schein (1978) argues that in the late career stage, lower levels of contribution and job involvement can all be turned into resources if both individual and organization understand that there is a natural career evolution here for many people.

Thus, we believe that the dissimilarities between organizational needs of exuberance, directedness and stewardship suggests differences in the way collective `job fit´ is anticipated to occur for organizations.

The Patterns of Convergence and Divergence

The combination between individual-organizational needs represented by exploring-exuberance, advancing-directedness, and protecting-stewardship offer a prospective `fit´ between the employee and the organization. The reasoning for `fit´ will differ according to each of the three paired stages of individual and organizational development.

The `fit´ between an individual and an organization is dependant on the matching of each party's developmental needs. Specifically, matching will depend on the degree of reciprocity between individual needs for exploring, advancing and protecting and respective organizational needs for exuberance, directedness and stewardship. Schein (1978) seems to agree when stating that the dynamics of the matching process cannot be managed without more knowledge about the reciprocal interaction of the individual and the organization.

Lack of `fit´ between an employee and an organization will be dependant on the degree of mismatch between each party's developmental needs. Specifically, lack of `fit´ will be dependant on a lack of reciprocity whereby the individual needs are not matched against respective organizational needs.

The maintenance of individual-organizational `fit´ will involve accepting changes in each party's needs over time. These changes will involve successive incorporation and emphasis of the respective terms expressed for both the individual and the organization. (Arthur and Kram, 1989)

Trying to serve only one set of developmental needs, individual or organizational, will be problematic to say the least. In the absence of fuller understanding, people will go to great lengths to interpret their own behavior as satisfactory. We agree with Arthur and Kram that attempts to improve individual-organizational `fit´ are more likely to succeed when strategic choices and political behaviors are sensitive to both individual and organizational needs. Thus, fundamental questions, imperative for the future of the organization are dealt with on both an employee and employer level.

Motivation as a Motivator – Influencing the Interpretation and Manifestation of Competence

As frequently asserted, the level of human motivation is a consequence of the interplay between the individual and the present cultural context in the company (Lindgren, 1996). In our study, we consider the individual understanding of the employees collectively concerning their interpretations of the cultural context. In light of this, these individuals' motivation is a product of their aforementioned interpretations. Thus, the leading forces of a particular organization can influence the individual motivation by actively manipulating[35] the culturally perceived `reality´.

We agree with Lindgren (1996) when she argues regarding what is often proclaimed in popular writings about how to tower motivation, ought to be neglected. Thus, the promising methods of action for actively influencing the individual motivation cannot be achieved on a one-way basis. The involvement of the individual is an ultimate prerequisite. The objective of human motivation

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[35] Here: `influence´.

is hence a complex relation connecting the individual interpretation of current existing `reality´ and the organizational `actual´ conditions.

The Bricks of the Imperturbable Pyramid

McGregor (1960) states that humans are wanting animals, as soon as one of his/her needs is satisfied, another appears in its place. This process is unending. It continues from birth to death. Humans continuously put forth effort to satisfy their needs. In **Figure 10**, a summary of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is illustrated, followed by an explanation. He states that there are five levels of needs, each and every one depending upon the one previous.
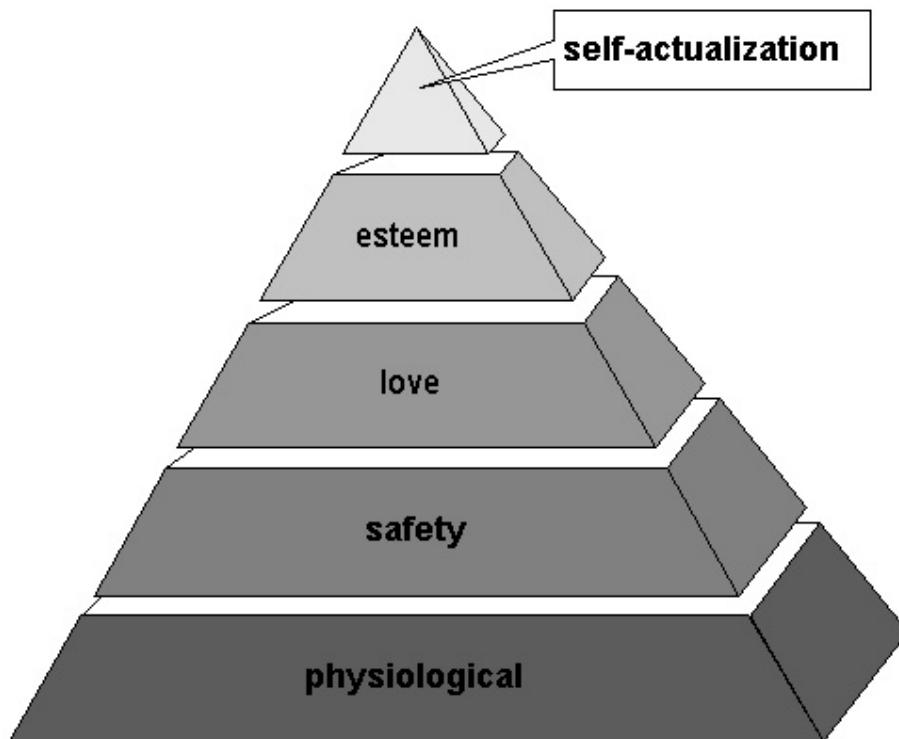
Figure 10, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943)

1. **The `physiological´ needs**
   This is the starting point of the motivation theory. These physiological needs vary from individual to individual and thus it seems impossible to present a complete list of such. Examples would be hunger, thirst, sex, or tiredness.

2. **The safety needs**

   If the physiological needs are relatively well satisfied, new needs will emerge, which most of the time is categorized as safety needs. This is unquestionably a more hidden or internal need than the above, not showing as clearly on the surface. However, an individual's search for safety and stability can be utterly strong.

3. **The love needs**

   On the next step on the ladder of motivation, we find the need of love. An individual tries to satisfy these needs when the two aforementioned are relatively satisfied. This seeking for belongingness is demonstrated as a search for friends, a sweetheart, a wife or man, or children. This expresses itself in an individual hunger for relationships with other people.

4. **The esteem needs**

   Under this category people have a desire for a high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect or self-esteem. Often, the expression `firmly based´ is added in this discussion meaning that the esteem is based on `real´ capacity, achievement, and respect from others. Thus, the individual seeks for strength, achievement, adequacy, confidence, and independence. In the second step within this category there is a desire for reputation or prestige, recognition, and attention.

5. **The need of self-actualization**

   When the above needs are satisfied an individual will feel rather content with the situation. However, some might experience a feeling of discontent and restlessness. An individual must in this sense do what he or she believes they are being fitted for. Thus, as often expressed "what a person *can* be, he or she *must* be", at least in order to satisfy the need of self-actualization.

Studies as Maslow's[36] can be criticized mainly because of the dilemma of the lack of empirical correspondence. Also frequently asserted is that their attempts are too generalized, neither acknowledging the variations among individuals nor one individual's progression over time (Lindgren, 1996). One can also question whether it is in actuality beneficial to attempt connecting an area as we do regarding competence development with behavioral studies with a psychological theory as Maslow's. One needs to bear in mind that we do not distinguish the behavioral material presented as a universal truth; hierarchically structuring needs or for that matter other abstract issues are an impracticality. Still, by introducing new perspectives and approaches discourses of other themes can be stimulated and the outcome, optimistically, enhanced in considering a greater base of comprehension(s).

The Erection of Arduous Bricks

The emergence of esteem and self-actualization rests upon prior satisfaction of the physiological needs. Maslow (1943) states that above the love needs, in the sense that they do not usually become motivators until lower needs are reasonably satisfied, are the needs of the greater significance to management and to employees: the needs are egoistic, and of two kinds:

1. Those that relate to one's self-esteem: needs for self-respect and self-confidence, for autonomy, for achievement, for competence and for knowledge.

2. Those that relate to one's reputation: needs for status, for recognition, for appreciation, for the deserved respect of one's fellows.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs also enables managers to achieve desired organizational outcomes. Since the hierarchy is innate or biological, all people possess these needs in manifold variations; hence, managers can achieve organizational effectiveness by structuring jobs in such a way as to ensure that

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[36] For other studies in the same genre, see Alderfer, Herzberg, and McClelland. For a summary of these studies including Maslow's, see Statt (1994).

individuals have the opportunity to self-actualize while performing those jobs. If individual self-actualization and the concomitant desired organizational outcomes do not occur, what is the explanation? Could it be that the manager's actions were ineffective or faulty or that the employee had only a limited potential to self-actualize and therefore could not benefit from the manager's benevolent actions? (Cullen, 2000)

Unravelling Our Interpretation of Motivational

In his hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1943) argues that each level of needs is depending upon the one previous. These five steps were Maslow's way of describing motivational issues in life.

Since we have a more narrow approach, regarding employees' perception on competence development, we are concerned about the effects of motivation of the employees regarding this issue. As stated before, we consider the individual understanding of the employees collectively concerning their interpretations of the cultural context.

In light of this, these individuals' motivation is a product of their outlook on competence development. Hence, an organization, like IKEA, can affect the motivation, individually or collectively, by actively supporting the development of their employees.

However, is it obvious that all employees have a need to develop? We do not imply that all employees need to have a career in the way the word is usually interpreted, meaning moving upward in the hierarchy obtaining managerial duties. Nevertheless, development is in most cases desirable. Most individuals want to feel safe at work, have friends, be recognized and even self-actualize. This may on the other hand not be equal to becoming a manager. Today, most organizations reward the employees by promoting them to managers; nevertheless, the individuals left still want to fulfill their needs. As we see it, the dilemma is that the typical organization of today offers only limited

opportunities for the satisfaction of egoistic needs to people at lower levels in the hierarchy.

What are the reasons, if an employee has not `self-actualized´ himself? Is the individual to blame or perhaps the organization? There is of course no `true´ answer to this. McGregor (1960) states that the average human being seeks responsibility under `proper conditions´. He continues to argue that under the conditions of modern industrial life, the intellectual potentialities of the average human being are only partially utilized. This is probably true, but we believe that it is also a question of what the individual believes and wants. `Proper conditions´ could have different connotations depending on which employee one questions. In order to improve the willingness to develop, the employer needs to adhere to the importance of motivation and its implications on the perception of the employee.

The question still remains about those who receive competence development? Interpreting Maslow's theories one could believe that an employee is satisfied and does not want anything more as soon as all levels are fulfilled. This would then indicate that the motivation of the employee would deteriorate. McGregor (1960) seems to agree when stating that a satisfied need is not a motivator anymore. We feel it is important for the company to establish new goals and challenges thereby activating the search for fulfillment again.

We consider it important for the employer to constantly supervise the challenges provided for the employees. We concur in Cullen's (2000) statement, that managers can achieve organizational effectiveness by structuring jobs in such a way that individuals have the prospect to constantly self-actualize while performing those jobs.

Adopting Maslow's pyramid to our purpose we have translated his somewhat broader definitions into employee related descriptions. As seen in **Figure 11**, we have adopted Maslow's needs to an employee related point of view. We see this movement as an upward striving force for self-fulfillment. The stairway symbolizes that the steps sometimes can be quite steep and hard to overcome. Notably, if one falls off, the descent can be extensive and hazardous to one's

confidence. The climb back towards the top can be difficult and time-consuming, as will be discussed further in the chapter regarding the generic persons.
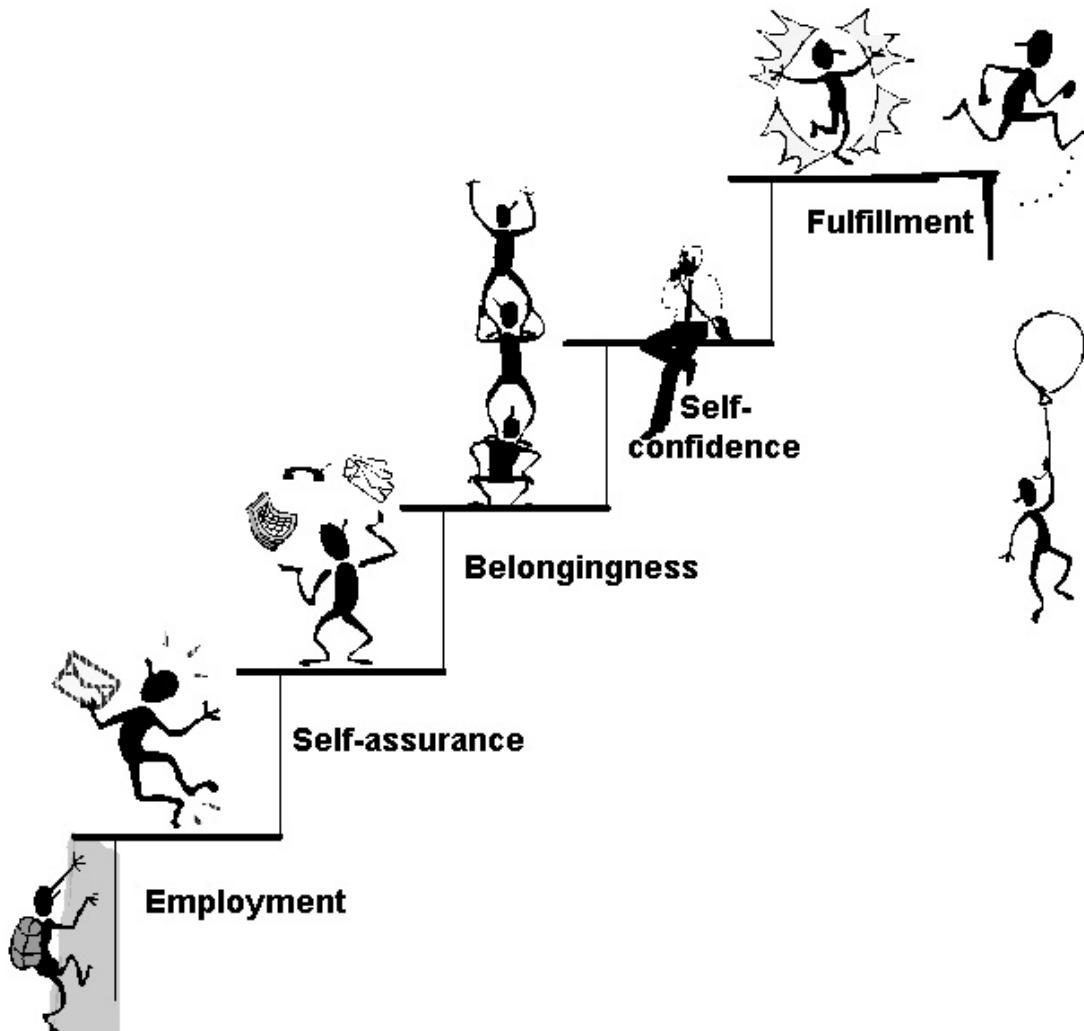
Figure 11, Stairway to fulfillment

1. **Employment**

   We see this base level as the need of having a job and the physical requirements in order to carry it out (such as your health, a place to be, breaks for lunch etc.).

2. **Self-assurance**

   As in Maslow's (1943) pyramid, new needs will emerge. An example would be a need of consistency, not having fear of losing ones job. It could also be a need of feeling safe at the job, not risking injury or sickness.

3. **Belongingness**

   After the two more basic needs of having a job and feeling secure are fulfilled, the next step emerges. An employee will try to satisfy this need when the two aforementioned are reasonably satisfied. This could represent a sense of belongingness amid colleagues, a department or even a company.

4. **Self-confidence**

   Under this category employees have a desire for a high evaluation of themselves. It could also signify a need for self-respect and/or self-esteem. Employees' esteem at work is usually based on others' perceptions of themselves. This could represent respect from colleagues, prestige or a reputation as well as acknowledgment or interest from the employer.

5. **Fulfillment**

   Having satisfied all needs specified above, one might assume the employee would be satisfied. Nevertheless, the employee might still feel discontent with his or her work situation. In having fulfilled all the needs aforementioned, an individual needs to self-actualize, meaning, borrowing an expression from the U.S-army, `be all you can be´. Far from everyone achieve this state; we believe it is usually individuals who regard work as a significant part of life.

It is also important to remember that if reaching the last level of fulfillment, which few do, this is not the `end´. In order to continue to develop one needs to return to lower levels, re-climbing the laborious steps. In this way, one can view the `Stairway to fulfillment as a treadmill, a road without an end, which sometimes is steep and sometimes is flat. As mentioned before, McGregor

(1960) argues that a satisfied need is not a motivator; therefore we believe it is important for the employer to continue to stimulate the employees in order to avoid the employees from feeling bored and the organization consequently from becoming stagnated.

A Need Précis

As we will continue our methodological discussion in the next chapter, we feel a need for a summation of the two above mentioned `hardcore´ theories. These two theories, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Arthur and Kram's (1989) theory of reciprocity deal with individual human needs. They both argue that in order to reach the subsequent level one needs to fulfill the former. We believe that this is definitely a simplified view of the complex spectra of human development; nevertheless, we feel it contains a degree of theoretical and factual relevance. In order to develop, one needs to pass certain steps of experience, however not necessarily in a predefined order. Therefore, we have presented these two theories, not because they are absolute truths, on the contrary, because they can help to shed light on our purpose and problem statement, explaining the intricate underlying reasons for how employees perceive competence development. In our analysis and conclusion we will elaborate further on these two theories in supporting or criticizing our own findings and reflections.

THE MEANS OF OUR JOURNEY
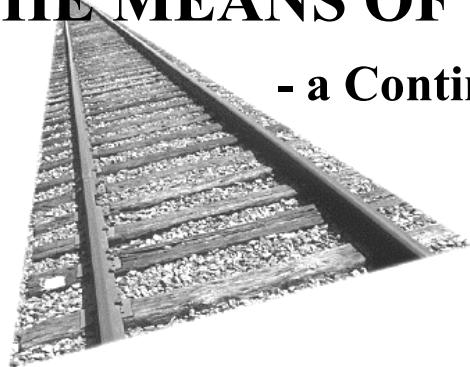
- a Continuation

*I*n this continuation of our methodology discussion, we start out with how we conducted our empirical investigation. Next we continue with issues around distribution and analysis of the questionnaire. Finally we end with a description representing our choice of an ethnographical approach. We see this chapter as a bridge adjoining our methodology, theory and empirical research.

"The term methodology refers to the way in which researchers approach problems and seek answers. This is the framework for how to conduct research. Assumptions, interests and purposes with the research will most likely affect the study. Therefore, debates over methodology are debates over assumptions and purposes, over theory and perspective."

(Bogdan, 1984, p 23)

Empirical Conduct

Our study is mainly based on primary data in the form of a questionnaire and informal interviews with employees at three IKEA houses in Sweden[37]. We choose to only give the questionnaire to staff on a departmental level and below[38] in order to exclude staff with mostly administrative functions. We perceive that the work conducted by the solely administrative staff is quite different from the work on a departmental level. Therefore, we were anxious that the perceptions of the administrative staff would be rather different from the workers without administrative functions.

When working at IKEA and traveling to different IKEA stores we have constantly debated and discussed the topic of competence development with the employees. During these informal interviews we allowed the interviewee to

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[37] According to Yin (1984), six sources of finding `evidence´ are to be used: Documentation, Archival records, Interviews, Direct observations, Participant-observation, and Physical artifacts. We use all except for the latter, Physical artifacts. For an explanation, see Yin, 1984, p 79-89.

[38] Meaning department manager/group manager and regular employees with no employee responsibility. See the chapter called: `IKEA – the Case Company´.

lead the discussion. Thus, we had no predefined questions of concern; nevertheless we tried to lead the interview towards areas concerning the employees' work situation and especially competence development. Hence, the interviewee was allowed to raise the areas of most concern. The interviews were taking place in the IKEA store, usually when the interviewees worked or during their breaks. They usually lasted between ten and 30 minutes depending on how occupied they were at the moment.

Based on these discussions and informal interviews we have constructed four generic persons. By doing this we avoided the difficult problem of conveying our message and still keeping the persons in the interviews unidentified. It is also a way of illustrating some of our findings from the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists of six pages with 56 questions, three of them being open-answer[39]. We also used secondary data in the form of company information, scientific articles and literature. A few brief informal interviews were also made in the beginning in order to obtain a clearer picture of the problem area. The reason for using both primary and secondary data is to make our findings more valid and to give a more unbiased picture of our area of interest.

The reason for using questionnaires was not obvious to us from the beginning. We took into consideration the alternative of using in-depth interviews. However, we reached the conclusion that this would give a partial picture of the area, since it was not possible to interview several hundred people due to our limited time and resources.

