

CHAPTER 6

Summary and General Discussion

The current dissertation presented four empirical studies that aimed at answering the question that was raised in the introductory chapter of this dissertation: Are competencies a farce, a fad, or a useful concept that should continuously be used in the future? We examined the nature of the competency concept, its relevance, and its use in daily practice. In separate studies we focused on the relationships between competencies and constructs such as personality and cognitive ability, and on relationships between competencies and effectiveness. Furthermore, we studied the predictive value of the different competencies beyond other constructs including cognitive ability and personality, and we focused on the use of competencies in daily practice. The results of the studies were discussed in the separate chapters. Here, the main conclusions are combined and summarized. Furthermore, strengths and weaknesses of the studies are discussed.

Competencies and Individual Characteristics

As pointed out in the introductory chapter as well as in Chapter 1, little was known about the nature of the competency concept. In other words, it was unclear which individual characteristics are related to competencies. A closer look at the many different definitions revealed that there was ambiguity surrounding the nature of the competency concept. That is, different definitions include different individual characteristics to describe competencies (e.g., Kurz & Bartram, 2002; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). In Chapters 2 and 4 we were able to reveal part of the nature of the competency concept by examining the relationships between competencies and competency dimensions and cognitive ability, personality, and behavioral aspects.

In Chapter 2, we examined competencies through the eyes of psychologists. The study was conducted in an assessment setting and the data were gathered during a one-day selection procedure. We wondered whether psychologists would rely on cognitive ability, personality, or assessment center exercise performance when rating applicants' competencies in the three

competency domains Thinking, Feeling, and Power. The results showed that, as expected, cognitive ability contributes to competency ratings in all three dimensions. The cognitive ability measures appear to be the main predictors of the competency dimension Thinking. This is in line with previous research which also showed a strong relationship between cognitive ability and competencies such as analyzing and interpreting (e.g., Bartram, 2005).

The results of the study described in Chapter 2 furthermore indicated that personality aspects make a notable contribution to assessing the competency dimensions Feeling and Power. That is, the Big Five factors extraversion and agreeableness play an important role in assessing the competency dimension Feeling, and the Big Five factors neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness were found to be important in assessing the dimension Power. Apparently, psychologists rate applicants as competent in the feeling area if the applicants possess characteristics such as trust, altruism, warmth, and assertiveness. According to the psychologists, to be competent in the power area an applicant needs to be somewhat dominant, energetic, and not inclined to trust each and everyone.

In line with previous research (e.g., Gaugler, Rosenthal, Thornton, & Bentson, 1987; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), assessment center exercises were found to be related to the competency dimensions as well. More specifically, assessment center exercise performance was found to be an important predictor of competency ratings in the Feeling and Power domains. In fact, ratings on the competency dimension Feeling were primarily based on assessment center exercises. In sum, based on the results described in Chapter 2, we may thus conclude that competencies in the Thinking domain are mainly assessed based on cognitive ability, whereas competencies in the Feeling and Power domain are mainly assessed based on personality and assessment center exercise performance.

In Chapter 4, competencies were again assessed by psychologists during a one-day selection procedure. Although it was not the main aim of this study, we were able to examine the relationships between competencies and other individual characteristics measured during the one-day selection procedure. Contrary to Chapter 2, in the study described in Chapter 4 we included six separate competencies instead of three overall competency dimensions. In contrast to our findings described in Chapter 2, the relationships between competencies and individual characteristics reported in Chapter 4 were somewhat smaller. The fact that in Chapter 4 separate competencies instead of competency dimensions were used may have influenced the strength of the relationships found. Although it is argued that broad measures have advantages over narrow measures (e.g., more explanatory power and greater reliability; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996), narrow measures can capture important criterion variance components that are obscured with general measures (Tett, Guterman, Bleier, & Murphy, 2000). Thus, in our opinion future research should continuously focus on competency

dimensions as well as on separate, more specific, competencies in order to contribute to the knowledge on competencies and their relationships with other constructs.