Since we were also going to include more than one store in our research, questionnaires, in combination with informal interviews, turned out to be the most appropriate choice. We were given the opportunity to join a research study conducted by two researchers at GRI (Gothenburg Research Institute) and could therefore use their questionnaire as a base for our study. The investigation is called `Effekter av decentraliserat personalansvar´ [Effects of

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[39] See Appendix 1.

decentralized human resource management] and is carried out by Freddy Hällsten and Stefan Tengblad. The aim of the study is to investigate how employee-related questions are handled. The investigation consists of six studies of different organizations: care taking, installation, engineering, process, childcare, and retail[40]. Total number of questionnaires answered equaled 1,881[41]. We will compare these studies later in the chapter called `IKEA – the Case Company´.

We will only focus on Swedish IKEA houses and therefore decided to have our questions in Swedish to avoid misunderstandings due to language problems. By using the questionnaire that was made for the larger investigation, we only had to add our specific questions. The questions we added concerned the employees' relation towards the employer and particularly regarding their view of competence development in the organization. We also discovered that some of the questions regarding their study were also interesting for our purposes. However, a substantial amount of the questions are not directly related to our purpose, consequently we will not bring up these in our analyzing parts. Still, in our appendix we have included all the answers to our questionnaire, regardless of whether they are related to our purpose or not[42]. After finishing the questionnaire we tested it on several persons and also made some minor changes.

Distributing the Questionnaires

We distributed the questionnaire personally since we believed this would result in higher answer frequency as well as creating motivation for the employees to answer the questions. Since most employees are occupied during their working hours servicing customers, we decided to sit in the canteen. Before visiting the IKEA houses we published a text in the company newsletter acknowledging our visit and purpose.

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[40] Representing our case company, IKEA.

[41] Our part representing 291 answered questionnaires.

[42] In Swedish.

At IKEA, the employees have a longer lunch-break and one shorter break before or after lunch, depending on when they begin their workday. If they start early they have a break for about twenty minutes in the morning and if they begin later they have a twenty minutes break in the afternoon. The first break is usually taken between half past eight AM and half past nine AM. Lunch is typically taken between half past eleven AM and half past two PM. Lunch usually lasts for about forty minutes. The second break is generally between half past three PM and six o'clock PM. Due to this we distributed the questionnaire in the canteen between half past eight AM and six PM.

Since the stores are open seven days a week, some of the employees are working irregularly. Some may work three days in a row, then be free for one or two days and then work the weekend. Others, who work part-time, may for instance only work one day a week or every second weekend. We wished to include as many of the employees as possible and therefore, we visited the canteen on different occasions. We visited each IKEA store for three days, including at least one day of the weekend. A few of the employees choose not to participate, but in general most accepted and answered the questionnaire[43].

There were no major differences in the degree of acceptance between the three stores. We received few answers from employees working as group managers, much due to the fact that there are quite few of them, especially at the smaller IKEA houses[44]. In total our selection included six group managers from Gothenburg, two from Örebro and one from Älmhult.

Our sampling had no predefined logic, instead we selected the employees that were present those days. We feel however, that our sample has theoretical relevance due to the fact that we have been able to include all categories of employees, rating from cleaning personnel to department managers[45].

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[43] Explained further in the `IKEA – the Case Company´ chapter.

[44] Group managers usually exists within the larger departments, naturally are these to a large extent only present at sizeable IKEA houses.

[45] Explained further in the `IKEA – the Case Company´ chapter.

Statistical Concerns

Researchers are often concerned about identifying constructs and investigating relationships among them (Marcoulides, 1998). Constructs are theoretical concepts or abstractions that help us explain and organize our surroundings. Employees' view on competence development is a construct, which cannot be directly observed. The alternative is to indirectly define their views through their observed manifestations. Since we are conducting a survey aimed at the employees' attitudes and feelings, we want to receive statistical data and subjective feelings about these constructs.

We will use cross tabulations in our statistical data in order to connect different elements with each other. It is also possible to examine the interactions between the set of our factors from IKEA, and other organizations in the study by Hällsten and Tengblad.

Our first and main intention is to explore the employees' attitudes towards competence development at IKEA. In this process, we can also determine which subsets of observed variables are related to which, by observing how each observed variable cross tabulates to each underlying factor (such as age, education and so forth).

An Ethnographical Approach in Scrutinizing the Untouchable

Ethnography is about doing fieldwork, an activity that involves pitching in and `getting one's hands dirty´. The broad methodological challenge is to `grasp the native's point of view´. A variety of methods may be used to this end, including in-depth interviewing, attending and recording meetings, documentary investigation of records, and participant observation. The latter is the invention of anthropologists and involves holding the role of `participant´ and `observer´, insider and outsider, in tension so as to ensure that one is close enough to see what is going on, but not so close as to miss the wood for the trees. (Bate, 1997)

"If you look for an organization you won't find it. What you will find is that there are events, linked together, that transpire within concrete walls, and these sequences, their pathways, and their timing are the forms we erroneously make into substances when we talk about an organization."

<div align="right">(Weick, 1979, p 88)</div>

Ethnography has to be considered a form of representation, as a discipline whose theories and concepts are as much created by the writer as by the reality itself that creates and constitutes the reality of organizations as much as it captures it. (Bate, 1997)

However, we are not merely outsiders looking in, we are insiders taking an outside perspective. It is impossible for us to say that we have taken a `correct´ outside view. On the other hand, is that really necessary? One of the root notions of ethnography is that thoughts and behavior cannot be properly understood outside the context in which they are situated; it is knowledge of context that renders them intelligible. By using our pre-developed knowledge about IKEA together with both a quantitative approach with questionnaires and a qualitative approach using observations and informal interviews we hope to bring forward the employees' perceptions and feelings. Perhaps the greatest contribution the ethnographic paradigm can make to organization and management studies is to challenge the highly influential `KISS´[46] paradigm found in the best-selling business books (Bate, 1997).

While visiting the houses we used a field diary in order to keep track of the thoughts and feelings we came across in every house. Since we have the perspective of the individual in mind we do not try to be objective. Instead we bring forward our subjective interpretations and feelings about how we interpret the individual.

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[46] `Keep It Simple Stupid´.

IKEA – THE CASE COMPANY
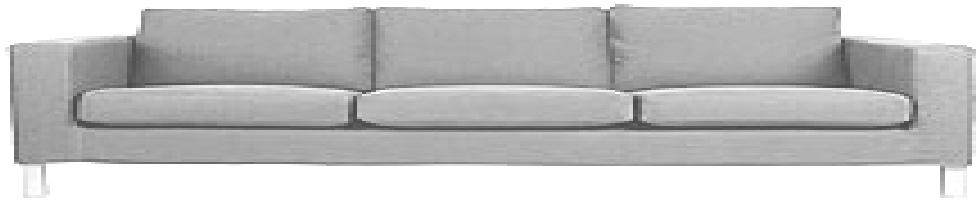
*I*n this chapter we will describe our case company, IKEA and the three different stores we visited. We will commence with some undisputed facts, supported with our statistical data. We will also compare some of our figures for IKEA with material from the other organizations, in Hällsten and Tengblad's study, in order to establish a point of reference. Moreover, in trying to provide the reader with a deeper understanding, we will continue with an ethnographic approach concerning our visits at the three different IKEA houses. Consequently, the purpose for this chapter is to provide the reader with a general background of the company and to generate a feeling for the different stores and the work carried out there.

From Past to Present[47]

IKEA was founded in 1943, in a small village, in the south of Sweden called Älmhult. Ingvar Kamprad, who at the time was 17 years old, established the company. The name IKEA is an acronym of his name (Ingvar Kamprad), and the farm he grew up on (Elmtaryd) and the parish it belonged to (Agunnaryd). Kamprad first sold pencils and watches, which he marketed through a catalogue that were sent out to his customers. In 1950 he started to buy furniture from the local carpenters, which he introduced into IKEA's product range. (Kamprad, 1998 and Björk, 1998)

> *"The IKEA business idea is to offer a wide range of home furnishings*
> *with good design and functioning at prices so low that as many people*
> *as possible will be able to afford them".*
>
> (IKEA, 2001)

At the end of the financial year 2000 (1 September 1999 - 31 August 2000), the IKEA[48] Group of Companies had a total of 139 stores in 22 countries.

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[47] We recommend two books for further readings about IKEA: Kamprad (1998) and Björk (1998).

[48] Legally IKEA is not one company, but consists of more than 100 different companies. The IKEA Group, which is owned by a charitable foundation in Holland, works with four basic functions: Product range, Purchasing, Distribution service and Retailing.

Additionally 18 IKEA stores are owned and operated by franchisees, outside the IKEA Group, in 11 countries. IKEA's turnover for the year 2000 was approximately 8.5 billion USD. Below in **Figure 12** a map illustrates the allocation of IKEA stores around the globe. (IKEA, 2001)

Figure 12, Allocation of IKEA stores 2001 (IKEA, 2001)

Employee Philosophy

IKEA claims to have a unique company culture[49], with strong values that are important for IKEA, values that create a feeling of unity. IKEA declare to offer an environment where everyone is part of a team, striving to break down barriers between management and co-workers, believing in leadership by good example. The company also states that they seek people who genuinely care about customers and colleagues and who have a desire to perform to the very best of their abilities. (IKEA, 2001)

IKEA claims that their way of working is a question of participation, daring to give and take responsibility, to trust one another, to show respect and in a natural way be a good example to others. IKEA also stress the importance that

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[49] Many scholars support IKEA's culture to be extraordinary and of untypical importance, see Lindgren (1996). On the contrary, some assert that IKEA's culture is as vital as for most organizations, however, uniquely promoted, see Salzer (1994).

everybody works well together, feels a sense of well-being, develops and grows, and have the will and spirit to try new ideas. To question and think along new lines are two pronounced cornerstones of the company culture, as are simplicity and humility. (IKEA, 2001)

> *"To give simple, honest people the possibility to develop as individuals and professionals so that we together and with great commitment can create a better everyday for ourselves and our customers."*
>
> (IKEA, 2001)

Organizational Concerns

Each IKEA house is hierarchically structured as a typical retailing company, having a management group with a store manager in the top. As for our focus, explained earlier, on departmental level, only three hierarchical positions exist: department manager, group manager[50], and regular workers.

The departments at IKEA are many and of diverse nature. The division called `satellit´ consists of departments selling household utensils, flowers, lamps, pictures and frames, fabrics, etc. Here, the main work lies in unpacking the products, keeping the department in a favorable condition and assisting the customers in their purchasing.

The furniture division consists of departments selling sofas, tables, shelves, kitchens, office fixtures, closets, beds, etc. The work in these departments is more of an actively selling nature, as well as keeping the department in an orderly fashion.

These two divisions are the most apparent ones, however, much else is required in order to operate a retail store. In this document these are called the `supporting´[51] departments dealing with functions as storing, unloading, customer complaints, telephone services, children's play-room, restaurant,

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[50] Serving as deputy department manager.
[51] In the questionnaire called `Övrig´.

cleaning, information, etc. Here, the major work encompasses serving the other employees or/and serving the customers.

The Journey Continues – to IKEA Land

In order to conduct the informal interviews and distribute our questionnaire we visited three IKEA houses, presented briefly as follows.

IKEA Gothenburg

The house in Gothenburg was built in 1972 and has approximately 493 employees. This is one of the larger houses in Sweden of 25,600 m² (IKEA, 2001). Since we are working in this particular store we experienced no difficulties in receiving answers from the employees. We spent two weekdays and one day of the weekend in the canteen and in total we obtained 129 answered questionnaires. Eight of the employees rejected to answer the questionnaire because of `resentment´ towards questionnaires or due to lack of time.

IKEA Älmhult

The house in Älmhult, constructed in 1958, was the first IKEA store ever built. Originally the store was a renovated old barn, but later it became too small and the new house of 19,700 m² was built. Even though the house has only about 200 employees, many of the residents in the town have some sort of connection to IKEA (IKEA, 2001). We visited Älmhult on a Thursday and stayed until Saturday. During this time period we received 81 questionnaires. Two employees rejected to answer the questionnaire due to lack of time.

IKEA Örebro

The house in Örebro was founded in 1991 and has about 160 employees. The house consists of 13,600 m² and is one of the smallest houses in Sweden (IKEA, 2001). It is also one of the most recent stores built in Sweden; only the second house in Stockholm, Barkaby, is newer. We visited Örebro on a Sunday and stayed until Tuesday. We received 81 answers and only one employee rejected to answer the questionnaire; again it was due to lack of time.

Contrasting the Perceptible

Under this heading, we will present statistical background information concerning the employees at IKEA. We will also present data from Hällsten and Tengblad's larger study in order to contrast our findings to other organizations.

As can be seen in **Table 1**, more women than men are employed in the three IKEA houses, which also corresponds approximately with the factual circumstances[52].

Table 1, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to Gender

% within IKEA house

	Gender	
	Woman	Man
Gothenburg	63%	37%
Älmhult	59%	41%
Örebro	67%	33%
Total	63%	37%

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[52] In Gothenburg, for example, the women represent 61 percent of the total workforce.

Table 2, Differences between organizations – in relation to Gender

	% Women	% Men
Care taking org.	92	8
Installation org.	3	97
Engineering org.	15	85
Process org.	11	89
Childcare org	92	8
Retail org.	*63*	*37*
Total	42	58

Compared to the other organizations in Hällsten and Tengblad's study, IKEA[53] is positioned in **Table 2**, as a company with a relatively equal distribution between the genders.

In **Table 3** we illustrate the age differences between the three houses. All IKEA houses have a relatively similar age spread of employees, however we received answers from a slightly higher percentage of employees below the age of 34 in Örebro, 77 percent, compared to 63 percent in Gothenburg and 67 in Älmhult. In addition, Gothenburg was the only house with a noteworthy percentage of employees above the age of 55.

Table 3, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to Age

% within IKEA house

	Age				
	-25	26-34	35-44	45-54	55-
Gothenburg	37%	27%	20%	7%	9%
Älmhult	44%	23%	20%	11%	1%
Örebro	30%	47%	20%	2%	1%
Total	37%	32%	20%	7%	4%

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[53] Represented by Retail Organization.

Taking the larger perspective one can note in **Table 4**, that IKEA has a young base of employees, a factor highly influencing the organizational identity of the company[54].

Table 4, Differences between organizations – in relation to Age

	% -24	% 25-34	% 35-44	% 45-54	% 55-	Average age
Care taking org.	7	18	26	31	18	43
Installation org.	3	3	17	44	33	50
Engineering org.	10	23	26	25	17	41
Process org.	3	18	21	34	24	45
Childcare org	2	27	19	28	24	44
Retail org.	37	32	20	7	5	***31***
Total	10	17	21	30	21	43

In **Table 5** one can see the differences between the houses regarding what division the employees answering the questionnaire belonged to. Even though there are differences in our selection from the three houses, all employees still work with similar work duties, thus, giving us roughly the same base for analysis.

Table 5, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to Division

% within IKEA house

	Division		
	Furniture	Satellit	Other
Gothenburg	29%	27%	45%
Älmhult	30%	14%	57%
Örebro	19%	23%	58%
Total	26%	22%	52%

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[54] Again the average age in our data-collection, 31 years old, corresponds to the actual average for Gothenburg, 31.

In **Table 6** facts about the educational background in our selection is presented. The minor difference in Örebro's percentage could be due to that this house is newer and the personnel younger. As a result, a larger amount of the employees have finished high school[55].

Table 6, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to Educational background

% within IKEA house

	Educational background		
	Compulsory school	High School	University
Gothenburg	13%	74%	13%
Älmhult	16%	73%	11%
Örebro	6%	80%	14%
Total	12%	75%	13%

Compared to the larger study one can distinguish in **Table 7**, that IKEA has a fairly educated base of employees, again, in relation to the compared organizations.

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[55] Translation of `Gymnasium´.

Table 7, Differences between organizations – in relation to Education

	% Compulsory school	% High-school	% University
Care taking org.	28	58	14
Installation org.	57	42	1
Engineering org.	31	65	5
Process org.	49	44	7
Childcare org	15	17	68
Retail org.	*12*	*75*	*13*
Total	35	51	14

In **Table 8** differences between the organizations regarding current education is illustrated, once again one can observe that Örebro has a slightly higher percentage of ongoing university studies. Two reasons are apparent for why the number for university studies is higher: One, Örebro is a university city, having a high population of students. Two, the employees are in average, as mentioned earlier, at a lower age.

Table 8, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to Current education

% within IKEA house

	Current education		
	University	Other vocational education	No current education
Gothenburg	8%	3%	88%
Älmhult	8%	7%	85%
Örebro	14%	1%	85%
Total	10%	4%	86%

IKEA Land Resumes - Insiders Taking an Outside Perspective

The purpose for visiting the different houses was not only for conducting the questionnaire investigation, which could have been done without our presence, mailing the survey forms. Further, we were eager to observe the daily work and behavior of the employees, since believing that the symbolic acts of the employees of utter importance for our purpose.

We visited the three different houses during a period of three weeks. As stated earlier, we had some general information published in the stores newsletter, before visiting each store, announcing our arrival and the purpose being the questionnaire. We hoped this would make the employees more inclined towards answering the questionnaire.

In the beginning we believed that the questionnaire would provide us with more answers, since our intended answer frequency was based on the number of employees at each store. However, we soon experienced that approximately more than half of the employees worked full time. This meant that less than half of the total number of the employees was usually present during one day. In order to reach all employees we would have been required to be present during several weeks and still we would probably have missed quite a few, that only works once or twice per month, or only a few hours during mornings or afternoons without a break.

IKEA Gothenburg

Even though the house in Gothenburg is soon 30 years old it is still rather modern and well kept. The house consists of two floors, furniture exhibitions on the upper level and accessories on the lower. We have observed some alienation between the two floors; some employees on the lower floor refer to the upper as `gräddhyllan´[56], meaning it to be a more comfortable area where

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[56] Meaning the `VIP-floor´.

work is not as heavy. It is also due to that the employees on the upper floor have a more active sales-role than the ones on the lower floor. One can also notice that there is a tendency towards territorial thinking in some departments at IKEA Gothenburg. This probably depends on that the house is fairly large and that most employees stay within one department for quite a long time.

> *"I keep my department clean and tidy, if I find something [meaning merchandise] from another department I take it and puts it on `their´ side, it is not my job to clean up for them."*[57]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

The canteen is newly renovated and quite large, there are several windows making the area light and refreshing. There are several tables and at the far end is a large TV, which is surrounded by a large sofa-group. This is usually a meeting point where employees sit down to relax after lunch, having coffee or a fruit. More often than not, the employees would rather watch some program on the television than chat with each other.

> *"We talk all the time with customers when we work…, good to relax in the sofa with some TV when you don't have to talk."*[58]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

The employees normally sit and eat with their particular department. A few exceptions exist since some employees have worked in different departments and therefore have a more broadened network of acquaintances.

> *"It is impossible to know everybody, it's so big here, in one way it is like in a regular shopping mall, you recognize people working in other stores, but you don't know them."*[59]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

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[57] Own translation.
[58] Own translation.
[59] Own translation.

IKEA Älmhult

We perceived IKEA Älmhult as rather different compared to the other two houses. The parts of the house that can be seen by the customers where modern and fresh, and several of the departments where undergoing renovations. The staff locations however, were not in the same condition. These areas looked old and in need of renovation. The staff bathroom for example, situated close to the canteen was worn out and dirty. The canteen was small, about half the size of the one in Örebro, even though Älmhult has more employees than the house in Örebro. Some small windows at one side of the room represented the only view outside in combination with two shabby-looking sofas facing each other. We perceived the atmosphere at IKEA Älmhult slightly unlike the one in Gothenburg. The employees mixed much more between the departments. It seemed as they filled each table in the canteen as they arrived instead of placing themselves department by department. We also noted that few, if any, sat alone.

> *"We work in a small town, and here, inside IKEA, the same*
> *small-town feeling subsists…"[60]*
>> Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

A different feature of the house in Älmhult is that it consists of several floors. There is no exact division between upper and lower floors; it is more a matter of a terrace-looking layout. Despite this, we felt that there is a feeling of cooperative spirit between the different departments, several times we noted how different persons from different departments stood in small groups discussing some area of interest.

> *"Everything started here and one can feel that when talking to the*
> *employees here..., they are proud!"[61]*
>> Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

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[60] Own translation.
[61] Own translation.

One could sense this feeling throughout the house, a feeling of pride due to the fact that it was here that everything started in 1943[62]. Quite a few of the corner stones in IKEA's philosophy were `preached´ when we talked to employees at different levels and departments:

> *"Here nobody is better than the other."*[63]
> > Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

We also noted a more familiar relation to the founder of IKEA, Ingvar Kamprad who quite frequently visits the store.

> *"When Ingvar speaks, you listen."*[64]
> > Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

In most stores he is more of a legend and not someone who you can relate to in person.

IKEA Örebro

Both the house and the canteen in Örebro are fresh and modern. The canteen had several windows facing the employee parking. We basically noted the same phenomena here as in Älmhult. Hardly anyone sat alone in the canteen and the employees mixed between the different departments. There is no television in the canteen in Örebro, which is probably positively affecting the socialization among the employees. Further, there was a group of sofas with a table filled with some internal newsletters, interior design books, as well as photos from different gatherings. Few employees sat down in the sofas, instead most remained at the tables after finishing lunch, usually talking to each other.

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[62] Even the receptionist at the hotel expressed some pride of working in the town of `IKEA´.

[63] Own translation.

[64] Own translation.

*"I have so many friends here, we have so much to discuss… Right now
we are planning to go out for dinner."*
<div align="right">Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview</div>

We also met an employee in Örebro that had previously worked at IKEA Gothenburg. This person confirmed our view that everyone seemed more willing to socialize between departments in IKEA Örebro compared to Gothenburg. It was also stated that the employees in Örebro seemed to have more of a team spirit. They saw themselves more as employees at IKEA Örebro than members of independent departments. We also observed that the staff seemed, in relation to the other houses, rather young. Support for this can be found in **Table 3** earlier presented from the questionnaire: more than 75 percent are below 35 years of age. We also noted that quite a few seemed to be students at the Örebro University.

The relatively small size of the house in Örebro made it interesting to observe. As one employee stated:

"We are a bit smaller here..., we have a good group feeling..."
<div align="right">Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview</div>

Since they are quite few[65] employees in Örebro they seemingly become more inclined to meet and talk to each other. This could also lead to more of a `we-feeling´ at IKEA Örebro rather than for example a `we-feeling´ in the kitchen-department.

"The people working here are fantastic!"
<div align="right">Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire</div>

Another interesting aspect is that the house in Örebro is only one floor. Could this lead to more of a family feeling? We believe that this alone is not a reason, however, in addition to the size of the house and the number of employees this could probably have an affect.

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[65] In relation to other IKEA houses, where a few have more than 1,000 employees.

Contrasting the Imperceptible

We have earlier presented the more pragmatic differences regarding the background between the three houses, as well as the other organizations in Hällsten and Tengblad's study. In this part we want to give the reader a more distinct impression of the underlying dissimilarities regarding perception of the work-situation and attitudes towards competence development. We will present a more thorough description of differences between the three houses, supporting some of our statements earlier concerning feelings during our visits as well as distinct observations on the subject of the more substantial investigation.

As mentioned before we perceived the atmosphere in Örebro as quite cheerful, however when analyzing the answers from the open questions in the questionnaire from Örebro we discovered a somewhat different picture. A substantial amount of the answers were regarding the work environment in Örebro, feeling stressed in their daily work. As seen in **Table 9**, more than 60 percent of the employees at Örebro feel stressed to a *rather* or *very high extent*.

Table 9, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to Perceived stress

% within IKEA house

	Stress				
	Very low extent	Rather low extent	To a certain extent	Rather high extent	Very high extent
Gothenburg	2%	15%	31%	35%	16%
Älmhult	5%	11%	36%	31%	17%
Örebro	5%	10%	25%	**42%**	**19%**
Total	4%	12%	31%	36%	17%

Examining how the employees at the three stores perceive how their competence is utilized, one can observe that the employees in Örebro are not pleased. In **Table 10,** 23 percent of the employees in Örebro state that their competence is utilized *very poorly* or *poorly*.

Table 10, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to How the employees feel that their competence is utilized

% within IKEA house

	Competence				
	Very poorly	Poorly	Not quite	Rather well	In the best way
Gothenburg	4%	6%	32%	48%	9%
Älmhult	4%	8%	25%	49%	15%
Örebro	**9%**	**14%**	21%	46%	11%
Total	5%	9%	27%	48%	11%

Comparing the figures for IKEA with those for other organizations one can notice, see **Table 11**, that IKEA's employees rate that there is a fairly low utilization of their competence.

Table 11, Differences between organizations – in relation to How the employees feel that their competence is utilized

	% Very poor	% Rather poor	% Neither poor nor well	% Rather well	% Very well	Average
Care taking org.	3	8	22	47	20	3,7
Installation org.	2	3	17	64	13	3,8
Engineering org.	2	7	21	59	11	3,7
Process org.	3	3	14	61	18	3,9
Childcare org	2	3	16	57	22	3,9
Retail org.	5	9	27	48	11	*3,5*
Total	3	5	20	57	15	3,8

It is difficult to answer why the employees at IKEA perceives that their competence is utilized poorly. We believe it could be due to the fact that the employees feel that they have, on average, a low degree of influence over their own competence development and therefore feel that their competence is not

developed in the right way, as can be seen in **Table 12**. Then again, it could be deceptive to only interpret the factual statistical data in this case. There are large differences between these organizations, which probably affects the degree of influence that the employees can effect their competence development. An engineering organization for example, has usually a higher degree of creative factors in their trade compared to, in this case, retailing since we only consider the sales function where the employees' degree of freedom and autonomy are quite low.

Table 12, Differences between organizations – in relation to What extent the employees feel that they can influence their competence development

	% Very low extent	% Rather low extent	% Certain extent	% Rather high extent	% Very high extent	Average
Care taking org.	12	15	39	28	6	3,00
Installation org.	13	20	43	21	4	2,84
Engineering org.	4	13	42	35	6	3,26
Process org.	20	24	42	13	1	2,52
Childcare org	9	17	44	27	3	2,97
Retail org.	14	26	38	18	5	*2,74*
Total	12	19	41	24	4	2,91

On the subject of freedom, one can in **Table 13**, observe that in relation to the other organizations, the employees at IKEA perceive their degree of freedom as fairly low. Again this could be an effect of the actual differences between the work-circumstances in these companies. Nevertheless, this is an important factor, which undoubtedly effects how the employees perceive how they can effect their competence development in the company. If one feels a low degree of freedom regarding work, it is likely that this affect the outlook on competence development, since one needs freedom in order to develop outside the immediate area of concern.

Table 13, Differences between organizations – in relation to Perceived degree of freedom in work[66]

	Average
Care taking org.	6,8
Installation org.	7,4
Engineering org.	7,4
Process org.	6,9
Childcare org	7,3
Retail org.	*6,2*
Total	7,0

One can question if the result in **Table 13,** has a relation to what is presented below in **Table 14**. As can be seen the employees at IKEA state that they receive a low degree of internal training in relation to the other organizations. Compared to the organizations that provide most internal training, an installation company, the difference is striking. Almost 30 percent more in this company state that they have received internal training during the last twelve months.

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[66] Here, the employees rated their perceived degree of freedom between 1 and 11, where 1 represented the lowest degree of freedom and 11 consequently the highest.

Table 14, Differences between organizations – in relation to If the employees have received any internal training the last 12 months

	% Yes	% No
Care taking org.	63,1	36,9
Installation org.	63,7	36,3
Engineering org.	55,1	44,9
Process org.	44,9	55,1
Childcare org	62	38
Retail org.	*35,8*	*64,2*
Total	56,3	43,7

The same astonishing result can be seen when comparing the organization on the subject of *if the employees have received any external training the last twelve months*. Fewer than eight percent of the employees state that they have received any external training during the last twelve months. This figure is more than ten percent lower compared to any of the other organizations and almost 40 percent lower than the organization with the highest `yes´ frequency.

Table 15, Differences between organizations – in relation to If the employees have received any external training the last 12 months

	% Yes	% No
Care taking org.	42,5	57,5
Installation org.	33,8	66,2
Engineering org.	19,4	80,6
Process org.	23,1	76,9
Childcare org	45,4	54,6
Retail org.	*7,2*	*92,8*
Total	29,6	70,4

As stated before we perceived the facilities in Älmhult as quite old and in need of renovation. Nevertheless, the employees seemed content and loyal to the

company. In **Table 16**, it is possible to compare the three houses regarding how loyal one feels towards the employer. It is interesting to note that not a single person who answered our questionnaire at the house in Älmhult stated to feel *not loyal*. More than 70 percent answered *very loyal* signifying that the employees in Älmhult feels relatively more loyal to the company than the other two houses. Again, one can notice the larger percentage of *not loyal* employees in Örebro.

"Wherever IKEA expands and however much IKEA
expands, its heart will always remain in Älmhult, in the midst
of the forests of southern Sweden"

(IKEA Facts, 1986, in Salzer, 1994, p 70)

Table 16, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to How loyal the employees feel towards the company

% within IKEA house

	Ind.loyalty		
	Not loyal	Rather loyal	Very loyal
Gothenburg	3%	43%	54%
Älmhult		28%	72%
Örebro	9%	33%	58%
Total	4%	36%	60%

When comparing the three IKEA houses regarding the question about *if they foresee themselves still in the company in five years* one can observe quite distinct differences between the houses. As seen in **Table 17**, the employees at Örebro and Gothenburg state to a much larger extent than Älmhult, that they will not be in the organization in five years. Concerning Älmhult, 20 percent of the employees state that they will not, definitely or probably, be in the company in five years, compared to approximately 40 percent for the employees in Örebro and Gothenburg.

Table 17, Differences between IKEA houses – in relation to Do you see yourself in the organization in 5 years

% within IKEA house

	5 years into the future			
	Yes, definitely	Yes, probably	No, probably not	No, definitely not
Gothenburg	24%	37%	29%	11%
Älmhult	39%	41%	14%	6%
Örebro	14%	43%	21%	21%
Total	26%	40%	22%	12%

Disregarding the fact that the employees feel that their competence is not utilized in the best way, one can still note that the employees seem to feel that the managers at IKEA are involved in their work. In **Table 18,** differences between the organizations in the larger study, concerning how involved the employees managers are regarding their work situation, can be observed.

Table 18, Differences between organizations – in relation to How involved is the manager regarding the employees' work situation

	% Very low extent	% Rather Low Extent	% Certain extent	% Rather high extent	% Very high extent	Average
Care taking org.	11	16	26	32	16	3,25
Installation org.	9	13	32	35	11	3,26
Engineering org.	11	11	35	30	13	3,22
Process org.	16	14	30	32	9	3,02
Childcare org	12	17	28	31	12	3,14
Retail org.	11	15	24	32	18	*3,33*
Total	11	14	29	32	13	3,22

As could be seen in **Table 18**, IKEA has the highest average regarding managers' involvement in the work situation in relation to the other

organizations. However, it is interesting to compare these figures to how involved the employees perceive the managers to be regarding their competence. As can be seen in **Table 19**, IKEA has here the lowest average in comparison between all organizations in Hällsten and Tengblad's study. This is interesting since this would imply that the managers at IKEA are highly involved in the employees work situation, although not regarding their competence development.

Table 19, Differences between organizations – in relation to How involved is the manager concerning the employees' competence development

	% Very low extent	% Rather Low Extent	% Certain extent	% Rather high extent	% Very high extent	Average
Care taking org.	9	12	30	35	14	3,32
Installation org.	6	13	37	37	8	3,28
Engineering org.	7	10	38	39	6	3,28
Process org.	12	9	38	34	9	3,19
Childcare org	9	15	34	35	8	3,18
Retail org.	12	17	28	33	10	*3,14*
Total	8	13	34	36	9	3,25

EXECUTING THE ANALYSIS GENERICALLY
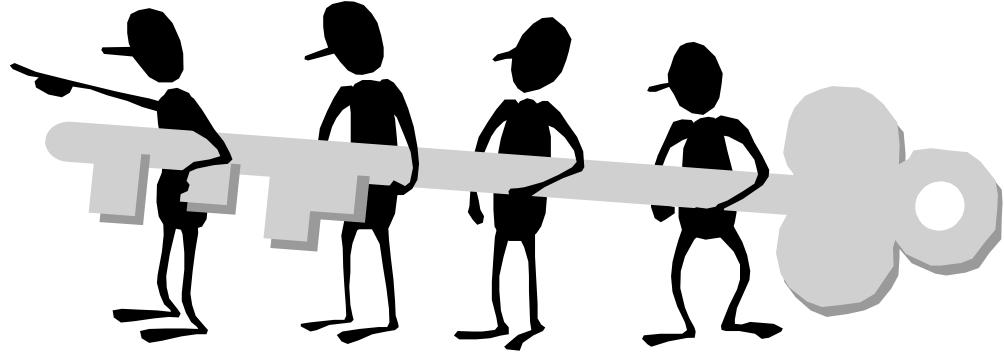
*I*n this chapter we will present our generic[67] employees, based on our questionnaire, observations, and informal interviews with employees at all three IKEA houses. We present the different perceptions of competence that exist among the employees using an untypical approach. Therefore, these `fictive´ characters should be seen as illustrations of the reality at IKEA, based on the perceptions of the employees, as we interpreted it.

We do not state that all employees in these groups think, feel or perceive work in the same manner. However, we discovered certain correlations between the employees that made it possible for us to label and categorize them into particular groups. Sometimes strong words are used, however our intentions are not to accuse IKEA. To note, we have not fabricated the quotes and comments, we are simply the messengers. The importance is to establish what the employees' feel regarding their work situation, and how that influences their perception of competence development at IKEA.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that these characters are not based on any specific person or event; rather they should be conceived as representatives of certain categories of employees. However, the characters are all based on factual circumstances and each event described has occurred. The reason for choosing these four types of characters are due to that these were the most prominent features we found.

We have no intention of describing what the employees factually receive or obtain regarding competence; instead we want to unravel their experiences. Consequently, we have deliberately altered some information in order to prevent employees from feeling exposed.

In describing the generic persons representing groups of employees, we commence with discussing the matters of personal and professional development, followed by how we perceive their competence. After that we present their self-perceived competence and their discernment of work.

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[67] Also called, `synthetic´.

Olga[68]

Age: 32
Time employed by IKEA: 11 years
Position: Group manager
Educational degree: High school
Working-hours: Full time

Olga begun her IKEA career working as a sales person and has worked her way up through IKEA's internal training programs. She used to have a more senior position in the hierarchy for many years while applying for various other positions. Even though often expressing her wish of advancement to the management, her position disappeared in the last re-organization. She was highly career focused a few years back, but has now lost interest in her job. Now, she possesses a temporary job as a group manager. She is doing an acceptable job, but the spirit is lost. If another job outside of IKEA would appear, she would probably quit.

"[IKEA] sucks!"[69]

Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

As highlighted above, Olga represents the people feeling resentment toward IKEA for various reasons, one being the self-perceived lack of competence development. As can be seen in **Table 20**, 29 percent of the IKEA employees describe their total work satisfaction as either very poor[70], rather poor[71], or neither poor nor well[72]. Olga is currently not satisfied with her working conditions and has a tendency to alienate many coworkers. This negative attitude has a significant impact on her behavior, profoundly influencing her perspective of competence development at IKEA.

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[68] Olga is the name of a kitchen-towel in IKEA's assortment.

[69] Own translation.

[70] Translation of `Mycket dåligt´.

[71] Translation of `Ganska dåligt´.

[72] Translation of `Sådär´.

Table 20, How would the employees describe their work satisfaction[73]

	Percent
Very poor	**3**
Rather poor	**6**
Neither poor nor well	**20**
Rather well	52
Very well	19
Total	99
Missing	1
Total	100

Personal and professional development

"I feel no personal development…"[74]

Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Olga is in her middle career phase. According to Arthur and Kram (1989), one of the most significant needs in this stage is personal advancement and recognition. Since Olga used to be on a `higher´ managerial position she feels frustrated about her diminished autonomy and responsibilities. Olga's primary concern is to develop in order to regain the position she once had. However, Olga does not feel that she is in control to influence her development. In our study, as seen in **Table 21**, 90 percent feel that they want greater possibilities to influence their personal development (60 percent answered *to a great extent[75]* and 30 percent answered *to a certain extent[76])*.

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[73] For a point of reference, Torbjörn Stjernberg (1978) made a study of employees in a shopping center (retail branch), where 63% stated to feel *very well* regarding their work.

[74] Own translation.

[75] Translation of `Hög grad´.

[76] Translation of `I viss mån´.

Table 21, Would the employees like to obtain greater possibilities to influence their personal development

	Percent
No	6
To a certain extent	**30**
To a great extent	**60**
Total	96
Missing	4
Total	100

Olga would like to effect her development in order to advance; the problem is that she feels this is not for her to decide since she feels no control over her development. Illustrated in **Table 22,** our investigation shows that only 22 percent feel they can influence their own development to either a *rather high extent*[77] or to a *very high extent*[78].

Table 22, To what extent can the employees effect their own development

	Percent
To a very low extent	14
To a rather low extent	25
To a certain extent	37
To a rather high extent	**18**
To a very high extent	**4**
Total	98
Missing	2
Total	100

From an employee viewpoint, this can be seen as a quite distinctive weakness, considering the fact that most people asserted in the open-ended questions in the questionnaire that personal development was of utter importance. It was interesting to note that among the open answers, IKEA had by far the highest

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[77] Translation of `Ganska hög´.
[78] Translation of `Mycket hög´.

percentage regarding comments about competence development compared to the other organizations in the study by Hällsten and Tengblad, see **Figure 13**.
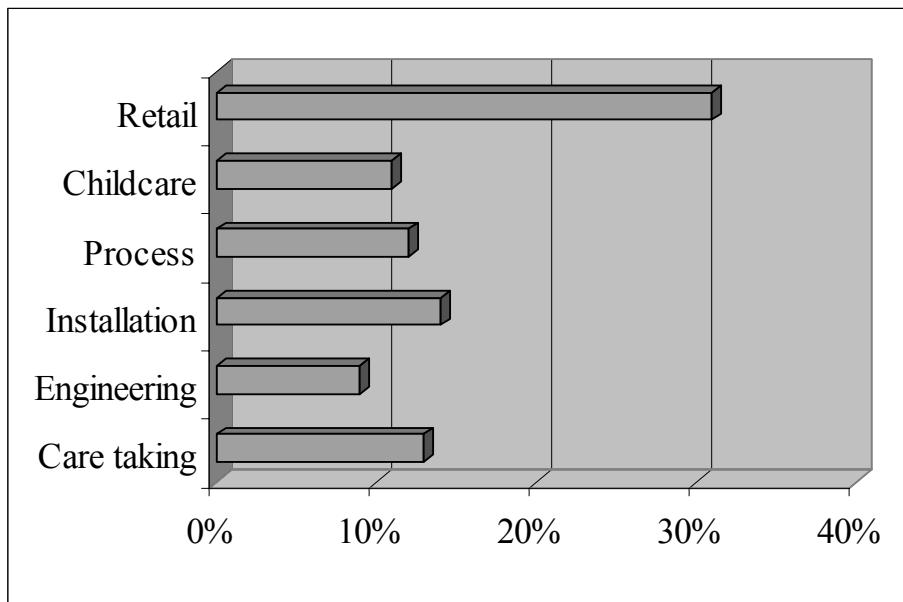
Figure 13, Percentage of the open answers in the questionnaire on the subject of competence development, compared to the different organizations in the study by Hällsten and Tengblad

"Earlier, I was very much engaged both in my job and in the company, but I have slowly lost my energy and motivation…"[79]

Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Moreover, the issue in many cases, represented by Olga, is not that the employees lack the capabilities of executing their job at a satisfactory level. As stated in the `A Theoretical Construction´ chapter a person might have the capabilities of producing a desired outcome, still the result does not reflect the persons outmost potentials. The reasons for this might be of various kinds. In the light of development, according to our study, many employees (79 percent) express that they want more training, as seen in **Table 23**. We believe that an organization can benefit from providing the employees with training, since this not only supports their performance but also enhance their motivational level.

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[79] Own translation.

Consequently, acknowledgement from the employer corroborates the employees' perception of work.

Table 23, Would the employees be interested in more internal training

	Percent
Yes	**79**
No	4
Don't know	16
Total	100
Total	100

"I want to develop faster than the company wants me to!"[80]

Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Perceived competence

Accordingly, Olga possesses many of the pieces of the puzzle, see **Figure 6**, presented in the `A Theoretical Construction´ chapter. She definitely has an extensive amount of experience related to her job as well as a significant degree of proficiency. Because of her time spent within IKEA, she also has the contacts within the company in order to function successfully. The part that is absent in the puzzle is the value piece. Olga has lost much of her beliefs in the organization. Arthur and Kram (1989) states that if an employee's job arrangements deny the employee the opportunity for individual accomplishment, boredom is the likely outcome.