Even though the relationships reported on in Chapter 4 were somewhat smaller than those found in Chapter 2, again competencies associated with the Thinking domain (analytical ability and judgment) were found to be strongly related to cognitive ability and competencies associated with the Feeling (sociability and compassion) and Power (perseverance and action orientation) domain were found to be strongly related to assessment center exercise performance and personality. Taken together, the results presented in Chapters 2 and 4 partially replicate and extend the results of previous theoretical and empirical studies on competencies and their underlying individual characteristics. In line with, for example Bartram (2005) and Baron, Bartram, and Kurz (2003), the results indicate that competencies are related to cognitive ability, personality, and assessment center exercise performance.

Yet, despite the fact that the results of Chapters 2 and 4 pointed out that cognitive ability, personality, and assessment center exercise performance could be regarded as characteristics underlying competencies, in Chapter 2 the percentage of variance explained by all predictors together was moderate. This indicates that there might be other individual characteristics that play a role in assessing competencies. For example, previous studies have shown that motives, values, and interests also determine what people do (e.g., McClelland, 1985; Winter, John, Stewart, Klohnen, & Duncan, 1998). It is thus arguable that motives, values, and interests have incremental value in predicting competencies or competency domains. We argue for future research to examine the role additional predictors might play in assessing competencies.

The Predictive and Added Value of Competencies

In practice, competencies are often used to distinguish effective from ineffective performance (e.g., Borman & Brush, 1993). As Kurz and Bartram (2002) stated, “A competency is not the behavior or performance itself but the repertoire of capabilities, activities, processes, and responses available that enable a range of work demands to be met more effectively by some people than by others” (p.230). Although a direct link between competencies and effectiveness is assumed (e.g., Stogdill, 1948; Posner & Kouzes, 1988), up until now relatively little research has been done to empirically verify exactly which competencies are related to effectiveness.

The studies described in Chapter 3 and 4 examined the relationship between competencies and perceived effectiveness. In Chapter 3, a 360-degree feedback inventory was used in order to measure managerial competencies and managerial effectiveness rated by supervisors, peers, and subordinates. The results showed that, as expected, supervisors, peers,

and subordinates rely on different competencies when rating managerial effectiveness of the same manager. The competency ‘analytical ability’ was perceived as essential for effectiveness by all rater sources. In the eyes of supervisors, peers, and subordinates an effective manager is one that analyzes problems and distinguishes different elements.

Although the results described in Chapter 3 pointed out that all rater sources value the competency ‘analytical ability’, a rather disperse pattern was found for the other competencies. Besides analytical ability both supervisors and subordinates value compassion. Peers consider sociability and perseverance to be characteristics of an effective manager. We argue that these differences might be explained by differences in situational demands and rater’s organizational perspectives.

First, as stated in the trait activation theory (e.g., Lievens, Chasteen, Day, & Christiansen, 2006) and in the competency demand hypothesis (e.g., Shoda, Mischel, & Wright, 1993), situational demands influence an individual’s behavior. The trait activation theory emphasizes situation trait relevance and situation strength. Situation trait relevance refers to the type of information to which people respond in expressing a trait, whereas situation strength refers to the persuasiveness to behave in such a way that individual differences in behavioral dispositions disappear (Tett & Guterman, 2000). Thus, as Tett and Guterman stated, “the behavioral expression of a trait requires arousal of that trait by trait-relevant situational cues” (p. 398). The concept of situation strength is also incorporated in the competency demand hypothesis in which it is stated that individual differences are small whenever situations have demanding behavioral requirements in terms of competencies (e.g., Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Shoda et al., 1993). Extending the trait activation theory and the competency demand hypothesis to the present research on the relationship between competencies and effectiveness suggests that managers respond to different types of information when interacting with supervisors, peers, and subordinates, which, as a consequence, activates different competencies.

Second, and in line with our first argument, differences between supervisors, peers, and subordinates may reflect legitimate differences in perceptions of the manager’s various roles (e.g., Borman, 1974; Toegel & Conger, 2003; Van Hooft, Van der Flier, & Minne, 2006). Several researchers have argued that the rater’s perspective might have an effect on the performance ratings independent of effects such as halo and leniency error (e.g., Pulakos, Schmitt, & Chan, 1996; Scullen, Mount, & Goff, 2000). In his article on the validity of 360-degree ratings Borman (1997) suggested that there are three reasons why it is conceivable that the rater’s organizational perspective might influence performance ratings. First, he suggested that raters at different organizational levels use different dimensions, or that they define dimensions differently when rating performance. Second, he proposed that raters from

different levels use similar dimensions in assessing performance, but that these dimensions are weighted differently. A third reason suggested by Borman (1997) is that raters from different organizational levels tend to disagree in their ratings due to the use of different samplings of ratee behavior when rating performance. Scullen et al. (2000) showed that perspective related effects are especially present in supervisor and subordinate ratings. To further examine these possible explanations, we argue for future research on the effects of situational demands, rater's organizational perspectives, and possible biases on the relationship between competencies and effectiveness.