Bearing in mind **Figure 8,** mentioned earlier, Olga feels that the organization is not responsive to her need of *advancing*. Placing Olga in the graph one could probably discern her to be in the `boredom´ area. As a consequence she feels that her work arrangements are unsuitable and therefore she feels unmotivated and uncommitted towards the employer and the work. Concerning this, 21

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[80] Own translation.

percent in her age group[81] proclaims that they feel that IKEA is *not loyal*[82] see **Table 24**.

Table 24, How loyal do the employees feel the employer is - in relation to Age

% within Age

		Employer loyalty		
		Not loyal	Rather loyal	Very loyal
Age	-25	14%	54%	31%
	26-34	**21%**	53%	26%
	35-44	21%	62%	17%
	45-54	11%	63%	26%
	55-		85%	15%
Total		17%	58%	26%

If the question is asked in an opposite way, see **Table 25**, whether the employees feel loyal towards the company, only four percent of the employees state to feel *not loyal*. Accordingly, the employees seem to feel that the scale is not equally balanced. Olga still feels a high degree of loyalty towards the organization and she still wants to develop within the company. However, feeling considerably more loyal towards the employer whereas she does not perceive the employer being loyal towards her, this decreases her motivation. Therefore, we consider that the value piece as one of the most imperative elements of the puzzle, we will return in the discussion of our next generic person, Rosanna.

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[81] 26-34 years old.

[82] Translation of ˋInte så lojal´.

Table 25, How loyal do the employees feel towards the employer

	Percent
Not loyal	**4**
Rather loyal	36
Very loyal	60
Total	99
Missing	1
Total	100

Self-perceived competence

Another factor influencing Olga's resentment towards work is that she feels `over-competent´ for her present job. Possessing a before higher managerial position she was applying for various other jobs, being displaced in an organizational change, she felt `degraded´. Even before this occurred she had started to feel that her career had come to a halt and therefore reconsidered her career. According to Schein (1978), reassessment of one's progress relative to one's ambition is one of the typical stages in a mid-career crisis.

Olga has been within IKEA for many years and feels that she has learned much through internal training programs in conjunction with many years of experience. She feels frustrated over the fact that despite the training she has obtained, no promotion has occurred. Again, one can relate to Arthur and Kram's reasoning that the most dominant need for employees in the middle career is advancement. In our study, we found that a mere eleven percent of the employees' feel that their competence is utilized *in the best way*, as seen in **Table 26**.

Table 26, Do the employees believe that their competence is utilized in the right way

	Percent
Very poorly	5
Poorly	9
Not quite	27
Rather well	47
In the best way	**11**
Total	99
Missing	1
Total	100

Because many seem to believe that they are truly competent, thus believing that they can manage a more demanding job, their attitudes are negatively influenced when someone else is employed at a position they desire. This phenomenon is discussed in the `A Theoretical Construction´ chapter under *buying competence* stating that this might risk a drastic alienation towards the management that took the decision of employing someone else, and possibly also towards the new employee.

We witnessed and were told about one example when a new manager was hired at an IKEA house. This person had prior to this been working for another company, consequently were not too familiar with IKEA and IKEA's employee philosophy. Many other employees drastically opposed the management decision to hire this individual, arguing that competent candidates were to be found internally.

"I can't believe why this person was hired when there are so many capable people working here, many with a long IKEA history."[83]

Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

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[83] Own translation.

"Many employees has finished the [internal] training[84] to manage this position, why then hire someone from outside?"[85]

Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

As shown by above expressions, some employees do not understand or support decisions to hire external people for management positions. Whether this is the right choice or if such situations could be handled in an improved manner is not up to us to judge. However, we sensed some resentment towards such decisions, highly influencing their perception of work.

Discernment of work

"I have recently been moved down in terms of leading/managing responsibility, which has influenced my view of the company… …my loyalty and my self-confidence has been negatively affected."[86]

Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Concerning the level of motivation, Olga is, as expressed, rather unmotivated to conduct her job. Placing Olga in our interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Olga would seem to be on level two expressed as `the need of self-assurance´. It could also have been the case that she was further up in the `Stairway to fulfillment´, however, as her feelings of dissatisfaction grew; she traveled downward in the stairway, and now she has a hard time to climb back. She does not feel secure in her position and possibly believes that she will be leaving the company due to lack of fulfillment. As illustrated in **Table 27**, 34 percent in our study believe that they will not be employed by IKEA in five years time (22 percent answered *Probably not[87]* and 12 percent answered *Definitely not[88]*).

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[84] In Swedish: `Aspirantutbildningen´.

[85] Own translation.

[86] Own translation.

[87] Translation of `Antagligen inte´.

[88] Translation of `Definitivt inte´ .

Table 27, Do the employees foresee themselves in the company in 5 years time

	Percent
Yes, definitely	25
Yes, probably	38
No, probably not	**22**
No, definitely not	**12**
Total	97
Missing	3
Total	100

The aspiration for advancement does not always show clearly on the surface, however, an individual's search for development can be strong, hence influencing much of that person's attitudes towards the job at task, depending on the perceived fulfillment of these needs.

Rosanna[89]

Age: 38
Time employed by IKEA: 1 year
Position: Department manager
Educational degree: High school
Working-hours: Full time

Working throughout her life in various retail companies, Rosanna was employed one year ago by IKEA. Since that day, her view of IKEA as an employer has only strengthened, possibly a factor of her participation in IKEA's training programs. She feels loyal and engaged towards the organization and the coworkers. She is confident of remaining within the company, although probably at a different/higher level.

Rosanna represents the department managers at IKEA, as will be illustrated, these employees are usually quite content with their working situation. As seen

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[89] Rosanna is a product line of textiles in IKEA's assortment.

in the description above of Rosanna, the common characteristic is her positivism towards work at IKEA. She is actively involved in IKEA's progress and takes part of much developing activities, as internal training programs. Her confidence, which is primarily due to the attention, is also affecting much of her attitudes and behavior.

Personal and professional development

As stated before, employees in the middle career are concerned with promotion and gaining acceptance from the organization. Rosanna is exceptionally satisfied with the attention regarding her development. 85 percent of the department managers proclaim that they can influence their own development, see **Table 28** (16 percent answered *to a very high extent*, 38 percent *to a rather high extent*, and 31 percent *to a certain extent*).

Table 28, To what extent can the employees effect their own development – in relation to Occupational title[90]

% within Occupational title

	Influence your own development				
	To a very low extent	To a rather low extent	To a certain extent	To a rather high extent	To a very high extent
Dep. mgr.	3%	13%	**31%**	**38%**	**16%**
Group mgr.		22%	44%	33%	
Not mgr.	16%	28%	38%	15%	3%
Total	14%	26%	37%	18%	5%

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[90] We do not come to any conclusions regarding the group managers since those answering the questionnaire were too few. Nine group managers answered the questionnaire, whereof six employed by IKEA Gothenburg.

Certainly, Rosanna believes that she has the possibility to influence her development. According to Arthur and Kram (1989), this is also one of the prerequisites that need to be fulfilled in order to achieve personal development and recognition in the middle career phase. With reference to the department managers, 94 percent answers that they believe that IKEA care much for them. For regular employees, that number equals 67 percent, as seen in **Table 29**. If the organization actually cares more for Rosanna is in this case of minor importance, however, her feeling greatly influences her perception of her work and of competence development at IKEA.

Table 29, Do the employees feel that the organization cares about them – in relation to Occupational title

% within Occupational title

		Organization cares	
		Not to a large extent	To a large extent
Title	**Dep.mgr.**	6%	**94%**
	Group mgr.	25%	75%
	Not mgr.	33%	**67%**
Total		30%	70%

In addition to this, 100 percent of the department managers in our study state that they feel that IKEA is loyal towards them, as illustrated in **Table 30** (48 percent answered *very loyal*[91] and 52 percent *rather loyal*[92]).

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[91] Translation of `Mycket lojal´.

[92] Translation of `Ganska lojal´.

Table 30, How loyal do the employees feel the employer is - in relation to Occupational title

% within Occupational title

		Employer loyalty		
		Not loyal	Rather loyal	Very loyal
Title	**Dep.mgr.**		**52%**	**48%**
	Group mgr.	22%	56%	22%
	Not mgr.	18%	58%	23%
Total		16%	57%	26%

Some would think that it would be natural to proclaim that if an employee feels loyal towards the company, this would automatically result in the perception that the organization is loyal towards the employer. On the contrary, as aforementioned, Olga experiences a high degree of loyalty towards the organization but she does not feel that the organization is loyal towards her, due to their lack of confidence in her[93]. Rosanna on the other hand, feels loyal towards the company and also believes that the company is loyal towards her, to a large extent due to the fact that she receives the appraisal and the attention she desires.

> *"[IKEA offers] great possibilities for development and training."*[94]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

In order to develop within a company, the natural prerequisite is that one would like to remain in the organization. 91 percent of the department managers believe that they will still be within IKEA in the next five years, seen in **Table 31** (61 percent answered *yes, definitely* and 30 percent *yes, probably*). In comparing this number to the one for regular employees (61 percent *yes*, either *probably* or *definitely*), we believe that actively engaging in the development of an employee reflects on the willingness to remain in the company. To note here

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[93] Again we feel it is necessary to emphasize that our concern is not whether she is treated correctly or not, our only interest is how this affects her perception of work and competence development.

[94] Own translation.

is that a company can encourage an employee to develop without making him or her manager. Providing internal or external training in matters that interests the employee or offering more responsibility (not concerning personnel responsibilities) might fulfill some of the needs of an employee.

Table 31, Do the employees foresee themselves in the company in 5 years – in relation to Occupational title

% within Occupational title

	5 years into the future			
	Yes, definitely	Yes, probably	No, probably not	No, definitely not
Dep.mgr.	**61%**	**30%**	9%	
Group mgr.	22%	56%	22%	
Not mgr.	**21%**	**40%**	24%	15%
Total	26%	39%	22%	13%

The hypothesis that department managers will stay longer might be shared by the leading forces of IKEA. Sharing this view, internal training is offered to a much larger extent for the ones with management duties, as shown in **Table 32**. Regarding the department managers, 66 percent answer that they have been involved in internal training during the last twelve months, compared to 32 percent of the regular employees. One likely explanation for this difference could be that an employer naturally focuses more on managers due to their more substantial responsibilities. Another reason could be that the managers seem to have a tendency to remain longer in the company; at least this could be interpreted from **Table 31** above.

Table 32, Have you received any internal training the last 12 months – in relation to Occupational title

% within Occupational title

		Have you received internal training?	
		No	Yes
Title	**Dep. mgr.**	34%	**66%**
	Group mgr.	63%	38%
	Not mgr.	68%	**32%**
Total		64%	36%

Perceived competence

It is interesting to note that Rosanna seems to lack many pieces in the `puzzle of competence´ presented in the `A Theoretical Construction´ chapter. Still, she is mostly perceived as competent because of her strong `value´ piece. Thus, she has an explicitly demonstrated willingness to share fundamental values, to act, and to seize responsibility for her actions.

> *"Positive working environment, easy to adapt and identify with the business concept and employee philosophy."*[95]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Nevertheless, she does not have the IKEA experience as many others and since large part of our learning comes from our experiences, one might assert that she is not in definition proficient in carrying out the work. Probably, she does not have the necessary contacts yet needed in order to function successfully. However, her positive attitudes ease this problem, and accelerate its completion.

> *"[IKEA is] despite everything the best company in the world!"*[96]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

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[95] Own translation.
[96] Own translation.

Self-perceived competence

Rosanna feels that her competence is utilized in a truly proficient way. We found support for this from that not one department manager answers that their competence is utilized *poorly*[97] or *very poorly*[98], instead 82 percent answered that their competence was utilized either *rather well*[99] (61 percent) or *in the best way*[100] (21 percent) as can be seen in **Table 33**.

Table 33, Do the employees believe that their competence is utilized in the right way – in relation to Occupational title

% within Occupational title

	Competence				
	Very poorly	Poorly	Not quite	Rather well	In the best way
Dep.mgr.			18%	**61%**	**21%**
Group mgr.	11%	22%	11%	56%	
Not mgr.	5%	9%	29%	46%	11%
Total	5%	8%	27%	48%	12%

Consequently, it is rather evident that the responsibility that the managers have is reflecting in the rate of satisfaction. Also, it can be a factor of that the managers have a more active involvement in the organization's progress.

We also found evidence for that the organization is more focused on managers in terms of internal training. As illustrated before in **Table 32**, 66 percent of the department managers answer that they have been involved in internal training during the last twelve months, compared to 32 percent of the regular employees.

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[97] Translation of `Dåligt´.

[98] Translation of `Mycket dåligt´.

[99] Translation of "Ganska bra".

[100] Translation of `På bästa sätt´.

"[I] have been involved in leadership/management training… …[I] see great possibilities to develop further.''[101]

Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Regarding **Figure 8** presented earlier, one can note that `fit´ for an employee in the middle career will occur when the organization allows the employee to pursuit major career goals, such as earning promotion, expanding job possibilities or gaining external recognition. One can without exaggerating state that Rosanna is in the `area of fit´ as she is fulfilling her major individual objectives signifying this career stage.

Discernment of work

Rosanna has a high degree of satisfaction regarding work aforementioned. As illustrated in **Table 34**, 97 percent of the department managers proclaim that their work satisfaction is *rather well* or *very well* (58 percent answered *rather well* and 39 percent answered *very well*). In comparison with the employees without a managing function, these numbers are quite distinct (17 percent of the non-managers answers that their work satisfaction is *very well*, and 52 percent answers *rather well*).

Table 34, How would the employees describe their work satisfaction – in relation to Occupation title

% within Occupational title

	Work satisfaction				
	Very poor	Rather poor	Neither poor nor well	Rather well	Very well
Dep.mgr.			3%	**58%**	**39%**
Group mgr.		22%	22%	44%	11%
Not mgr.	3%	6%	21%	**52%**	**17%**
Total	3%	6%	19%	53%	19%

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[101] Own translation.

Concerning Rosanna, a remarkable amount of commitment towards the company is evident, as seen in **Table 35**. Every department manager questioned, stated that they are committed to their present job and that they are an important part of a meaningful organization, which they belong to. Whether they in actuality are, is in this case of trivial concern. The essential factor is what they believe, which heavily influences their view on competence.

Table 35, Do the employees feel involved in something meaningful in their present job – in relation to Occupational title

% within Occupational title

	Involved		
	Uncertain	Do no agree	Agree
Dep.mgr.			**100%**
Group mgr.	11%		89%
Not mgr.	18%	8%	74%
Total	16%	6%	78%

The commitment discussed above is undeniably an affect by the attention and opportunities of self-fulfillment that Rosanna is offered by the company. The high level of motivation for Rosanna becomes even more apparent when regarding her from our `Stairway to fulfillment´ perspective, mentioned in the chapter called `Unravelling Our Interpretation of Motivational Theory´. Rosanna seeks for strengthening the achievement, adequacy, confidence, and independence in her present occupation as seen in step four in the stairway. In the second step within this level there is a desire for reputation or prestige, recognition, and attention. Here, we also detect a bond with Rosanna, who in her advancement depend on the attitude of others.

Billy[102]

Age: 52
Time employed by IKEA: 19 years
Position: Sales person
Educational degree: Compulsory school
Working hours: 30 hours per week

Billy has worked at few departments during his years at IKEA. He has no particular motivation to change job, or to climb on the hierarchical ladder. He has not gone through much training, however, this does not upset him, since he is content with his working situation, feeling loyal towards the company and his superiors. He is incredibly skillful regarding the product assortment, at least concerning the products `belonging´ to his department. Billy feels rather determined of continuing his working life within IKEA, probably in his present department.

There are quite a few employees that have worked for several years at IKEA, sometimes decades. It is not uncommon that these faithful old servants have stayed within one department during the whole period of their employment. Their background is usually quite similar, being older than the average employee and no or insignificant formal education after compulsory school. Strangely enough, rather few of these `oldies´ are department managers. As seen in **Table 36**, there are relatively few managers above 45 years old and none at all above 55 in our selection.

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[102] Billy is a storage system, an old family member in IKEA's assortment.

Table 36, Occupational title – in relation to Age

% within Occupational title

	Age				
	-25	26-34	35-44	45-54	55-
Dep.mgr.	9%	42%	33%	15%	
Group mgr.	22%	44%	33%		
Not mgr.	41%	30%	18%	6%	5%
Total	37%	32%	20%	7%	4%

Personal and professional development

Billy has no formal education after compulsory school and therefore we argue that his theoretical knowledge regarding work-related issues is relatively low. However, his practical knowledge is high due to the fact that he has been employed by IKEA for 19 years. Billy has mostly learned how to act in his job informally from colleagues and based on occurred situations. He has received a relatively modest degree of internal training; still he is content with his work situation and he has not complained. As can be seen in **Table 37**, our findings show that only 34 percent of the employees have received some kind of internal training the last twelve months.

Table 37, Have the employees received any internal training in the last 12 months

	Percent
No	60
Yes	**34**
Total	94
Missing	6
Total	100

"...invest in the people that are not the most noticeable, but that still are competent and responsible."[103]

<div align="right">Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire</div>

It is difficult to explain the relative higher percentage of `missing´, in **Table 37** above. However, one reason could be that some employees are uncertain about what the concept of internal training regards.

Perceived competence

In **Table 38**, one can see that despite the lack of training and promotion from the organization, Billy feels that he is involved in something meaningful. One reason could be the amount of recognition he receives from his peers and the organization. Even though the company does not promote him, much due to the fact that he has no aspirations of such, he receives appraisal. Arthur and Kram (1989) states that when an employee is in the career maturity phase, he or she seeks for securing and maintaining one's emergent status, experiencing continued affirmation of work. Passing on knowledge and experience is also an important factor at this phase, which could be one reason for why Billy feels part of something meaningful, since this would mean that he is contributing to the company's future.

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[103] Own translation.

Table 38, Do the employees feel involved in something meaningful in their present job – in relation to Age

% within Age

		Involved		
		Uncertain	Do no agree	Agree
Age	-25	28%	6%	66%
	26-34	9%	8%	84%
	35-44	9%	9%	83%
	45-54	10%		**90%**
	55-	8%		92%
Total		16%	6%	78%

As seen in **Table 39**, quite a few in Billy's age group are interested in a management position. More than 50 percent (53) of the employees between 45 and 54 years old are not interested in a management position. In relation to the younger age group the difference is quite striking. This could of course be due to the fact that Billy is older than the average, and not as career focused. As stated before, Arthur and Kram (1989) argue that in the maturity level, supervision of others is not conditional on any demands for further promotion. One could also question if `ambition´ and `interest in a management position´ means the same?

> *"I feel that I'm simply not made to be a manager."*[104]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

As mentioned earlier, Schein (1978) states that in the late career stage, lower levels of contribution and job involvement can be expected. This could also be an explanation as to why few of the employees above 45 are interested in a management positions, they simply have a lower degree of ambition compared to the younger employees.

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[104] Own translation.

**Table 39, Would the employees be interested in a management position –
in relation to Age**

% within Age

		Management position			
		Currently having a management position	Yes, it is of interest	No, not of interest	Uncertain
Age	-25	4%	43%	24%	29%
	26-34	19%	43%	18%	21%
	35-44	24%	33%	29%	14%
	45-54	26%	21%	**53%**	
	55-	8%	17%	75%	
Total		14%	38%	27%	20%

The same result can be seen when comparing with employees with no other educational background than compulsory school. 59 percent of these employees claim to have no interest in a management position, seen in **Table 40**. One reason is naturally that a large proportion of the employees without any formal education except compulsory school are the elderly employees. Yet another explanation could be that they do not feel the confidence necessary or the trust from the employer.

**Table 40, Would the employees be interested in a management position –
in relation to Educational background**

% within Educational background

	Management position			
	Having a management position	Yes, it is of interest	No, not of interest	Uncertain
Compulsory school	13%	19%	**59%**	9%
High School	14%	38%	24%	25%
University	20%	57%	17%	6%
Total	14%	38%	27%	20%

Self-perceived competence

Billy feels that his competence is taken care of reasonably well. In our study, 59 percent of the employees stated that they think their competence is utilized *rather well* or *in the best way*, illustrated by `Total´, in **Table 41**. Compared with employees, with no formal education besides compulsory school, 88 percent feel that their competence is taken care *rather well* or in the *best way*, same table as before. We understand this as a factor of that they feel comfortable and pleased with their working arrangements and do not want to risk changing this.

> *"I think I should be satisfied with my position, after all*
> *I did not finish school."*[105]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

For the employee in the maturity phase, mentioned earlier in the chapter called `Individual and Organizational Development – a Reciprocal Approach to Competence Development´, the need of concern is *protecting*. `Fit´, in **Figure 8**, will then take place when the organization cater to the employee's own need for career safeguarding, as well as allowing the employee to support and teach less experienced colleagues.