All in all, competencies appear to explain a rather large part of the variance in perceived managerial effectiveness. We need to keep in mind, however, that although the study is based on a 360-degree inventory incorporating different raters, the results on the predictive value of competencies are based on cross-sectional and common-source data. Keeping in mind the disadvantages of the use of common-source data (e.g., Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), in Chapter 4, using multi-source and multi-method data collected at multiple time-points, we extended our research on the relationship between competencies and perceived effectiveness. We were able to study competencies in an assessment context and to measure perceived effectiveness in a work-related context nine months after the assessment of competencies took place.

The study on the uniqueness of competencies in predicting perceived sales and managerial effectiveness, described in Chapter 4, showed somewhat different results with respect to the relationships between competencies and perceived effectiveness than the study described in Chapter 3. Perceived sales effectiveness was found to correlate significantly with the competencies 'sociability', 'perseverance', and 'action orientation'. Perceived managerial effectiveness was found to correlate significantly with 'analytical ability', 'judgment', 'sociability', and 'perseverance', and marginally significant with 'action orientation'. However, hierarchical regression analyses showed that none of the separate competencies explains a significant proportion of the variance in sales effectiveness. The competencies 'judgment' and 'perseverance' were found to contribute marginally to the prediction of managerial effectiveness. Furthermore, in contrast to the results described in Chapter 3, the results described in Chapter 4 show that competency 'analytical ability' is not a significant predictor of perceived managerial effectiveness.

A possible explanation for the differences in results reported in Chapters 3 and 4 might be found in the fact that in the study described in Chapter 3 we used common-source data, while in Chapter 4 the results were based on multi-source data. In the study described in Chapter 4, competency ratings were provided by psychologists based on the results of a one-day assessment procedure and ratings of perceived sales and managerial effectiveness were

provided by employers nine months after the assessment took place. Thus, in the study described in Chapter 3, both competency and perceived effectiveness ratings were provided by the same source. This may have inflated the relationships found (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2003).

In Chapter 4 we were furthermore able to examine the added value of competencies beyond cognitive ability, personality, and assessment center exercise performance. While large meta-analyses have shown that cognitive ability, personality, and assessment center exercises are the main predictors of job performance (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), other studies focused on the added value of the competency concept (e.g., Goffin, Rothstein, & Johnston, 1996; Lievens, Harris, Van Keer, & Bisqueret, 2003). However, none of these studies has examined the added value of competencies beyond cognitive ability, personality, and assessment center exercise performance in an assessment context. As such our study contributes to the existing literature. Based on previous research, we expected competencies to explain an additional part of the variance in effectiveness above and beyond the traditional predictors (e.g., Bartram, 2005; Goffin et al., 1996).

The results of the study described in Chapter 4 showed that competencies indeed explained a unique portion of the variance in perceived sales and managerial effectiveness beyond the other predictors, such as cognitive ability, personality, and assessment center exercise performance. In other words, competencies did add to the prediction of perceived sales and managerial effectiveness. In line with previous studies (e.g., Goffin et al., 1996; Lievens et al., 2003), competencies could thus be considered unique predictors of sales and managerial effectiveness. Taken together the competencies explain about 5% of additional variance in perceived sales and managerial effectiveness. Although this percentage is in itself rather low, it represents a significant contribution to the prediction of perceived sales and managerial effectiveness. Moreover, our findings are in line with previous research on the contribution of competencies to the prediction of effectiveness in which similar percentages were reported (e.g. Goldstein, Yusko, & Nicolopoulos, 2001; Offermann, Bailey, Vasilopoulos, Seal, & Sass, 2004).

Remarkably, cognitive ability was not found to be a significant predictor of perceived sales or managerial effectiveness. Neither verbal nor abstract reasoning plays a role in predicting sales effectiveness. Furthermore, contrary to our expectations, the results show that only extraversion is related to perceived sales effectiveness. Contrary to our expectations that were based on previous research (e.g., Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer, & Roth, 1998), no relationships were found between conscientiousness and sales effectiveness. In addition, only neuroticism was found to be negatively related to perceived managerial effectiveness. Neither extraversion nor openness was found to play a role in predicting managerial effectiveness.

A general explanation for the absence of the expected relationships may be found in the fact that employers were asked to rate sales and managerial effectiveness regardless of the type of job. It might thus be that some employers rated sales and / or managerial effectiveness while the job was not a typical sales or managerial job, but, for example, a job with only a small sales or managerial component. Our findings may have been different if the focus of the study had been on specific sales and managerial jobs. We therefore advocate for future studies using more specific samples.

In addition, there might be a more specific explanation for the absence of a relationship between cognitive ability and both forms of perceived effectiveness. We propose that the relationship between cognitive ability and effectiveness might, at some point, reach a limit or threshold beyond which the predictive validity of cognitive ability decreases. Previous studies have focused on the existence of such a curvilinear relationship between cognitive ability and criterion measures (e.g., Keil & Cortina, 2001). First, it might be that the cognitive ability of the applicants included in our sample reaches the proposed threshold value since it are all applicants with a rather high level of education. As a result cognitive ability is of less importance and the predictive validity of cognitive ability might decrease. Second, the nine month time-lag between the measure of cognitive ability and effectiveness might also be responsible for the absence of the relationship between cognitive ability and effectiveness. Following Ackerman (1987, 1988) and Keil and Cortina (2001), we argue that the predictive validity of cognitive ability may deteriorate over time. Based on their results, Keil and Cortina (2001) concluded that this deterioration was not dependent upon ability-task characteristic combinations as was suggested by Ackerman (1987; 1988). In sum, for several reasons the existence of a curvilinear relationship might offer an explanation for the absence of the expected relationship between cognitive ability and effectiveness in the study described in Chapter 4. It might also offer an explanation for the ambivalent findings regarding the relationship between cognitive ability and effectiveness reported in the previous studies (e.g., Bertua, Anderson, & Salgado, 2005; Vinchur et al., 1998). It would be interesting to elaborate more on the curvilinear relationship between cognitive ability and effectiveness in future research.

All in all, though critics have expressed their concern about the value of the competency concept in practice (e.g., Barrett & Depinet, 1991; Hollenbeck, McCall, & Silzer, 2006) competencies do seem to be predictors of perceived sales and managerial effectiveness. Furthermore, competencies do have added value in predicting sales and managerial effectiveness beyond traditional predictors, such as cognitive ability and personality. It thus seems worthwhile to continue the use of competencies in human resource practices such as selection and assessment.

The Competency Concept in Practice

We believe that, since competencies are so widely applied and since they seem to contribute to the prediction of effectiveness, it is important to study competency applications in practice. For that reason, in the fourth empirical study, which is somewhat distinctive from the first three empirical studies, we focused on one of the most well known competency applications, namely competency management. As mentioned in the introductory chapter competency management can be described as an integrated set of human resource activities aimed at optimizing the development and the use of employee competencies in order to increase individual effectiveness. Subsequently, an increase in individual effectiveness is expected to contribute to the realization of organizational goals and to organizational effectiveness (e.g., Van Beirendonck, 1998). Competency management can bring about many advantages for the organization (Becker & Huselid, 1999; Heinsman, Koopman, & Van Muijen, 2005). Whether or not an organization can profit from these advantages is dependent upon the way competency management is implemented. The study described in Chapter 5 examined the effects of two implementation approaches, namely commitment and control, on the use of competency management using both a survey and a scenario study.

Both the survey study and the scenario study showed that the commitment approach, in which competency management is implemented bottom-up, has a more positive effect on employee attitude and perceived behavioral control than the control approach, in which competency management is implemented more top-down. A commitment approach, characterized by involvement and participation throughout the organization, thus not only results in a more favorable attitude towards competency management but also increases employees' feelings of behavioral control. Moreover, the results consistently showed that attitude and perceived behavioral control mediate the relationship between the commitment approach and the use of competency management. In other words, due to the fact that a commitment approach increases a positive attitude and feelings of control, the use of competency management by employees is increased.