Since Billy is satisfied regarding these needs, due to the fact that he is safe in his position and has a steady flow of new colleagues to instruct, he is in the area of fit.

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[105] Own translation.

Table 41, Do the employees believe that their competence is utilized in the right way – in relation to Educational background

% within Educational background

	Competence				
	Very poorly	Poorly	Not quite	Rather well	In the best way
Compulsory school			12%	**76%**	**12%**
High School	5%	9%	28%	47%	11%
University	14%	14%	32%	27%	14%
Total	5%	9%	27%	48%	11%

Regarding Billy's attitude towards work, he is rather motivated and usually enjoys it. He is also confident in his abilities to carry out the tasks since he has worked without complaints for several years and feels that he can master the situation. Billy is neither an overachiever nor an underachiever. He does what he is supposed to, feeling satisfied. We define `value´ in the piece of the puzzle, as symbols of the willingness to act and seize responsibility for one's proceedings. If Billy has no aspirations of becoming a manager, does this signify that he is not worth investing in for IKEA? We presume that employees who feel that they receive attention regarding their capacity to perform become more motivated. Hence, it can be worth investing in employees without aspirations to become leaders in order to improve their work moral.

Discernment of work

In Billy's age group[106], 80 percent proclaims in our study to feel *very loyal* towards the employer, shown in **Table 42**. Not all, but many, employees in this age group have been at IKEA for a longer period. Loyalty is a notion that can be interpreted in manifold ways, to state that an employee is loyal only due to the reason that he or she has been within the company for many years would be a mistake. On the other hand, the employees at IKEA are in general feeling

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[106] Employees between the age of 45 and 54.

quite loyal. As we experienced, many of the `old timers´ do indeed feel a great sense of dedication and devotion towards their employer, IKEA.

"I like it very much here at my department in IKEA, I have been here for long now, you know." [107]

Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

We feel that IKEA tries to support this feeling of loyalty, one example being that after 25 years one receives a golden Allen key[108]. Arthur and Kram (1989) also states that an employee in the career maturity stage will become bored if he or she is not viewed as an established member of the organization. Thus, loyalty, at this phase in the working life, is utterly important not only for the organization but also for the employee.

Table 42, How loyal do you feel towards the employer – in relation to Age

% within Age

		Ind.loyalty		
		Not loyal	Rather loyal	Very loyal
Age	-25	4%	40%	56%
	26-34	5%	30%	64%
	35-44	3%	36%	60%
	45-54		20%	**80%**
	55-		69%	31%
Total		4%	36%	60%

Sandberg (1994) writes about the importance concerning a network of professional contacts. We do not believe that an individual creates one's perception of competence in a vacuum. On the contrary, colleagues and non-personal sources such as newspapers or TV-programs influence the individual. Billy has a large professional net of contacts; he knows most of the employees at his respective house and whom to contact depending on what the situation concerns. Therefore, these collective ideas and discussions affect Billy's view

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[107] Own translation.

[108] In Swedish: insexnyckel

on competence. This also corresponds to Arthur and Kram's (1989) view of employees in the phase of career maturity, stating that they have a need of sharing with trusted peers.

In our `Stairway to fulfillment´, we discusses that each and every need is dependent upon the other. One could easily misinterpret this meaning that all employees want to have a career, and advance in the organization, in order to fulfill their needs. However, we believe that regarding Billy, he does not have to self-fulfill all needs[109]. Schein (1978) proclaims that the needs associated with work often diminish in the stage labeled `late career in non-leadership role´. Often people at this stage of employment accept a reduced degree of influence and a lower faced challenge.

We perceive Billy as an employee comfortable with staying at level three in the `Stairway to fulfillment´. Level three regards the need for belongingness, which we see as the need for being part of an organization with individuals who respect and cares about oneself. Billy receives this at work, his colleagues appreciate him and his closest superiors regard him as a reliable employee, being knowledgeable about the assortment. If the organization would require Billy to move upward in the organization they need to create a need for Billy to desire a need higher up in the stairway. It is difficult to provide a specific solution for this since all employees get motivated on different grounds. Nevertheless, in order to move Billy upward he would need some stimulation, preferably from the organization. In that way, Billy can begin the process of self-development at work, acquiring self-esteem and interest from the closest managers and the organization.

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[109] It is important to emphasize that we only regard the needs at work; and do not take into consideration the larger perspective of life. It could very well be so that Billy has high expectations in other parts of his life and fulfills the other levels there.

Robin[110]

Age: 23
Time employed by IKEA: 2 years
Position: Sales person
Educational degree: Currently finishing last year of a university degree
Working hours: 10 hours per week

Robin's first job at IKEA was a summer job in a supporting[111] department. He found rather quickly that IKEA was an interesting company and applied for a weekend job in a selling department, which he obtained. IKEA means more to Robin than just a weekend job and he is willing to start and continue his career within IKEA. Despite this he is rather skeptical towards IKEA's HR-philosophy and questions whether he, with his educational background, belongs in the organization of IKEA. Therefore, whether he is to remain within IKEA or not depends on the actions of the company. Overall, he is performing his job well and enjoys working and contributing to IKEA's progression.

Robin is a university student working part-time in order to obtain some extra money. The IKEA houses have numerous employees, many in the same situation as Robin. Around 40 percent are part-time employees, working from almost full-time to sometimes as seldom as one or two weekends per month. As seen in **Table 43**, many of these part-time employees, who work less than 20 hours per week, study at universities.

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[110] Robin is a quite recent contribution of articles with a modern design to IKEA's assortment.

[111] Not actively selling any products, seldom having customer relations.

Table 43, Current education – in relation to Working hours

% within Working hours

	Current education		
	University	Other vocational education	No current education
Full-time	4%	2%	94%
Between 20 and 40 hours	2%	5%	93%
Between 10 and 20 hours	**33%**	13%	53%
Less than 10 hours	**70%**	5%	25%
Total	10%	4%	86%

Personal and professional development

When investigating how the employees feel regarding their possibilities to affect their own development in the company, we found that the fewer hours they work, the less the employees feel that they can influence their own development, seen in **Table 44**. The most obvious reason is that they are not working as frequently, being within the boundaries of the company. Another factor that many employees stressed during our encounters, is that the people in `charge´ of their development, namely the managers, mainly work during the weekends.

> *"The managers here are good, but unfortunately, I do not meet them as often. I miss that…"*
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee during an informal interview

Table 44, To what extent can the employees influence their own development – in relation to Working hours

% within Working hours

	Influence your own development				
	To a very low extent	To a rather low extent	To a certain extent	To a rather high extent	To a very high extent
Full-time	16%	21%	36%	22%	5%
Between 20 and 40 hours	10%	25%	45%	17%	4%
Between 10 and 20 hours	18%	53%	18%	6%	6%
Less than 10 hours	10%	43%	38%	5%	5%
Total	14%	26%	38%	18%	5%

These part-time employees are quite young as seen in **Table 45**, usually below 25 years of age. One cannot find these persons on any management positions, naturally due to the fact that they do not work full-time. Robin is one of these students who work part-time; he will also shortly be finished with his studies and speculates whether there is a place for him in the future at IKEA.

Table 45, Age - in relation to Working hours

% within Working hours

	Age				
	-25	26-34	35-44	45-54	55-
Full-time	24%	39%	25%	9%	3%
Between 20 and 40 hours	49%	23%	17%	3%	7%
Between 10 and 20 hours	**61%**	11%	6%	11%	11%
Less than 10 hours	**71%**	24%	5%		
Total	37%	31%	20%	7%	4%

Perceived competence

In order to understand how Robin perceives competence, one has to take into account Robin's knowledge and experiences. As stated earlier, Sandberg (1994) argues that competence is a sum of different categories. Robin has a well-founded theoretical background from his years in school. However, he does not have much experience, therefore he would like to compensate this by internal training. The problem is that quite a few of those who work less than 20 hours receives attention from the organization; only about 10 percent have received any internal training during the last twelve months. When examining the statistics for part-time employees, it is apparent that the more seldom one works, the lesser are the chances to obtain possibilities of internal training, illustrated in **Table 46**.

Table 46, Have the employees received any internal training the last 12 months – in relation to Occupational title

% within Working hours

	Internal training?	
	No	Yes
Full-time	54%	46%
Between 20 and 40 hours	74%	26%
Between 10 and 20 hours	**88%**	12%
Less than 10 hours	**90%**	10%
Total	64%	36%

One likely factor explaining these figures is that since these employees are not working as frequently as the other employees, it is more difficult to provide them with courses and training. However, this ought not to be a justification of the fact that many in Robin's situation experience lack of attention from the organization.

"I have been here for long but is still on the same level, no internal training at all during all these years in order to move upward."[112]

Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Self-perceived competence

It is a question of whether IKEA consider it worth investing in employees who work below 20 hours a week? Even more important, are they interested? Beginning with the latter question it is clear that people who work less than full time are open for the possibility to remain within the organization almost to as large extent as the full time employees, see **Table 47**.

Table 47, Do the employees foresee themselves in the company in 5 years – in relation to Working hours

% within Working hours

	5 years into the future			
	Yes, definitely	Yes, probably	No, probably not	No, definitely not
Full-time	33%	40%	17%	10%
Between 20 and 40 hours	15%	41%	29%	15%
Between 10 and 20 hours	33%	13%	40%	13%
Less than 10 hours	10%	45%	25%	20%
Total	26%	39%	23%	13%

In addition, the part-time employees are interested in receiving internal training, although the percentage of *don't know* is higher as shown in **Table 48**. The reasons behind this could be that the employees working part-time have other activities besides work, as school or another occupation, which makes it more difficult for them to participate in training.

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[112] Own translation.

Table 48, Do the employees want internal training – in relation to Working hours

% within Working hours

	Do you want internal training?		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Full-time	90%	4%	6%
Between 20 and 40 hours	72%	5%	23%
Between 10 and 20 hours	39%	6%	56%
Less than 10 hours	67%	5%	29%
Total	80%	4%	16%

Having established a plausible argument for the interest of the part-time employees, the second question aforementioned remains. Is IKEA willing to invest in these individuals? Bearing **Table 46** above in mind one could assert that the answer is no. Unfortunately, this has been supported repeatedly during our encounters. One example of such from our interviews, was regarding an excursion to a producer for the entire department. The only exception was that the part-timers were not invited, leading to alienation and lower motivation for these employees. This is merely one example among many, expressed during our dialogues. Perhaps the persons would not have benefited much from this learning experience, however one has to take the issue one step further. This individual, whose motivation has drastically decreased, could have been a future manager now lost due to reluctance to insignificantly increase the cost of the excursion.

> *"Perceive part-time employees as a resource and not*
> *only as a temporary solution"*
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Regardless of the lack of training Robin receives, he still feels that the organization appreciate him, seen in **Table 49**. Robin is motivated and considers that he is involved in something meaningful. We find this somewhat surprising since few of the part-timers receive much attention from IKEA (regarding competence development). Arthur and Kram (1989), state that

during the early career period the employee try to develop an occupational identity. The essential concern is `doing´ and this high level of energy for the work is usually accompanied by optimism and a compliance to trust the employer. Another explanation for the relatively high figures in **Table 49** below could be that for the part-time employees, work at IKEA is not the essential aspect of their lives. Therefore, their expectations are lower, hence easier to meet.

Table 49, Do the employees feel that the organization cares about them – in relation to Working hours

% within Working hours

		Organization cares	
		Not to a large extent	To a large extent
Working hours	Full-time	32%	68%
	Between 20 and 40 hours	31%	69%
	Between 10 and 20 hours	19%	**81%**
	Less than 10 hours	25%	**75%**
Total		30%	70%

Discernment of work

In examining those who have finished their university studies we notice that they seem truly involved in their job, seen in **Table 50**.

> *"There are numerous possibilities to develop within IKEA,*
> *in Sweden as well as abroad."[113]*
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

---

[113] Own translation.

Table 50, Do the employees feel involved in their present job – in relation to Educational background

% within Educational background

	Involved		
	Uncertain	Do no agree	Agree
Compulsory school	14%		86%
High School	17%	8%	75%
University	8%	3%	89%
Total	15%	6%	78%

The situation changes if one perceives the correlation between people currently being involved in education and how involved the employees feel, as can be seen in **Table 51**. Again, the focus of these employees is concentrated elsewhere. Consider the possibility of IKEA capturing their attention. The result would be a potential base of promising individuals for future demanding positions. For the employees in the phase of early career, work should provide opportunities to learn and demonstrate competence, to experience acceptance. What then are the reasons for the deviations between the feeling of involvement depending on education and current education? We believe it could be due to the fact that employees who are finished with their studies are working full-time and therefore have more opportunities to experience the aforementioned feelings. The employees still educating themselves are usually working part time, and therefore have less opportunities for self-fulfillment at work.

> *"[I will not be within IKEA in five years] because I have*
> *hopefully finished school by then."*
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

Table 51, Do the employees feel involved in their present job – in relation to Current education

% within Current education

	Involved		
	Uncertain	Do no agree	Agree
University	27%	15%	**58%**
Other vocational education		20%	80%
No current education	15%	5%	79%
Total	16%	7%	77%

During our many visits to the IKEA houses we have discussed the matter of a future within IKEA with many employees. Especially for the individuals at a lower age, IKEA do not even seem to be considered an option as future employer, illustrated in **Table 52**. Why? We believe it could be due to the fact that many of the younger employees perceive their employment at IKEA as highly temporal, being a mere source of income during their years as students. Few regard that IKEA is an immense organization, offering possible vocations for most areas of interest.

> *"It [IKEA] is a way of getting extra money right now, but it could just as well have been somewhere else."[114]*
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

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[114] Own translation.

Table 52, Do the employees foresee themselves in the organization in 5 years - in relation to Age

% within Age

		5 years into the future			
		Yes, definitely	Yes, probably	No, probably not	No, definitely not
Age	**-25**	11%	38%	**40%**	**11%**
	26-34	28%	47%	13%	12%
	35-44	45%	36%	9%	11%
	45-54	53%	21%	11%	16%
	55-	8%	46%	15%	31%
Total		26%	40%	22%	13%

Regarding **Figure 8** presented previously, Arthur and Kram (1989) stated that for the employee in the early career stage, `fit´ will occur when the organization allow the employee to pursuit individual tasks, such as developing job competence and occupational identity. As mentioned earlier, Arthur and Kram (1989) label these needs, *exploring*. Robin is not in the area of `fit´ at the present time, but a course in such direction can be maneuvered with assistance from the organization.

Consequently, for a great part of the younger employees these needs are not fulfilled. One reason could of course be that a significant part of the younger employees are only working part-time and therefore have hardly any chance of satisfying these needs due to their not being present at the company often enough.

> *"[I will be within IKEA in five years], if IKEA starts to acknowledge my need of development and starts to use my knowledge…"*[115]
>
> Expressed by IKEA employee in the questionnaire

---

[115] Own translation.

Schein (1978) supports our arguments proclaiming that an important issue to confront in the early career stage is to decide whether to remain in the organization, or to seek a better match between own needs and organizational constraints and opportunities in another company. Certainly, if the individual can find a more appropriate match elsewhere, that must be accepted. However, consider an alternative; IKEA has what the individual need, still not being aware of it…

INFERENCE OF ENTIRETY

T *ying the ends together is a metaphorical expression probably abused, however, although it rather clearly illustrates what we now will present. Nevertheless, being more than a summary, we intend to take the aforementioned discussions one step further. We commence by developing the theories earlier scrutinized in conjunction to our findings in our study. Hence, the two parts represented by arrows in* **Figure 1,** *earlier presented, will now convene, forming our inference. As a prolongation we present our proposals for our case company, not as absolute instructs, but as possible areas of enhancement. We end our writings by indicating some areas for future research, topics that have activated our curiosity although not developed in this thesis.*

Apart from writing for the sake of our own learning, we had an additional aim of constructively contributing to our case company's progress. We know we have attained our prime objective encompassing learning, which comprises the actual topic at hand as well as other vital aspects such as the ability to cooperate, to express ourselves, and to find and cultivate information of concern. In addition, our comprehension of the case company has deepened, making our future more promising. As regards the succeeding intention of contributing to our case company, we are optimistic that our input will be well reputed, facilitating some actions in the future. In the setting of completing a Master Thesis we further anticipate that our study and findings will assist research of tomorrow, triggering researchers' imagination and students' erudition, as were our intentions…

A Generic Extension

As stated in our problem statement, we intend to answer the question about how the employees' subjective apprehension of their immediate work situation, framed by the organization, affect their perception of competence development. In order to accomplish this, we first need to create an understanding of the prerequisites of competence development.

Mayo argues that the prime mover is belonging, while McGregor states that it is self-fulfillment (Tengblad, 1997). We find this interesting to contemplate since concerning our four generic persons, not one seems to be motivated by the same factor as another. As our generic persons, discussed earlier, represent the majority of the employees in our case company, including an application of presented theories, we now base the following deduction and assumptions thereof. We will commence by a short description of the four characters' different connotations of their work situation and then continue with placing them into the `Individual-organizational interaction model at the individual level´ described by Arthur & Kram (1989), as well as describing how their work situation affect their perception of competence and competence development, thereby, addressing the problem statement.

Olga

Although Olga is a `low-priced kitchen towel´ in our case company's assortment, her equivalent can be found in virtually all organizations. She regards herself neglected, which unsurprisingly affects her work productivity and her spirit. We have tried extensively in capturing just this spirit, decisive for the determination of her perception of competence development. She is dissatisfied, in addition frustrated, due to the fact that she is not in a favored position.

We believe Sandberg's model as a possible utopia, still it is interesting to discuss theoretically. In his `Rationalistic perspective towards competence´ the conception of the work piece is an important factor in order to develop. Olga

possesses the other parts in Sandberg's model to a certain degree, however she may lack the conception part due to her negative opinion regarding the management of the organization. Another possibility could also be that she lacks the important aspect of self-assessment.

Olga is not currently in the area of `fit´, as can be seen in **Figure 14**. Ulrich (1998) stated that `bouncing´ was a way of removing employees who failed to develop new skills or were unqualified for the current work. As mentioned earlier, we question who then bears the responsibility? We will return to this issue later in our organizational part. Arthur and Kram (1989) state that the employees prevailing in the middle career are generally most concerned about their personal advancement and recognition. Conversely, this is exactly what Olga is lacking, placing her in the `boredom´ area.
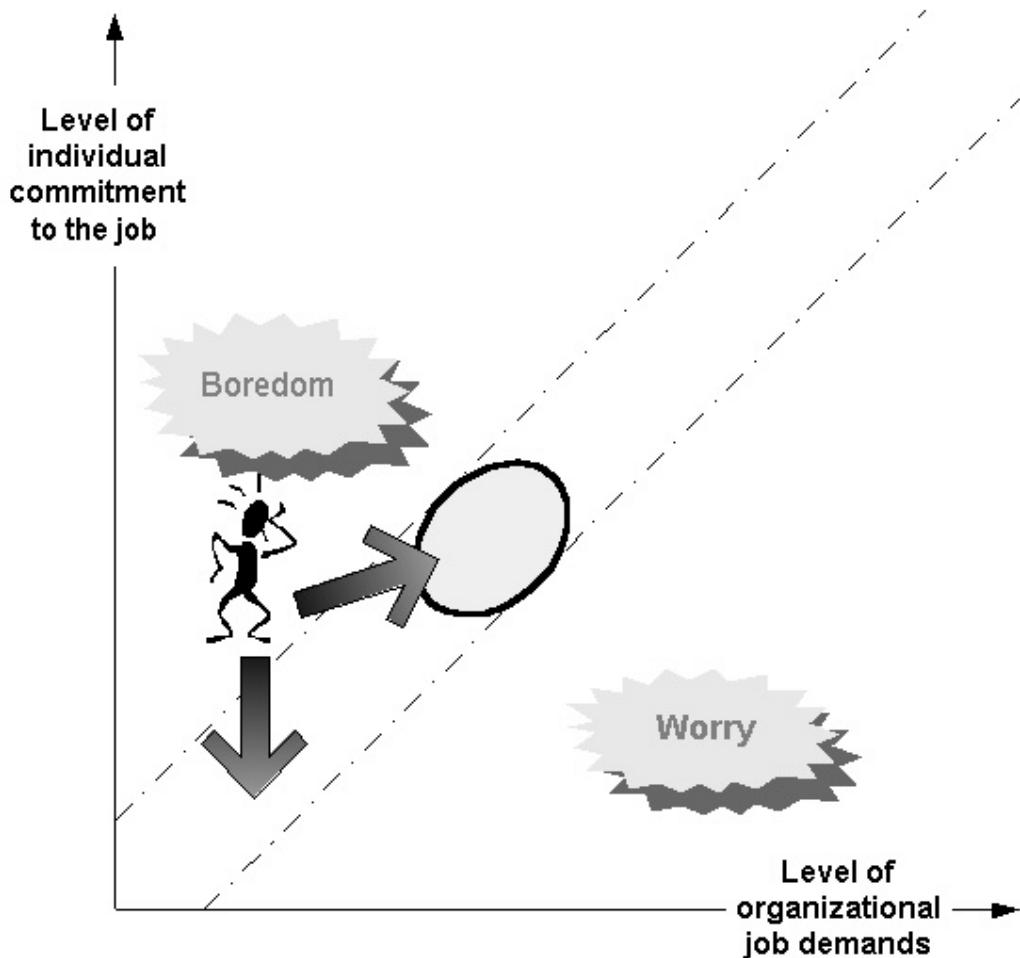
Figure 14, Individual-organizational interaction at the individual level, in reference to Olga

The arrows in the figure above represent two possible directions that Olga could take in the future. These potential outcomes are not based on any scientific calculations; instead they are founded on our descriptions of these characters, thus on our own feelings, interviews and theories. Consequently, we feel that this is a valid way of illustrating our point of view, combining facts, observations and feelings. There could probably be different alternatives of how Olga might develop; hence our two alternatives should be seen merely as probable outcomes.