Contrary to our expectations, competency management was not found to be used more frequently when competency management was implemented with a commitment as opposed to a control approach. Although the scenario study revealed that competency management is used more extensively when competency management is implemented with a commitment approach rather than with a control approach, no significant difference between the both approaches was found in the survey study. Thus, the results did not consistently support the idea that competency management would be more extensively used when involvement and participation, as opposed to control and order, are key elements of the implementation process.

It might be argued that there are concepts other than attitude and perceived behavioral control that influence the relationships between the commitment and control approaches and the use of competency management. Trust, fairness, and justice are, for example, concepts that are known to influence outcomes relevant to organizations, such as performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment (e.g., Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Tyler, 1999). In addition, previous research has established relationships between commitment and control, and trust, fairness, and justice. To some researchers trust can be considered a substitute to control (e.g., Bijlsma & Van de Bunt, 2003). That is, the higher the degree of trust in a certain relationship, the lower the costs of control mechanisms, such as monitoring (e.g., Cummings & Bromiley, 1996). Others consider trust and control to be parallel concepts and suggest that trust levels moderate the effect of control mechanisms in determining the control level (e.g., Das & Teng, 1998). Similar arguments may hold for fairness and justice. Fairness and justice are known to increase cooperative behavior and to decrease resistance (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1999). Thus, it might again be argued that the higher the perceived fairness and justice, the lower the need for control mechanisms.

Based on the studies described above, it seems safe to assume that the concepts of trust, fairness, and justice and the concepts of commitment and control are interrelated. Considering the results of previous studies, we argue that implementing competency management with a commitment oriented approach might induce feelings of trust, fairness, and justice, while implementing competency management with a control oriented approach might have the opposite effect. Moreover, previous research has shown that trust, fairness, and justice are highly related to attitudes, intentions, and to behavioral outcomes (e.g., Costa, 2003; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Studying the relationships between commitment and control approaches towards competency management, and concepts such as trust, fairness, and justice in order to simulate the use of competency management thus seems worthwhile.

The fourth empirical chapter was in part based on Ajzen's (1985, 1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, in which intentions are expected to mediate the relationship between attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norm and behavior. Due to the cross-sectional character of both studies we were unable to test the mediating effect of intentions. Since the scenario study was hypothetical in nature we did measure the effects of the commitment and control approaches on the intention to use competency management. It would be interesting for future research to study the relationships between commitment, control, attitude, perceived behavioral control, the intention to use, and the actual use of competency management longitudinally. Furthermore, we argue for future research to focus on the use of competency management by, for example, managers. By integrating the results

of the present study with results of future studies recommendations can be made to increase the use of competency management at various levels throughout the organization.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Each research method has its strengths and limitations. Naturally, the strengths and limitations of the method chosen will confine the conclusions that can be drawn. Thus, we used various methods so that the strengths of one method could compensate for the weaknesses of the other. In the first empirical study, described in Chapter 2, we studied competencies in the context of a one-day assessment procedure. The different assessment center components and the competencies were assessed by different raters and with different method resulting in a multi-source and multi-method approach. In Chapter 3 we recognized that different raters may provide the same manager with different competency and effectiveness ratings. We therefore used a 360-degree feedback method to study the relationship between competencies and effectiveness. Competency and effectiveness ratings of supervisors, peers, and subordinates were compared. Thus, again we adopted a multi-source approach. Yet, due to the relatively small sample size the predictive value of competencies was studied in a common-source manner.

In Chapter 4, competencies and effectiveness were studied using a multi-source and multi-method approach. Furthermore, measurements were conducted at multiple time-points. Competencies were assessed by a psychologist during a one-day assessment procedure while perceived sales and managerial effectiveness were assessed by the employer nine months after the one-day assessment procedure. Consequently, we were able to examine the link between competencies and effectiveness in the long term. Moreover, in addition to the study described in Chapter 3, this study enabled us to examine the predictive and added value of competencies when both competencies and perceived effectiveness were rated by different sources. Chapter 5 provided the advantage of triangulation (e.g., Denzin, 1970; Jick, 1979). By comparing the results of a cross-sectional survey and a scenario experiment and by incorporating different types of participants we optimized the validity, strength, and interpretative potential of the research described in this chapter.

Although multi-source and multi-method approaches are known to result in more robust and generalizable set of findings (e.g., Scandura & Williams, 2000), the studies reported on in this dissertation are not without limitations. The limitations of the individual studies have been discussed in the separate chapters. There are, however, several limitations that were reported in more than one study. These limitations will be discussed in more detail here.

A first comment should be made on the competency concept's clarity. As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, due to the confusion surrounding the competency concept it seems as if competencies and outcome measures, such as effectiveness, overlap. Furthermore, the competency concept has been applied in many different areas as an alternate for other basic concepts including knowledge, skills, abilities (KSA's), and performance dimensions. As a result there is a lack of conceptual clarity. In order to contribute to the conceptual clarity, we have tried to separate the competency concept from other basic concepts such as cognitive ability, personality, and effectiveness. In the present studies we tried to shed a light on the competency concept by identifying underlying characteristics and we examined its relationship with the outcome measure perceived effectiveness. The studies show that competencies are indeed related to, but do not fully overlap cognitive ability, personality, and assessment center exercise performance. Moreover, competencies contribute to the prediction of perceived effectiveness beyond cognitive ability, personality, and assessment center exercise performance. This indicates that indeed competencies and effectiveness are distinguishable. However, future research should test this conclusion more extensively.

A second comment should be made on the way in which competencies were measured in two of the four empirical chapters. The competency measures in Chapters 3 and 4 were based on single items. Single-item measures have received their share of criticism, especially regarding their psychometric properties. The problems with the psychometric properties are discussed by, for example, Nagy (2002), Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski (2001), and Woods and Hampson (2005). It is argued that single-item measures are less reliable than multiple-item measures and that estimates of internal reliability cannot be provided. In addition, single-item measures are thought to have moderate correlations with scale measures. In contrast, advocates of single-item measures have shown that the reliability of these measures is acceptable (e.g., Wanous & Hudy, 2001), that criterion correlations are comparable with those of multiple-item measures (e.g., Woods & Hampson, 2005), and that single-item measures might have incremental validity compared to multiple-item measures (Nagy, 2002). In line with this, single-item measures have proven to be valuable in measuring different concepts, such as job satisfaction (e.g., Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997), personality (e.g., Paulhus & Bruce, 1992; Woods & Hampson, 2005), job insecurity (e.g., De Witte, 1999), and self-esteem (e.g., Robins et al., 2001). In addition, single-item measures are cost effective, they avoid boredom, and they prevent participant fatigue (e.g., Nagy, 2002). Partaking in empirical studies is often without reward and thus the shorter the study, the lower the threshold to actually participate voluntarily. Considering the above, we are of the opinion that it would be interesting for future studies to incorporate both single and multiple-item measures of competencies.

A third comment should be made on the relatively small sample sizes of the studies described in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 was based on a total sample of 98 managers of whom competencies and effectiveness were assessed by supervisors, peers, and subordinates. When comparing the ratings of the different sub-samples, pairwise deletion caused a drop of the number of raters per comparison. In Chapter 4, the number of participants was limited, partly due to the fact that measurements were conducted at multiple time-points. We examined the added value of competency ratings in assessing the perceived effectiveness of about 110 participants nine months after they had participated in a one-day selection procedure. In both studies, the small sample sizes may have influenced the power of our analyses and, consequently, this may have influenced the strength of the relationships found (Cohen, 1992). More effects might have been significant had the sample sizes been larger. At the same time, it also means that the effects that we did find need to be replicated across larger samples to test robustness. Nevertheless, as outlined above the multi-source, multi-method, and longitudinal nature of the studies may be considered great advantages.

A fourth comment should be made on the fact that most of the data were collected in collaboration with a single consultancy firm. As a result we used rather specific competency taxonomies containing either 21 separate competencies that could be classified into three competency domains or containing six broad competencies. Although the competency domains and the separate competencies showed substantial overlap with classifications used by for example Bartram (2005), Borman and Brush (1993) and Tett et al. (2000), the use of data collected in collaboration with a single consultancy firm might have influenced the generalizability of our findings. It would be interesting for future studies to use data collected in collaboration with more than one (consultancy) firm and to incorporate other competency taxonomies.

Finally, the design of most of the studies described in the empirical chapters did not allow testing for the directionality of causal relationships (with the scenario study described in Chapter 5 as an exception). We would like to note that where causality is implied, it is assumed based on theory and previous work rather than tested here.