The first possible shift of direction we present is downward; representing that Olga's commitment is decreasing even more. One might interpret the above

figure as Olga would then end up in her `fit´ zone. However, this is not accurate, the `fit´ zone for Olga is inside the circle. Ending up between the two dotted lines only symbolizes that the `job demand´ equals Olga's degree of commitment, consequently this would signify that Olga would become an employee achieving below her actual potential outcome. Schein (1978) argues that in the middle career stage, an important aspect is to develop self-confidence; a factor we feel is desperately missing in Olga's résumé.

The second possible shift is a parallel movement towards the circle of `fit´. In order for this to occur, the level of organizational job demand would have to increase. Accordingly, Olga would in this case have to be offered a new position with increased possibilities to pursuit major individual tasks such as earning promotion, expanding job possibilities and gaining external recognition of her achievements. However, she might be negative regarding her capabilities to influence the future of her career based on the perceived lack of trust in the organization. Believing that she in fact is capable of managing a more demanding job, she is awaiting an altered course, now in the control of the organization.

We believe that lack of recognition and development can trigger a negative downward going spiral effect. The less appraisal and acknowledgement an employee receives, the more negative and unmotivated he or she becomes regarding work. Hence, this employee will probably receive even less detection and appraisal. An organization has to keep in mind that competence development generates expectations, if not fulfilled, shattering the dreams of the employee, tragedy can follow.

> *How does Olga' subjective apprehension of her immediate work situation, framed by the organization, affect her perception of competence and competence development?*

Olga has gone through extensive training. Now, she impatiently anticipates the outcome, deeming more training inadequate. For Olga, competence is analogous to experience, acquiring the necessary tools for advancement. She perceives competence as an achievement, now she awaits the adherent

compensation. For Olga, competence development is a specific phenomenon, encompassing a concrete progression. Hence, she demands competence development in order to reach the next subsequent, predefined, level.

Rosanna

Rosanna, being a high-quality textile, is the threads keeping the complex structure of the organization collected. Being a contributor to our case company's success, Rosanna is a person of tomorrow. There are numerous employees such as Rosanna working for various organizations. Their objective is to develop in the course of the company. However, as for the other generic persons, Rosanna does not symbolize a specific person, she could just as well represent a period in an individual's career. Thus, a `Rosanna´ can swiftly become an `Olga´ if inappropriate actions are taken by the organization[116].

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[116] To be noted, other non-work-related aspects can also negatively affect the individual, not further discussed.
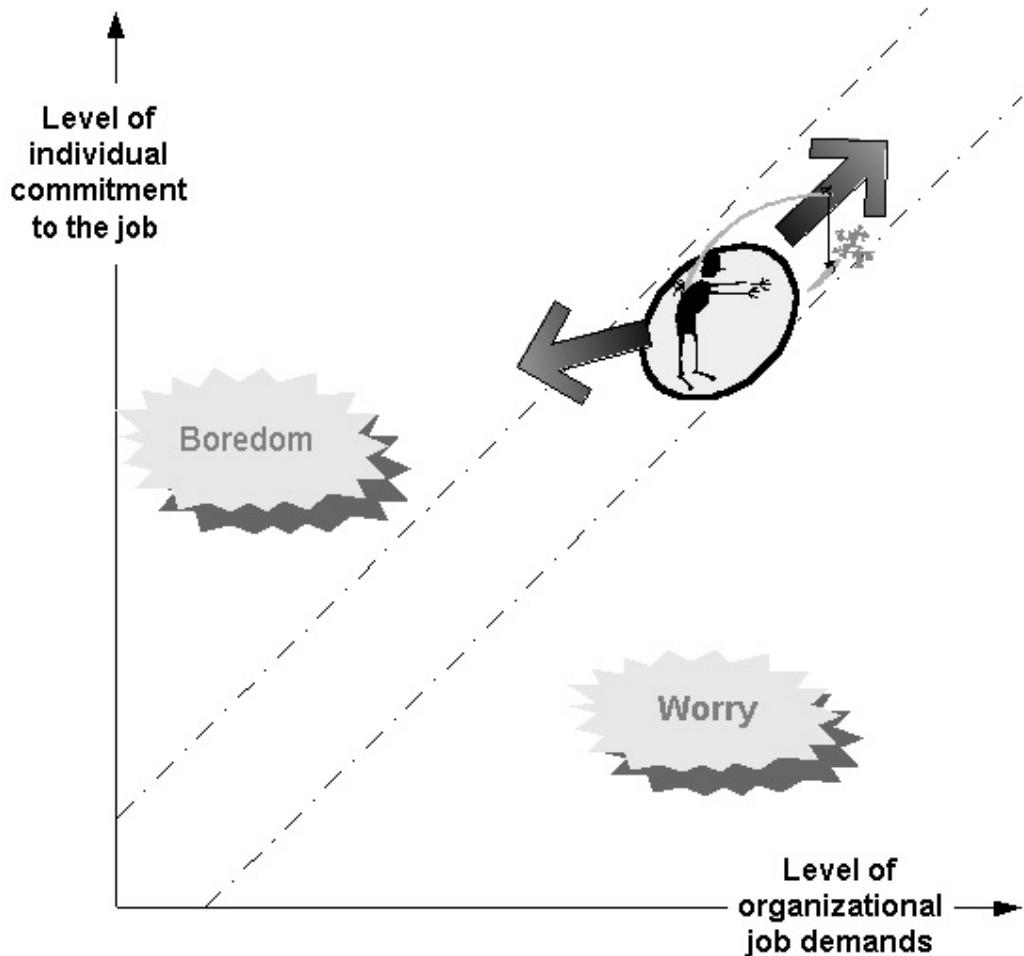
Figure 15, Individual-organizational interaction at the individual level, in reference to Rosanna

Rosanna is currently in the area of `fit´ as can be seen in **Figure 15**, the carrot symbolizing that she strives upward. Arthur and Kram (1989) state that the need of utter concern during the middle career is *advancing*, a need that Rosanna is satisfying since she is progressing in the organization. This need manifest itself in, for example, obtaining responsibility over junior colleagues and by acquiring appraisal and acknowledgment from peers and superiors. The overall purpose of these behaviors is to seek out opportunities in order to advance. Right now, Rosanna feels that she can influence her course of development, also feeling a great deal of trust towards the organization. Nevertheless, every road has its end; Rosanna will not always be provided with

the attention as in the present. Hence, in the future other needs will probably emerge, consequently the organization need to be prepared for this situation.

In the `Puzzle of competence´, we emphasized the importance of the piece called `values´, symbolizing the willingness to share fundamental values, to act, and to seize responsibility for one's proceedings. We believe Rosanna to clearly encompass this piece, utilizing it in order to make the most of the other sections in the puzzle.

The arrow pointing upward symbolizes that Rosanna would continue to advance, probably, however not necessarily, to higher levels in the organization's hierarchy. Here, Rosanna's commitment would correspond to the level of demand her work would require, allowing her to continue to advance. It could also be the case that Rosanna would grow within the present position, receiving the amount of recognition and challenge she would need in order to correspond to her level of commitment. As mentioned earlier, McGregor stated that a satisfied need is not a motivator; hence Rosanna will need to continue to develop in order to continue to climb in the `Stairway to fulfillment´, receiving new challenges and opportunities.

The second arrow, aiming leftwards, implies that Rosanna's commitment would remain unaffected although the degree of demand would decrease. Then she would end up in the `boredom´ area, soon becoming uninspired. This reminds, to a large extent, of what happened to Olga, recapturing the importance for the organization to provide the employee with a proportional level of challenge, depending on the degree of motivation of that specific employee.

> *How does Rosanna' subjective apprehension of her immediate work situation, framed by the organization, affect her perception of competence and competence development?*

Rosanna defines competence as a measurement of previous accomplishments. To be competent is equivalent of having managerial responsibilities, exercising control and leadership. For Rosanna, competence is correspondent to

performing a specific task in order to accomplish what intended. She craves competence development in the concepts `true´ meaning, developing for the sake of development. Rosanna perceives competence development as a natural and obligatory element of her professional existence, providing the crucial challenges she craves.

Billy

Billy is a stable product to rely on. His presence is not only what to expect in most Swedish households, he is also anticipated in all departments of our case company. Although he is not the first one to be noticed, he is a foundation necessary for most, if not all, organizations. If one can be non-dissatisfied without being satisfied, Billy is just this. He works to live and not vice versa and chooses the `Stairway to fulfillment´ to be found outside of work. Billy's level of influence regarding his work situation is rather low, in fact he does not have much of a choice since he is perceived as a `Billy´ personality. It might be easier for a newcomer, like Rosanna, entering the organization with a high degree of energy and career motivation. Nevertheless, Billy desires to remain in his present position in the organization.

Earlier, we questioned if a person should be in charge of ones own competence development. At the beginning of our journey, we assumed that for an employee with a strong career-focus it might be less problematic to manage the `road to success´. However, after completing our analysis regarding our informal interviews and questionnaire, we are cautious regarding the declaration of such remarks. Billy, or any other employee for that matter, might be capable of administrating his own development, however, concerning the outcome and goals of this, we ponder. It would be problematic to possess the self-awareness necessary, in order to accomplish this successfully. Still, we find this question intriguing.

As asserted before, it is also a question about *if* the employee wants competence development. Ulrich (1998) states that one way of increasing competence in a unit is to *build* competence. However, as aforementioned, a gap frequently exists between the management interpretations' of what training

the employee needs and the desires of the individual employee. Consequently, as stated before, a more employee-focused approach to competence may be required.

Just as Rosanna, Billy is within the area of `fit´ illustrated in **Figure 16**. Arthur and Kram (1989) states that employees in the period of career maturity are generally faced with the task of securing and maintaining their emergent status, experiencing continued affirmation of their work. Passing on know-how to colleagues are also an important need at this stage. In order for these tasks to be successfully accomplished, job arrangements must provide feedback from peers and superiors so that one's contributions continue to have significance for the organization, even though one is becoming older. Consequently, Billy feels that he is secure in his position and professional actions. He feels *protected* and feels that he can *protect*, the need emblematic of this phase.

Examining Sandberg's (1994) categorization of competence, one can state that Billy probably lacks the theoretical knowledge even though possessing a great part of the practical one. We believe that holding all elements of Sandberg's division of competence is not necessary for the level of work Billy performs, however, in order to reach a more challenging position, an increase of his theoretical knowledge would probably be beneficial.
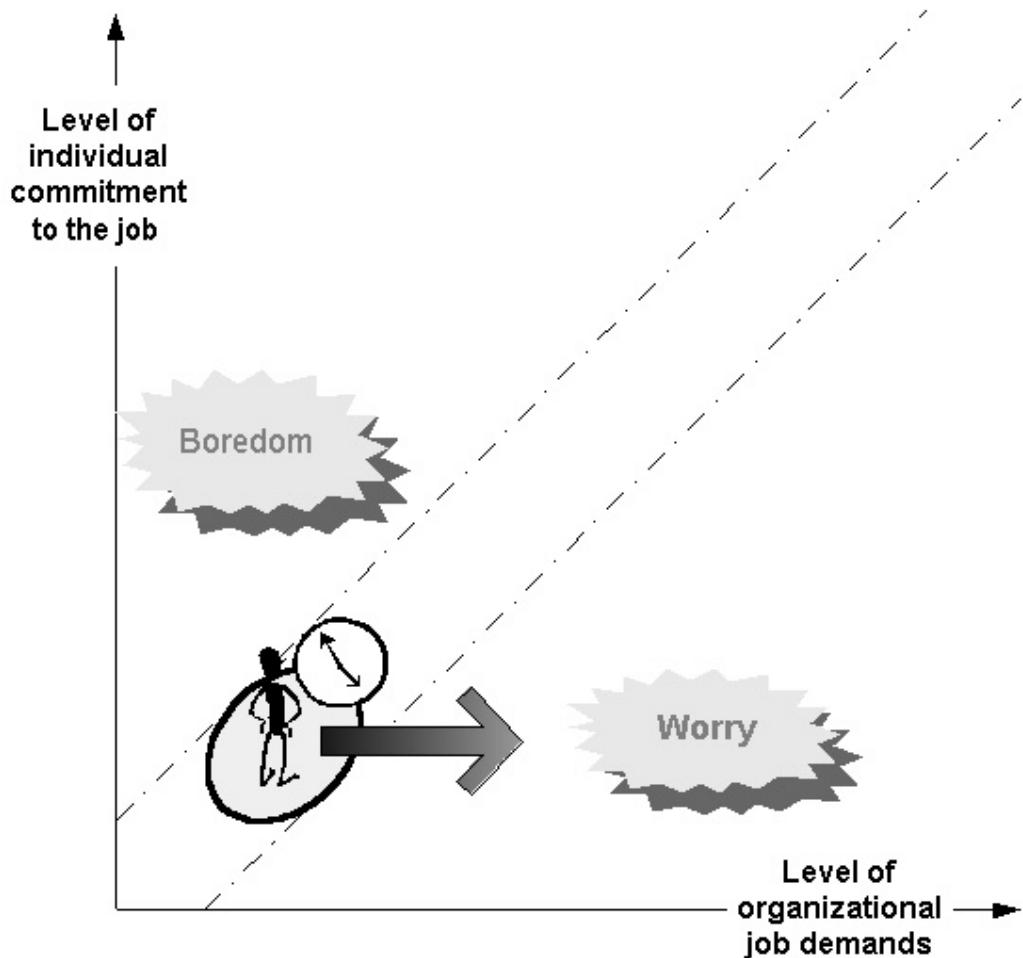
Figure 16, Individual-organizational interaction at the individual level, in reference to Billy

We identify Billy as reasonably established, most likely remaining in his present position in the figure, where his commitment is corresponding to the level of organizational demand. As a result he is rather satisfied with his present work arrangements, trusting the organization and sensing that they believe in him, even though not seeking any further development. Ulrich (1998) states that retaining the right employees is an important cornerstone when increasing comptence. As mentioned earlier, we believe competence development can be seen as a form of motivation for the employees to remain in the organization, providing the employee with encouragement and development. The question is if Billy perceives competence development in

this way, since he has received a relativ insignificant amount of development and still remains in the organization.

However, if Billy would commence to perceive his contributions as insignificant to the organization, due perhaps to his age or lack of education, he could well move into the `worry´ area, represented by the arrow pointing rightward. Arthur and Kram (1989) states that in the phase of career maturity worry could occur if a person's potential contribution is disregarded. If Billy is frustrated regarding his need of protecting this could bring about a threat to the usual developmental tasks of career maturity, and consequently moving Billy into the `worry´ area.

> *How does Billy's subjective apprehension of his immediate work situation, framed by the organization, affect his perception of competence and competence development?*

Billy perceives competence as a practical notion, displayed through actions by individuals in an organizational working context. He feels that one is competent when performing the job to a satisfactory level. He sometimes regards competence development as a reward, a welcomed disruption of the everyday duties. On the other hand, he might also distinguish competence development as a disruption in his workday. When introduced to something new and unfamiliar, changing the procedures of the duties conducted on a daily basis, Billy might even feel uncomfortable. Consequently, he appreciates the possibility to choose, perceiving mandatory training negatively. For Billy, the incentive for taking part in competence development is to enhance performance in his present job.

Robin

Robin is a new and trendy product in our case company's assortment. He is `fresh´ in the working community as well, eager to try his wings. The question he dwells on is whereto the wings will carry him. Robin has high expectations on his future career, the only problem being that it is dependent on the

organization. Is the company Robin currently works for prepared to act in regards to his capabilities? Robin is a man of tomorrow, and that tomorrow will be a consequence of the organization's actions.

Arthur and Kram (1989) state that during the early career period the employee is faced with the essential mission of developing occupational competence and establishing an initial occupational identity. At the same time, Robin has to learn the way of the organization. Robin's dilemma is that he does not feel that he has the possibilities desired to influence his course of development.

Since work has not been the primary focus for Robin, he has been rather satisfied with his previous work arrangements in the organization. Now, when the time has come to start his career, he would like a position that provides him with larger challenges. When working part-time, Robin had faith in the organization, foreseeing only possibilities. However, at present he is unsure whether he is noticed.

Robin has doubts whether to remain within the company, to a large extent due to the lack of training and development offered. However, were he to be aware of the relatively, extensive training and competence development the department managers receive, he would probably have a different attitude concerning to remain in the organization. We believe that one reason explaining why quite a substantial amount of the young employees have no intention of staying, is due to lack of knowledge about the organization's development programs. Since they hardly receive any training or development when working on introductory positions or while working part time, they believe this will also be the case if remaining in the future. As usual, first impression lasts.

Ulrich (1998) states that retaining the right employees is critical. As argued earlier, competence development can be seen as a form of reward, making the employee feel appreciated and motivated. Ulrich also argued that investments made in individual talent, take years to pay back. Ironically, in Robin's case, competence development is critical in order to inspire him to remain, this also being a prerequisite in order to invest in him. Hence, we believe that providing

Robin with competence development generates a twofold return on investment, encouraging him to stay in addition to increase his use to the organization.

In **Figure 17**, one can see that Robin is outside the area of `fit´, instead prevailing in the area of boredom. Arthur and Kram (1989) argue that this occurs when the assigned tasks are uninteresting, not providing the employee with the necessary level of demand. Robin does not feel that he can fulfill the need of *exploring*, and as a consequence his initial experiences, critical to future successful performance, adaptation and further career development, are suffering.
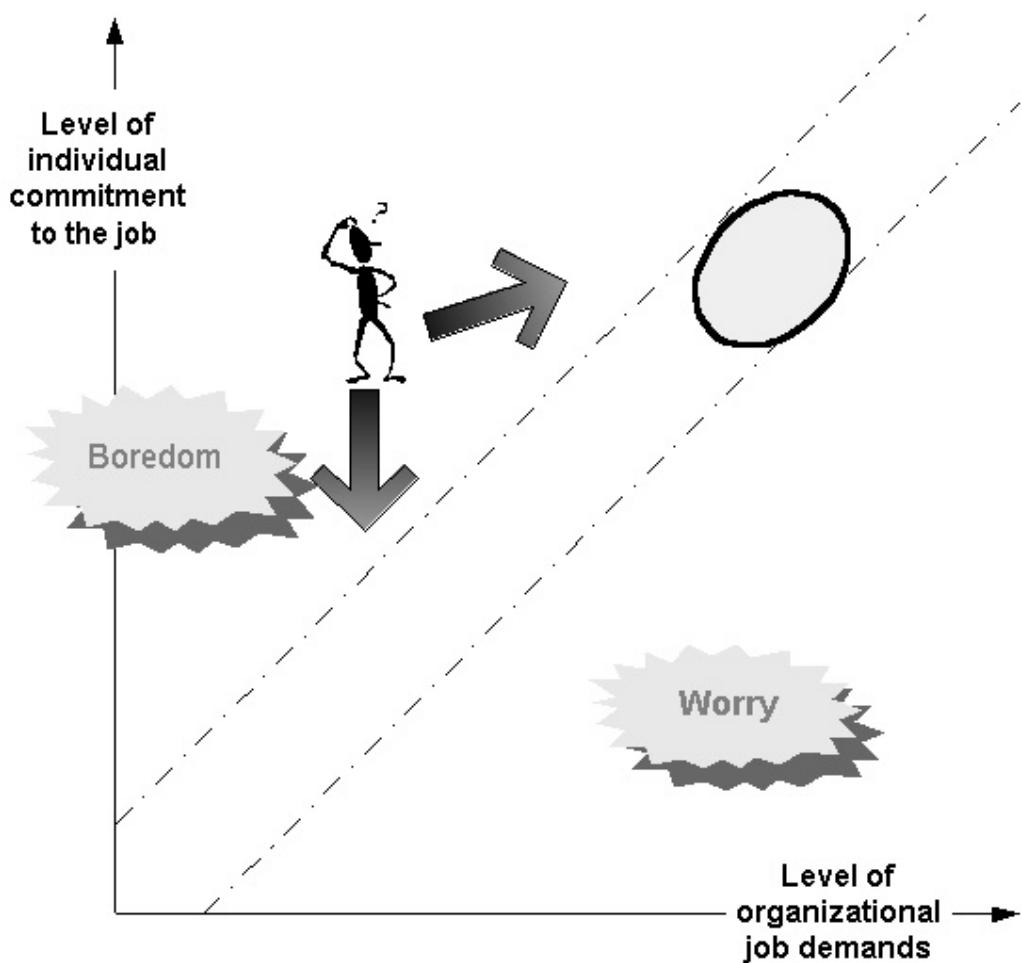
Figure 17, Individual-organizational interaction at the individual level, in reference to Robin

Again we present two plausible developmental patterns; one is reminding about Olga's, where commitment decreases. If repositioning in this direction, Robin would then discontinue to be concerned about the work arrangement or organizational matters. The second plausible outcome is horizontal, towards the sphere of `fit´. This could occur if the organization would provide Robin with more challenging tasks, allowing him to pursuit his major individual goals, such as developing job competence and a professional individuality.

Placing Robin in Sandberg's (1994) categorization of competence we perceive him to possess the theoretical part although not the practical experience. This is quite the opposite compared to Billy, discussed earlier. However, Robin has the aspiration to develop the practical experience, while Billy[117] may not have the ambition or motivation in order to develop a theoretical understanding of his work arrangements.

> *How does Robin's subjective apprehension of his immediate work situation, framed by the organization, affect his perception of competence and competence development?*

For Robin, competence signifies a base of comprehension, an ability to transform knowledge into action. From his academic background he is used to acquiring knowledge from a teacher – student relationship, instead of the more pragmatic `learning by doing´. Therefore, Robin would favor a mentorship approach to his development in the organization. Robin regards competence development as a mean to reach higher positions, making a career. He also perceives competence development as a source of motivation. He lacks experience; consequently regards competence development as a substitute for this.

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[117] This is of course not something universally applicable to older employees, nonetheless, with the background of Billy, both educationally and professionally we believe this to be noteworthy.

The Organizational Part in a Reciprocal Approach

As stated before, our intention in the beginning was to entirely leave out the organizational viewpoint of competence development. However, we soon came to realize that approaching the complex field of competence development, leaving out the organization, was not an option. As stated in the title of this thesis, a reciprocal approach to competence development is stressed.

An organization has to question if it aims for personal development per se or if the goal simply is to produce a more productive employee in order to comply with company objectives? Clearly, we believe in a `matching´ approach where individual and organizational needs are satisfied. Hence, the focus should be on the `fit´ between the overall level of commitment brought by the employees and the set of organizational job arrangements provided in response.

We believe that an organizational perspective of competence implies that competence is defined as a concept, rendering the organization more effective, while the individual perspective involves what the individual perceives as optimistic for personal development. These perspectives ought to be coalescent!

If reviewing the positions of our four generic persons one can see that two of them are in the `fit´ area while the two other can be found in the `boredom´ area. If examining in which direction they are repositioning, if they are, one can notice that some are possibly progressing towards the `fit´ while others are possibly shifting towards the `boredom´ area (we only perceived Billy as possibly moving towards the `worry´ area). A worrisome potential future however unlikely for the company could therefore be what Arthur and Kram labels organizational *stagnation*. This is when job arrangements provide insufficient opportunity for members to respond to the organization's needs.

Still, as questioned before, why have an employee not developed or responded in the manner that the management planned? The reasons could of course be numerous but one explanation being the lack of reciprocity between the two

parts, neither of them understanding the underlying objective of the other. Keen (1998) proclaims that we have to improve in identifying, evaluating, and developing competence. In our next part we will continue to debate this intriguing subject, related to our case company.

Conceivable Areas of Consideration for IKEA

As our intentions initially were quite pretentious as we believed that we would compose a more or less meticulous action-plan for the sake of IKEA's progress. However, at present we regard such attempts as rather naïve. Indubitably, we have a rather far-reaching understanding of HRM-related concerns within IKEA's organization; still, we are researchers who aimed to learn and ought to act subsequently.

That being noted, following statements must be regarded as merely qualified suggestions and possible areas in need of attention. `Everything can be improved´ is IKEA's motto and we dearly hope we contribute to this.

> *"To give simple, honest people the possibility to develop as individuals and professionals so that we together and with great commitment can create a better everyday for ourselves and our customers."*

IKEA employee philosophy (IKEA, 2001)

IKEA's employee philosophy is rather promising; "To give simple, honest people the possibility to develop as individuals and professionals…". `Develop´ being our focus we are concerned with such statements. Still, a statement in itself is worth close to nothing. If the statement is sincere it ought to be involved in all actions considered within the vast organization. One must not treat such stance as a separate topic, but as a norm permeate most aspects in conducting everyday business. Therefore, we propose an altered perspective of the area of HRM. Recalling **Figure 4,** HRM is here a separate circle not

affecting the mission and strategy. This is eccentric, considering that `H´[118] is present in most organizational situations.

As we introduced **Figure 7**, we proposed an organizational involvement in the individuals' course of development, which we determine inevitable. What role the organization should play is another question. Possibly one could assert that we ought to sculpt a unanimous model of how an organization should act. Again we disregard such an unsophisticated attempt, acknowledging the uniqueness of *every* circumstance and *every* individual. Concerning this, are we so inept to insinuate that IKEA ought to recognize *all* 70,000 employees? We do! Reaching one step further we assert that it ought to occur corresponding to the individual's desires. Will IKEA endure without this perspective, certainly! Will they continue to prosper, probably! Still, if IKEA have intentions of becoming the organization they propose by "giving people the possibility to develop as individuals" a change is inevitable.

Referring back to the same sentence, "To give simple, honest people the possibility to develop as individuals and professionals…", we highlight *possibility*. It is not a must, but an opportunity. An opportunity for all and sundry? According to our findings, this is far from the actuality, were high percentage of the employees crave attention and possibilities to develop, as professionals, as well as individuals.

Now, what could possibly be the reason for why IKEA ought to care about their employees' development? Employees come and go and IKEA is in business to sell furniture, which is being done with an enormous success. One could believe that profit is the ultimate goal, however, rarely is it mentioned in IKEA's public statements regarding company objective. "…a better everyday for ourselves and our customers" considering this as the prime objective, development of competence becomes an essentiality. What do each and every

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[118] Human(s) (HRM)

employee requires in order to develop? This question has to be asked over and over again[119].

"…as individuals *and* professionals…". High ambitions from an organization that promotes itself as simple and cost-conscious. Again dissecting the statement, the *and* is of great importance. As has been explained manifold times, an individualized organizational perspective signifies that employees require individual or professional development, possibly both. Perceiving the generic individuals earlier presented, it is rather clear that, for instance, Rosanna to a larger extent expects professional development contra Billy that prefers attempts toward a development of his private individual side. Competence development is not one singularity, but `one´ according to each person. Therefore, the gap between the understanding of competence development of the people in charge of development[120] and the understanding of competence development of the once receiving it needs to be addressed as highlighted by **Figure 18**.

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[119] Certainly we are aware of the fact that IKEA work under a budget and that considerations has to be taken regarding how much money to invest.

[120] Here, we refer to the leading forces of the organization although aware of the fact that the individual is co-responsible for his or her development.
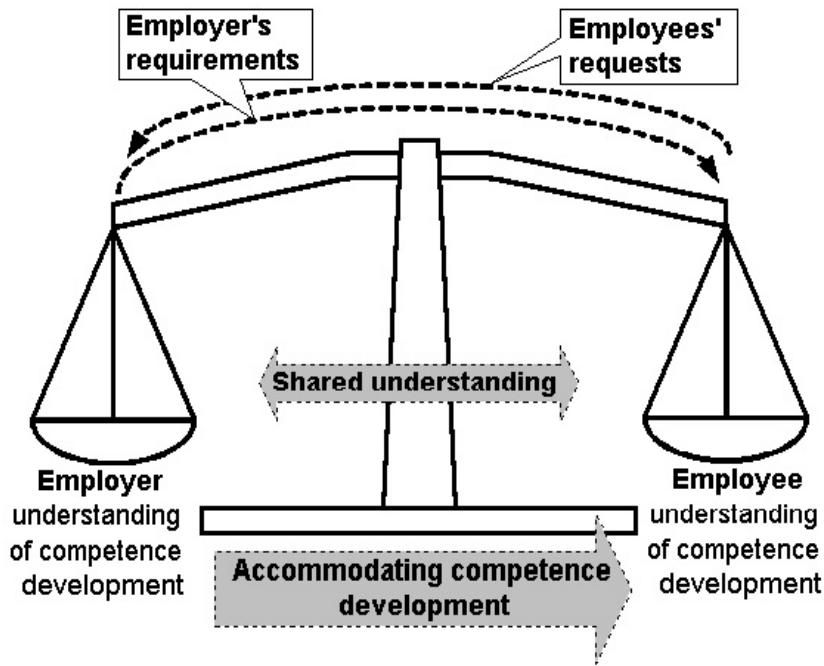
Figure 18, Shared understanding concerning reciprocity of competence development

One underlying factor for the conduction of our thesis is the future of IKEA. Reviewing their internal forecasts, IKEA intend to expand radically during the next coming years. They are in a great need of more competence in order to take the organization to an unexplored level. Where IKEA chooses to find new sources of knowledge will be of vital significance for tomorrow. During the last years we have witnessed that the recruitment philosophy at IKEA has shifted and we expect it to continue in the same direction, namely recognizing the importance of employing people with a substantial academic background. Throughout history, IKEA has been advocating the importance of personality and experience, more or less intentionally precluding university graduates. Positively, the focus has changed an IKEA is now promoting its presence in schools for higher education. Why, one might wonder. An explanation we found was that the base of future managers is incomplete if searching only among the already employed.

In attracting competence, IKEA has in this respect two options. One, IKEA can regard only present job-specific knowledge, therefore finding their employees among already employed or within other retail organizations. Two, IKEA can

regard the base of knowledge and learning capabilities of university graduates, foreseeing competence of tomorrow. We are certainly partial, however, the preferable is in all probability a mix of the two[121]. If we predict accurately IKEA will focus on the latter alternative for the next coming years in order to balance the scale, sharing our view that competence emerges when knowledge is managed well.

As we have witnessed competence development is not only a mean of individual or professional development, it is in its essentiality a pure source of motivation. We have found that the employees welcome more chances for development. Although at a cost for IKEA, consider that increased possibilities for training would enhance an employee's motivation to remain and function well in the organization. The `cost´ for development will presumably be accounted as insignificant compared to the cost of replacing one employee with a new person unaware of the job that awaits. In addition, it is not merely about intensifying the willingness to remain in the organization, but about motivating the employee to service the customers, hence selling at a greater level. An intensified level of motivation and awareness would almost certainly result in greater assurance when involved in selling activities. In practicality, more focus on employee-enhanced measures would probably lead to an upsurge in sales.

For Alternative Expeditions

During our journey we have discovered several issues related to our subject, even though not always relevant. However, due to the limitations mentioned earlier, these areas have not been developed. Nevertheless, we hope by this presentation to intrigue the reader for further research.

✓ During our work we have frequently debated the connotation of the concept of competence development, or rather, lack of a common definition. When studying such a subjective area as competence, one soon discovers that

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[121] For further discussions concerning how to regard competence, we recommend *Competence in transit* by Andersson, & Correia (2000)

everybody possess a personal definition and meaning of the word `competence´. Since our purpose was to study the affect of the employees' work situation on their perception of competence development, we did not explicitly investigate the employees' discernment of the concept of competence. It would have been intriguing to, most likely by in-depth interviews, examine the differentiations between groups of employees concerning their interpretation of competence development and also why there are such differences (if any).

✓ Another concept we discerned is the difference between individual and collective competence development. Even though not direct related to our study we found this notion absorbing. What is the actual difference between the two polar opposites and how are they perceived in a case company setting?

✓ As mentioned earlier we have carefully avoided the difficult area of organizational and national cultural differences. However, being aware of the fact that the foundering culture has an effect on all situations, such prime focus would have been appealing. For instance, comparing our findings with an IKEA store abroad, alternatively, another company.

✓ IKEA has experimented more or less successfully to complement their main strategy by using a franchising concept. How could this influence the area of competence development?

✓ Although we have intentionally disregarded the management perspective, we do not propose that such focus would have been of inferior significance. Therefore, it could have been fruitful to complement our study with such continuation.

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APPENDICES

1. Questionnaire (in Swedish)

Enkät gällande arbetssituation och kompetensutveckling

I. Introduktion

Under hösten 2001 kommer vi som avslutning på vår Master Examen att skriva en avhandling om kompetensutveckling. För att få underlag för vår analys genomför vi en studie på ett par IKEA varuhus.

Syftet med denna enkät är att få svar på hur *du* upplever *din* arbetssituation samt hur *du* ser på ett antal kompetensrelaterade frågor. Besvara därför enkäten enskilt och utifrån din egen uppfattning om ditt arbete och dina arbetsförhållanden. Tänk inte allt för länge på varje fråga utan försök att svara spontant. Dina svar är anonyma!

Dina svar är värdefulla såväl för vidare forskning som för IKEA som organisation och arbetsgivare. Undersökningen ingår även i ett större forskningsprojekt kring personalledning och arbetsförhållanden i svenskt arbetsliv, vilket inkluderar ett flertal företag aktiva i skilda branscher. Företagsnamnen kommer inte att nämnas utan endast branschtillhörighet.

Du besvarar frågorna genom att sätta kryss i den ruta som bäst stämmer överens med din uppfattning.

Tack för ditt engagemang!

II. Bakgrundsfaktorer

a) Kön
1.❑ Kvinna   2.❑ Man

b) Ålder

1.❏ - 24 2.❏ 25 - 34 3.❏ 35 - 44

4.❏ 45 - 54 5.❏ 55-

c) Position

1.❏ Avdelningschef 2.❏ Gruppchef 3.❏ Inget chefsansvar

d) Avdelning

1.❏ Möbler 2.❏ Satellit 3.❏ Övrig

d¹) Arbetstid (per vecka)

1.❏ Heltid 2.❏ Mellan 20 och 40 timmar

3.❏ Mellan 10 och 20 timmar4.❏ Mindre än 10 timmar

e) Utbildningsbakgrund (avslutad utbildning)

1.❏ Grundskola, motsv. 2.❏ Gymnasieexamen 3.❏ Högskoleexamen

e¹) Pågående utbildning

1.❏ Högskola 2.❏ Annan yrkesutbildning

3.❏ Ingen pågående utbildning

f) Anställningsform

1.❏ Fast anställning 2.❏ Vikariat 3.❏ Projektanställning

III. Frågor om hur du upplever din nuvarande arbetssituation

g) Hur skulle du vilja beskriva din totala arbetstillfredsställelse?

5.❏ Mycket god 4.❏ Ganska god 3.❏ Sådär

2.❏ Ganska dålig 1.❏ Mycket dålig

h) Tycker du att din kompetens tas till vara på rätt sätt på din arbetsplats?

5.❏ Ja, på bästa sätt 4.❏ Ganska bra 3.❏ Inte riktigt

2.❏ Dåligt 1.❏ Mycket dåligt

i) Hur upplever du att personalsociala frågor (personalens trivsel, rehabilitering, mobbning, missbruk mm) hanteras på din arbetsplats?

3.❏ På ett mycket seriöst och värdigt sätt   2.❏   På ett någorlunda seriöst och värdigt sätt   1.❏   På ett huvudsakligen bristfälligt sätt

j) I vilken grad ger din chef dig god feedback (återkoppling) kring hur ditt arbete utförs?

5.❏   I mycket hög grad   4.❏   I ganska hög grad 3.❏   I viss mån
2.❏   I ganska liten grad   1.❏   I mycket liten grad

k) I vilken grad är din chef engagerad i dina behov och önskemål vad gäller din sociala arbetssituation, t ex hur du mår, arbetstrivsel och sociala aktiviteter?

5.❏   I mycket hög grad   4.❏   I ganska hög grad 3.❏   I viss mån
2.❏   I ganska liten grad   1.❏   I mycket liten grad

l) I vilken grad är din chef engagerad i frågor som rör dina kunskaper, färdigheter och utveckling i arbetet?

5.❏   I mycket hög grad   4.❏   I ganska hög grad 3.❏   I viss mån
2.❏   I ganska liten grad   1.❏   I mycket liten grad

m) I vilken grad är din chef tillgänglig när behov finns?

5.❏   I mycket hög grad   4.❏   I ganska hög grad 3.❏   I viss mån
2.❏   I ganska liten grad   1.❏   I mycket liten grad

n) I vilken grad kan du bestämma/påverka dina arbetstider?

5.❏   I mycket hög grad   4.❏   I ganska hög grad 3.❏   I viss mån
2.❏   I ganska liten grad   1.❏   I mycket liten grad

o) I vilken grad kan du bestämma/påverka hur du skall lägga upp ditt arbete?

5.❏   I mycket hög grad   4.❏   I ganska hög grad 3.❏   I viss mån
2.❏   I ganska liten grad   1.❏   I mycket liten grad

p) I vilken grad kan du bestämma/påverka din arbetsbelastning?

5.❏   I mycket hög grad   4.❏   I ganska hög grad 3.❏   I viss mån
2.❏   I ganska liten grad   1.❏   I mycket liten grad

q) I vilken grad kan du påverka din egen utveckling (utbildning mm) i arbetet?

5.❑ I mycket hög grad 4.❑ I ganska hög grad 3.❑ I viss mån

2.❑ I ganska liten grad 1.❑ I mycket liten grad

r) I vilken grad kan du påverka din lön/ dina personalförmåner?

5.❑ I mycket hög grad 4.❑ I ganska hög grad 3.❑ I viss mån

2.❑ I ganska liten grad 1.❑ I mycket liten grad

s) I vilken grad upplever du stress (fysisk och mental) i ditt arbete?

5.❑ I mycket hög grad 4.❑ I ganska hög grad 3.❑ I viss mån

2.❑ I ganska liten grad 1.❑ I mycket liten grad

t) I vilken grad kan du påverka den enhet du tillhör genom att lämna idéer/förslag?

5.❑ I mycket hög grad 4.❑ I ganska hög grad 3.❑ I viss mån

2.❑ I ganska liten grad 1.❑ I mycket liten grad

u) Vad anser du om kvaliteten på den interna informationen, personaltidning, nyhetsbrev, etc?

5.❑ Mycket god 4.❑ God 3.❑ Varken bra eller dålig

2.❑ Ganska dålig 1.❑ Undermålig

v) Om du tänker på de löneskillnader som finns mellan de som har det enklaste och de som har det svåraste arbetet på din arbetsplats – är de löneskillnaderna i stort sätt riktiga, för små eller för stora?

1.❑ Löneskillnaderna är i stort sett riktiga 2.❑ Löneskillnaderna är för små

3.❑ Löneskillnaderna är för stora 4.❑ Tveksam, vet ej

x) Kan du placera dig själv på denna stege, där 1 betyder att man i sitt arbete har minsta möjliga frihet att bestämma något och 11 betyder att man i sitt arbete har största möjliga frihet och oberoende. På vilken pinne i stegen skulle du placera dig? *(Sätt en ring runt ditt svar)*

<div align="center">

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11

</div>

y) Tycker du att man på din arbetsplats verkligen bryr sig om dig eller tycker du att man inte bryr sig om dig så mycket?

2.❑ Man bryr sig mycket 1.❑ Man bryr sig inte så mycket

z) Hur lojal känner du dig mot din arbetsgivare?

3.❑ Mycket lojal 2.❑ Ganska lojal 1.❑ Inte så lojal

aa) Om vi vänder på frågan – hur lojal tycker du att din arbetsgivare är gentemot dig?

3.❑ Mycket lojal 2.❑ Ganska lojal 1.❑ Inte så lojal

aa[1]) Skulle du vara intresserad av internutbildning, alternativt mer internutbildning?

1.❑ Ja 2.❑ Nej 3.❑ Tveksam, vet ej

aa[2]) Om "ja" på föregående fråga; skulle du *helst* se att denna utbildning var direkt relaterad till ditt nuvarande jobb alternativt att den handlade om andra områden?