Despite these limitations, the results of our four empirical studies have some important practical implications. First, the fact that we established relationships between competencies and cognitive ability, personality, and behavioral aspects, in an assessment setting as well as longitudinally, suggests that the aforementioned components might be regarded as components underlying competencies. In other words, cognitive ability, personality, and behavioral aspects might be considered a competency's building blocks. In line with the definitions of, for example, Boyatzis (1982) and Kurz and Bartram (2002) a competency can thus be described as a conglomeration of different individual factors. This is an important

conclusion for practitioners that are somehow involved in assessing competencies. Knowing what to assess will naturally improve the accuracy and thus the quality of the assessment. Furthermore, the results of the studies showed that each competency or competency domain has a main predictor (e.g., cognitive ability for the competencies in the Thinking domain and personality for the competencies in the Power domain). This knowledge might help practitioners when assessing competencies or competency domains.

A second practical implication can be found in the relationship between competencies and effectiveness. Being aware of the competencies that individuals, employed in different organizational positions, must possess in order to be perceived effective by their supervisors as well as by their peers and subordinates forms an important starting point for selection procedures and processes of performance appraisal. The competencies that are considered to be prerequisites for effectiveness should play a central role during selection and performance appraisal.

A third practical implication that ensues from the empirical research described in this dissertation lies in the use of competency management, one of the most well known competency applications. Organizations that are planning to implement competency management should keep in mind that involving employees will contribute to a positive attitude towards competency management and a sense of perceived behavioral control. In turn, a positive attitude and a sense of perceived behavioral control are responsible for the use of competency management by employees. Organizations that already work with competency management may consider influencing employee attitude and increasing perceived behavioral control, for example by offering additional information on competency management or by initiating workshops on the use of competency management. This might result in an increase in the use of competency management throughout the organization.

Competencies: Farce, Fad, or Future?

As outlined above, competencies are based on cognitive ability, personality, and behavioral aspects. Moreover, competencies are related to effectiveness. Finally, based on the results presented in this dissertation, we may conclude that competencies do contribute to the prediction of effectiveness. Using competencies as a predictor in addition to other constructs including cognitive ability and personality does result in a better prediction of perceived sales and managerial effectiveness. So, based on the outcomes, strengths, and weaknesses discussed above we are able to answer the main question that was formulated in our introductory chapter, namely whether the competency concept can be considered a farce, a fad, or a concept that should be used in the future. Given the fact that competencies are firmly based on individual characteristics and given their contribution to the prediction of effectiveness, we

believe that it is safe to argue that the competency concept could be fruitfully further used in the future. We are of the opinion that the use of the competency concept contributes to human resource practices, such as assessment, selection, performance appraisal, and individual development in several ways.

First, competencies may be considered a common language or a way of communicating within organizations. This is emphasized by the use of competency taxonomies and competency dictionaries. Communicating in terms of competencies has several advantages. By using such taxonomies and dictionaries a common frame of reference is created. In addition, communicating in terms of competencies is less entangling than communicating in terms of, for example, cognitive ability and personality on which competencies are found to be based. Competencies are concepts that are easy to grasp and that appeal to one's imagination, partly due to the use of behavioral anchors. The use of competencies might thus enhance clarity, and ease and stimulate communication between employer and employee.

Second, by using competencies specified in behavioral anchors, practitioners are given detailed insight in behaviors required to reach a certain level of competence. Additionally, the use of competencies and their behavioral anchors simplifies the identification of one's strengths and weaknesses and as a result specified recommendations can be made for personal development. Furthermore, as we have shown, competencies are related to effectiveness. Moreover, they contribute to the prediction of effectiveness. As such competencies provide direct insight in the behaviors required to be effective. As we all know, individual effectiveness might contribute to organizational effectiveness. All in all, competencies seem to stimulate a result oriented as well as a development oriented climate in which individual and organizational goals are linked.

In sum, given the advantages of competencies and competency management outlined above, it is expected that competencies will continue to play an important role in human resource practices in the future. Debates about the usefulness or uselessness of competencies will probably always remain (e.g., Hollenbeck et al., 2006). Yet, we believe that, based on the results of the studies described in the present dissertation and based on the practical relevance of the concept, we may conclude that the competency concept should not be considered a farce. Rather, we would like to refer to competencies as a fad with a future.