1.❑ Nuvarande område 2.❑ Andra områden 3.❑ Tveksam, vet ej

aa[3]) Skulle du vara intresserad av en ledarposition inom företaget?

1.❑ Innehar för närvarande en ledarposition 2.❑ Ja, det är av intresse

3.❑ Nej, inte intressant 4.❑ Tveksam, vet ej

aa[4]) Ser du dig själv inom företaget om 5 år?

1.❑ Ja, definitivt 2.❑ Ja, antagligen

3.❑ Nej, antagligen inte 4.❑ Nej, definitivt inte

Vänligen utveckla ditt svar: varför tror du så?

_____

IV. Är det önskvärt anser du…

ab)…att du som individ/ att din arbetsgrupp ges möjlighet till ett större inflytande och ansvarstagande för dina/ din grupps arbetsuppgifter?

5.❑ I mycket hög grad 4.❑ I ganska hög grad 3.❑ I viss mån

2.❑ I ganska liten grad 1.❑ I mycket liten grad

ac) Anser du att det är mer angeläget med ett större eget ansvar/inflytande över ditt arbete eller anser du att din arbetsgrupp bör ta ett större gruppgemensamt ansvarstagande?

      3.❑   2.❑   1.❑

Större individuellt ansvar   Bra som det är   Större gruppgemensamt ansvar

Vill du erhålla större möjligheter till inflytande och ansvarstagande beträffande:

		I hög grad	I viss mån	Nej
ad):	Ekonomiska beslut	3.❑	2.❑	1.❑
ae):	Arbetstider	3.❑	2.❑	1.❑
af):	Arbetets utformning	3.❑	2.❑	1.❑
ag):	Arbetsvolym/arbetstempo	3.❑	2.❑	1.❑
ah):	Personlig utveckling	3.❑	2.❑	1.❑
ai):	Förtjänstmöjligheter (löner, mm)	3.❑	2.❑	1.❑
aj):	Bemötandet av kunder	3.❑	2.❑	1.❑

V. Ta ställning till följande påståenden

ak): Personalavdelningen bidrar aktivt med insatser för personalplanering, personalvård och kompetensutveckling.

3.❑   Instämmer 2.❑   Instämmer inte   1.❑   Tveksam, vet ej

al): Facket är en pådrivande kraft för att förbättra arbetsförhållanden och arbetsvillkor i min organisation.

3.❑   Instämmer 2.❑   Instämmer inte   1.❑   Tveksam, vet ej

am): Jag värdesätter en regelbunden kontakt med min chef för att få vägledning i mitt arbete.

3.❑   Instämmer 2.❑   Instämmer inte   1.❑   Tveksam, vet ej

an): Det är bättre att min chef är tillgänglig när det behövs än att ha regelbundna kontakter.

3.❑   Instämmer 2.❑   Instämmer inte   1.❑   Tveksam, vet ej

ao): Jag är engagerad i mitt nuvarande jobb. Jag tycker jag är en viktig del i en meningsfull organisation och ställer upp för den.

3.❏   Instämmer   2.❏   Instämmer inte   1.❏   Tveksam, vet ej

ap): Jag känner mig starkt engagerad i mitt jobb och gör ofta mer än vad jag behöver. Mitt arbete är så viktigt att jag offrar en hel del annat för det.

3.❏   Instämmer   2.❏   Instämmer inte   1.❏   Tveksam, vet ej

VI. Vilka av nedanstående aktiviteter har du tagit del av under den senaste 12-månadsperioden?

	Ja	Nej
aq): Utvecklings/medarbetar/planeringssamtal	1.❏	0.❏
ar): Lönesamtal	1.❏	0.❏
as): Intern utbildning (i din arbetsgivares regi)	1.❏	0.❏
at): Extern utbildning (anordnat av ett annat företag/organisation)	1.❏	0.❏
au): Planeringsdag(ar) angående egna enhetens arbetsuppgifter	1.❏	0.❏
av): Diskuterat din arbetssituation med fackföreningsrepresentant	1.❏	0.❏
ax): Diskuterat din arbetssituation med representant för personalavdelningen/personalkonsulent	1.❏	0.❏

VII. Egna kommentarer och utveckling av svar på tidigare frågor

ay): Med vilken sak/ vilka saker anser du det är mest angeläget att din organisation arbetar med inom det område som denna enkät har berört?

_____

az): Egna kommentarer och utveckling av svar på tidigare frågor (skriv gärna på baksidan om utrymmet nedan inte räcker till).

_____

Tack för att du tagit dig tid att fylla i enkäten!

2. Result of Questionnaire (in Swedish)

I. Bakgrundsfaktorer

a) Kön

% within Varuhus

	Kvinna	Man
Göteborg	63%	37%
Älmhult	59%	41%
Örebro	67%	33%
Total	63%	37%

b) Ålder

% within Varuhus

	-25	26-34	35-44	45-54	55-
Göteborg	37%	27%	20%	7%	9%
Älmhult	44%	23%	20%	11%	1%
Örebro	30%	47%	20%	2%	1%
Total	37%	32%	20%	7%	4%

c) Yrkestitel

% within Varuhus

	Avd. chef	Grupp chef	Inget chefansv.
Göteborg	13%	5%	83%
Älmhult	13%	3%	85%
Örebro	9%	1%	90%
Total	11%	3%	85%

d) Avdelning

% within Varuhus

	Möbler	Satellit	Övrig
Göteborg	29%	27%	45%
Älmhult	30%	14%	57%
Örebro	19%	23%	58%
Total	26%	22%	52%

d1) Arbetstid (per vecka)

% within Varuhus

	Heltid	Mellan 20 och 40 timar	Mellan 10 och 20 timmar	Mindre än 10 timmar
Göteborg	55%	33%	6%	6%
Älmhult	61%	23%	8%	9%
Örebro	56%	32%	5%	7%
Total	57%	30%	6%	7%

e) Utbildningsbakgrund (avslutad utbildning)

% within Varuhus

	Grundskola	Gymnasium	Högskola
Göteborg	13%	74%	13%
Älmhult	16%	73%	11%
Örebro	6%	80%	14%
Total	12%	75%	13%

e1) Pågående utbildning

% within Varuhus

	Pågående utbildning		
	Högskola	Annan yrkes-utbildning	Ingen pågående utbildning
Göteborg	8%	3%	88%
Älmhult	8%	7%	85%
Örebro	14%	1%	85%
Total	10%	4%	86%

f) Anställningsform

% within Varuhus

	Fastanställd	Vikariat	Projekt
Göteborg	88%	12%	
Älmhult	80%	20%	
Örebro	79%	17%	4%
Total	83%	15%	1%

II. Frågor om hur du upplever din nuvarande arbetssituation

g) Hur skulle du vilja beskriva din totala arbetstillfredsställelse?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket dålig	Ganska dålig	Sådär	Ganska god	Mycket god
Göteborg	2%	5%	18%	60%	16%
Älmhult	2%	7%	12%	49%	28%
Örebro	5%	7%	30%	44%	14%
Total	3%	6%	20%	52%	19%

h) Tycker du att din kompetens tas till vara på rätt sätt på din arbetsplats?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket dålig	Dåligt	Inte riktigt	Ganska bra	Ja på bästa sätt
Göteborg	4%	6%	32%	48%	9%
Älmhult	4%	8%	25%	49%	15%
Örebro	9%	14%	21%	46%	11%
Total	5%	9%	27%	48%	11%

i) Hur upplever du att personalsociala frågor hanteras på din arbetsplats?

% within Varuhus

	Huvudsak. bristfälligt	Någorlunda seriöst	Mycket seriöst
Göteborg	13%	57%	30%
Älmhult	10%	63%	27%
Örebro	16%	60%	24%
Total	13%	59%	28%

j) I vilken grad ger dig din chef god feedback kring hur ditt arbete utförs?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	10%	13%	31%	33%	13%
Älmhult	10%	20%	21%	36%	13%
Örebro	11%	14%	25%	39%	11%
Total	10%	15%	27%	35%	12%

k) I vilken grad är din chef engagerad i dina behov och önskemål vad gäller din sociala arbetssituation, t ex hur du mår, arbetstrivsel och sociala aktiviteter?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	9%	15%	26%	30%	20%
Älmhult	13%	13%	23%	33%	19%
Örebro	10%	18%	24%	34%	15%
Total	10%	15%	24%	32%	18%

l) I vilken grad är din chef engagerad i frågor som rör dina kunskaper, färdigheter och utveckling i arbetet?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	6%	19%	30%	32%	13%
Älmhult	14%	14%	28%	36%	9%
Örebro	18%	16%	25%	33%	9%
Total	11%	17%	28%	33%	10%

m) I vilken grad är din chef tillgänglig när behov finns?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	4%	11%	26%	45%	15%
Älmhult	4%	6%	28%	36%	26%
Örebro	2%	12%	25%	47%	14%
Total	3%	10%	26%	43%	18%

n) I vilken grad kan du bestämma /påverka dina arbetstider?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	13%	16%	23%	37%	11%
Älmhult	21%	11%	27%	27%	14%
Örebro	15%	21%	25%	28%	11%
Total	16%	16%	25%	31%	12%

o) I vilken grad kan du bestämma/påverka hur du skall lägga upp ditt arbete?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	9%	8%	30%	35%	18%
Älmhult	14%	14%	26%	30%	17%
Örebro	15%	10%	30%	29%	16%
Total	12%	10%	29%	32%	17%

p) I vilken grad kan du bestämma/påverka din arbetsbelastning?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	16%	16%	40%	22%	6%
Älmhult	16%	23%	23%	31%	6%
Örebro	26%	20%	35%	18%	1%
Total	19%	19%	34%	23%	5%

q) I vilken grad kan du påverka din egen utveckling (utbildning mm) i arbetet?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	12%	28%	39%	17%	5%
Älmhult	17%	25%	31%	22%	5%
Örebro	14%	23%	43%	16%	4%
Total	14%	26%	38%	18%	5%

r) I vilken grad kan du påverka din lön/ dina personalförmåner?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	50%	29%	14%	6%	1%
Älmhult	51%	28%	20%	1%	
Örebro	56%	36%	6%	1%	1%
Total	52%	31%	13%	3%	1%

s) I vilken grad upplever du stress (fysisk och mental) i ditt arbete?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	2%	15%	31%	35%	16%
Älmhult	5%	11%	36%	31%	17%
Örebro	5%	10%	25%	42%	19%
Total	4%	12%	31%	36%	17%

t) I vilken grad kan du påverka den enhet du tillhör genom att lämna idéer/förslag?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	2%	6%	41%	35%	15%
Älmhult	4%	13%	34%	44%	6%
Örebro	9%	9%	40%	30%	14%
Total	4%	9%	39%	36%	12%

u) Vad anser du om kvaliteten på den interna informationen, personaltidning, nyhetsbrev, etc?

% within Varuhus

	Undermålig	Ganska dålig	Varken eller	God	Mycket god
Göteborg	1%	9%	25%	61%	4%
Älmhult	2%	6%	12%	60%	19%
Örebro	6%	8%	23%	54%	10%
Total	3%	8%	21%	59%	10%

v) Om du tänker på de löneskillnader som finns mellan de som har det enklaste och de som har det svåraste arbetet på din arbetsplats - är de löneskillnaderna i stort sätt riktiga, för små eller för stora?

% within Varuhus

	Löneskilln. riktiga	Löneskilln. för små	Löneskilln. för stora	Vet ej
Göteborg	10%	14%	16%	60%
Älmhult	15%	9%	25%	51%
Örebro	9%	13%	18%	60%
Total	11%	12%	19%	57%

x) Placera dig själv på denna stege, där 1 betyder att man i sitt arbete har minsta möjliga frihet att bestämma något och 11 betyder största möjliga frihet och oberoende.

% within Varuhus

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Göteborg	2%	5%	6%	11%	6%	22%	13%	18%	13%	3%	1%
Älmhult	1%	6%	7%	7%	14%	10%	15%	19%	15%	4%	2%
Örebro	4%	6%	9%	12%	11%	14%	14%	17%	9%	4%	1%
Total	2%	6%	7%	10%	10%	16%	14%	18%	12%	3%	1%

y) Tycker du att man på din arbetsplats verkligen bryr sig om dig eller tycker du att man inte bryr sig om dig så mycket?

% within Varuhus

	Man bryr sig inte så mycket	Man bryr sig mycket
Göteborg	25%	75%
Älmhult	35%	65%
Örebro	36%	64%
Total	31%	69%

z) Hur lojal känner du dig mot din arbetsgivare?

% within Varuhus

	Inte så lojal	Ganskal lojal	Mycket lojal
Göteborg	3%	43%	54%
Älmhult		28%	72%
Örebro	9%	33%	58%
Total	4%	36%	60%

aa) Om vi vänder på frågan - hur lojal tycker du att din arbetsgivare är gentemot dig?

% within Varuhus

	Inte så lojal	Ganskal lojal	Mycket lojal
Göteborg	14%	61%	25%
Älmhult	16%	52%	32%
Örebro	21%	58%	21%
Total	17%	57%	26%

aa1) Skulle du vara intresserad av internutbildning, alternativt mer internutbildning?

% within Varuhus

	Ja	Nej	Vet ej
Göteborg	80%	4%	16%
Älmhult	80%	5%	15%
Örebro	79%	5%	16%
Total	80%	4%	16%

aa2) Om "ja" på föregående fråga; skulle du helst se att denna utbildning var direkt relaterad till ditt nuvarande jobb alternativt att den handlade om andra områden?

% within Varuhus

	Nuvarande område	Andra områden	Tveksam, Vet ej
Göteborg	53%	38%	8%
Älmhult	67%	25%	7%
Örebro	58%	34%	8%
Total	58%	34%	8%

aa3) Skulle du vara intresserad av en ledarposition inom företaget?

% within Varuhus

	Innehar för närvarande ledarposition	Ja, det är av intresse	Nej, inte intressant	Tveksam, vet ej
Göteborg	17%	33%	26%	24%
Älmhult	14%	49%	20%	18%
Örebro	11%	35%	35%	18%
Total	14%	38%	27%	20%

aa4) Ser du dig själv inom företaget om 5 år?

% within Varuhus

	Ja, definitivt	Ja, antagligen	Nej, antagligen inte	Nej, definitivt inte
Göteborg	24%	37%	29%	11%
Älmhult	39%	41%	14%	6%
Örebro	14%	43%	21%	21%
Total	26%	40%	22%	12%

III. Är det önskvärt anser du…

ab)…att du som individ/ att din arbetsgrupp ges möjlighet till ett större inflytande och ansvarstagande för dina/ din grupps arbetsuppgifter?

% within Varuhus

	Mycket liten	Ganska liten	I viss mån	Ganska hög	Mycket hög
Göteborg	2%	5%	27%	44%	22%
Älmhult	1%	6%	31%	33%	29%
Örebro		8%	39%	34%	19%
Total	1%	6%	32%	38%	23%

ac) Anser du att det är mer angeläget med ett större eget ansvar/inflytande över ditt arbete eller anser du att din arbetsgrupp bör ta ett större gruppgemensamt ansvarstagande?

% within Varuhus

	Grupp ansvar	Bra som det är	Ind. ansvar
Göteborg	30%	46%	24%
Älmhult	26%	51%	23%
Örebro	30%	44%	25%
Total	29%	47%	24%

Vill du erhålla större möjligheter till inflytande och ansvarstagande beträffande:

ad): Ekonomiska beslut

% within Varuhus

	Nej	I viss mån	Hög grad
Göteborg	39%	43%	18%
Älmhult	35%	51%	14%
Örebro	57%	32%	11%
Total	43%	42%	15%

ae): Arbetstider

% within Varuhus

	Nej	I viss mån	Hög grad
Göteborg	5%	36%	59%
Älmhult	8%	42%	51%
Örebro	14%	39%	47%
Total	8%	39%	53%

af): Arbetets utformning

% within Varuhus

	Nej	I viss mån	Hög grad
Göteborg	5%	48%	48%
Älmhult	12%	39%	49%
Örebro	10%	38%	51%
Total	8%	43%	49%

ag): Arbetsvolym/arbetstempo

% within Varuhus

	Nej	I viss mån	Hög grad
Göteborg	5%	41%	54%
Älmhult	8%	38%	55%
Örebro	10%	44%	46%
Total	7%	41%	52%

ah): Personlig utveckling

% within Varuhus

	Nej	I viss mån	Hög grad
Göteborg	7%	30%	63%
Älmhult	5%	32%	63%
Örebro	5%	34%	61%
Total	6%	31%	63%

ai): Förtjänstmöjligheter (löner, mm)

% within Varuhus

	Nej	I viss mån	Hög grad
Göteborg	5%	30%	65%
Älmhult	8%	32%	61%
Örebro	13%	30%	57%
Total	8%	31%	62%

aj): Bemötandet av kunder.

% within Varuhus

	Nej	I viss mån	Hög grad
Göteborg	17%	38%	45%
Älmhult	16%	40%	44%
Örebro	25%	42%	33%
Total	19%	40%	41%

IV. Ta ställning till följande påståenden:

ak): Personalavdelningen bidrar aktivt med insatser för personalplanering, personalvård och kompetensutveckling.

% within Varuhus

	Tveksam vet ej	Instämmer inte	Instämmer
Göteborg	38%	33%	29%
Älmhult	46%	32%	23%
Örebro	35%	27%	38%
Total	39%	31%	30%

al): Facket är en pådrivande kraft för att förbättra arbetsförhållanden och arbetsvillkor i min organisation.

% within Varuhus

	Tveksam vet ej	Instämmer inte	Instämmer
Göteborg	51%	16%	33%
Älmhult	46%	33%	22%
Örebro	48%	35%	18%
Total	48%	26%	26%

am): Jag värdesätter en regelbunden kontakt med min chef för att få vägledning i mitt arbete.

% within Varuhus

	Tveksam vet ej	Instämmer inte	Instämmer
Göteborg	16%	6%	78%
Älmhult	12%	9%	79%
Örebro	15%	7%	78%
Total	14%	7%	79%

an): Det är bättre att min chef är tillgänglig när det behövs än att ha regelbundna kontakter.

% within Varuhus

	Tveksam vet ej	Instämmer inte	Instämmer
Göteborg	19%	33%	48%
Älmhult	14%	31%	55%
Örebro	16%	31%	53%
Total	17%	32%	51%

ao): Jag är engagerad i mitt nuvarande jobb. Jag tycker jag är en viktig del i en meningsfull organisation och ställer upp för den.

% within Varuhus

	Tveksam vet ej	Instämmer inte	Instämmer
Göteborg	16%	6%	78%
Älmhult	18%	3%	80%
Örebro	14%	11%	75%
Total	16%	6%	78%

ap): Jag känner mig starkt engagerad i mitt jobb och gör ofta mer än vad jag behöver. Mitt arbete är så viktigt att jag offrar en hel del annat för det.

% within Varuhus

	Tveksam vet ej	Instämmer inte	Instämmer
Göteborg	25%	37%	38%
Älmhult	23%	32%	46%
Örebro	11%	35%	53%
Total	20%	35%	45%

V. Vilka av nedanstående aktiviteter har du tagit del av under den senaste 12-månadsperioden?

aq): Utvecklings/medarbetar/planeringssamtal

% within Varuhus

	Nej	Ja
Göteborg	37%	63%
Älmhult	47%	53%
Örebro	44%	56%
Total	42%	58%

ar): Lönesamtal

% within Varuhus

	Nej	Ja
Göteborg	84%	16%
Älmhult	73%	27%
Örebro	73%	27%
Total	78%	22%

as): Intern utbildning (i din arbetsgivares regi).

% within Varuhus

	Nej	Ja
Göteborg	62%	38%
Älmhult	68%	32%
Örebro	64%	36%
Total	64%	36%

at): Extern utbildning (anordnat av ett annat företag/organisation).

% within Varuhus

	Nej	Ja
Göteborg	92%	8%
Älmhult	94%	6%
Örebro	94%	6%
Total	93%	7%

au): Planeringsdag(ar) angående egna enhetens arbetsuppgifter.

% within Varuhus

	Nej	Ja
Göteborg	66%	34%
Älmhult	65%	35%
Örebro	63%	37%
Total	65%	35%

**av): Diskuterat din arbetssituation med
  fackföreningsrepresentant.**

% within Varuhus

	Nej	Ja
Göteborg	82%	18%
Älmhult	92%	8%
Örebro	95%	5%
Total	89%	11%

**ax): Diskuterat din arbetssituation med representant
  för personalavdelningen/personalkonsulent.**

% within Varuhus

	Nej	Ja
Göteborg	86%	14%
Älmhult	84%	16%
Örebro	76%	24%
Total	82%	18%