

# The Preliminary Exploration of Competency for Community Revitalization – A Study Among The Rural Youth as an Example

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## ABSTRACT

According to the literature of competency and entrepreneurship, developing appropriate competencies is more likely to accomplish expected achievements especially under an uncertain business environment. The conditions of the community revitalization in rural areas are in a similar situation as a process of new business development. Therefore, this study focused on what kind of competency the youth participants of the community revitalization have. Taking the eight excellent participants from two governmental projects as samples, the method of Behavioral Event Interview (BEI) was conducted. Five main work fields or stages and 19 related vital competencies were extracted.

**Keywords:** *Rural Youth, Community Revitalization, Competency Model*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rural community development has long been a worldwide issue, and the sustainable development of agriculture and rural area has always faced many challenges in Taiwan. In order to solve the serious displacement of the rural labor population and the agricultural labor force, the central and local government launched several community revitalization programs after the year 2000. The “policy incentives drive” program has contributed to the wave of youth returning to rural home area. Whether it is returning to farming or engaging in innovation and reconstruction of traditional industries, it also brings new direction to think about business characteristics or models. The youth reveal obvious “cross-border” characteristics, including the integration of new and old local culture, the creation of cross-regional community relations, cross-industry business activities, cross-disciplinary creative marketing capabilities and practices [3]. Such typical and non-traditional developing models also face many problems and restrictions. How can the ideal and enthusiasm of rural youth continue in the complex practice? Is it practical to systematically build rolling-correction developing modules? Human resource may be a particular and special development resource because of its features such as value, rareness, imperfect imitability, and contextual dependence [13]. Meanwhile, the quality of human capital closely associates to its knowledge, technology, attitudes, and other characteristics (KSAO) especially for the entrepreneurship [16]. Consequently, when carrying out the resource inventory of the returning young labor force in rural areas, it is impossible to ignore the classification of competencies of rural youth for the next stage of governmental development policy and project.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of competency was wildly discussed in various research arenas, such as human resource management [4], strategic management [12], knowledge management [9], and entrepreneurship study [10]. However, the Iceberg Model proposed by Spencer and Spencer [15] is widely used. In this model, the concept of competency could include at least five types: a. Knowledge-This refers to the information and learning resting in a person; b. Skill- This refers to a person’s ability to perform a certain task; c. Self-Concepts and Values- This refers to a person’s attitudes, values, and self-image, d. Traits- Traits refers to physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information; and e. Motives- Motives are emotions, desires, physiological needs or similar impulses, that prompt an action. Competencies are best described as an iceberg with a person’s knowledge and skills representing the visible tip of the iceberg, while the underlying and enduring personal characteristics or self- concepts, traits, and motives which represent the larger portion of the iceberg, hidden below the waterline [15].

In addition, McClelland and Boyatzis [8] tried to identify competencies, based on the skilled behavioral repertoires of recognized better performers within particular organizations. Consequently, competencies are a generic body of knowledge, motives, traits, self-images, and social roles and skills, that are causally related to superior or effective performance in the job.

The positive influence of competencies on individual work performance were validated by various studies [6, 11, 17]. Therefore, the success of entrepreneurs and people who work in a complex and uncertain environment may have particular and superior competencies.

Bird [1] referred entrepreneurial competencies to the underlying characteristics such as traits, knowledge, motives, social roles and skills, that lead to venture the birth and survival in its growth. In addition, some researchers recognized that entrepreneurial competencies are needed to start a new venture than those who manage the growth of an existing business [2, 5]. Man et al. [5] proposed the following components for analyzing entrepreneurial competencies: strategy, commitment, conceptual, opportunity, relationship, learning, organizing, and personal competency. Roblesa and Zárraga-Rodríguez [14] summarized some literatures of entrepreneurial competencies and pointed out 20 important competencies such as risk assumption, self-determination, search, and analysis of information. This study supposed to retrieve similar competencies from the youth of cooperation workers.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

#### ***3.1 The Concept of Behavioral Event Interviews***

One method of developing the competencies described by McClelland [7] is by conducting the Behavioral Event Interviews (BEI). The objective of BEI is to get very detailed behavioral descriptions of how a person goes about doing his or her work. The interviewer's job is to elicit complete stories that describe the interviewee's specific behaviors, thoughts, and actions in actual situations. The major step in BEI is to elicit behavioral events. The interviewee is asked to describe, in detail, the five or six most important situations he or she has experienced in a specific job. The situations should include two or three high points, or major successes, and two or three low points, or key failures. In order to have a comprehensive story, the STAR principle could be used as reference. The STAR method is a manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation which the interviewees are describing. Situation means what interviewees are in or the task that interviewees need to accomplish. Task refers to what goal interviewees are working toward. Action means what interviewees take to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail and keep the focus on interviewees. Result refers that the outcomes of interviewees' actions, including what they accomplish and what they learn.

#### ***3.2 Sampling***

The interview samples are excellent cases who joined two programs handled by the Soil and Water Conservation Bureau (SWCB), Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan, R.O.C. There were 83 participants enlisted in these programs which attracted the youth to stay and begin a

business in rural area from the year 2015 to 2018. Ten cases were selected by SWCB as excellent samples of rural youth. From July to September in 2019, eight participants were interviewed. Each interview took 1-2 hours and had transcript in detail.

### **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

Since the entrepreneurial competencies are possessed by individuals who are the entrepreneur's, this means that they start the organization and then add the value through resource organization and opportunities [1]. The similar situations usually happen to the rural youth who work in revitalizing communities. From entrepreneurial perspective, the "stories" that the rural youth presented were basically divided into five main stages or work fields: entering the field to establish relationships, suggesting feasible ideas and finding opportunities, integrating developmental resources, implementing development plans, and establishing and revising business models. Depending on the situations which rural youth are facing in revitalizing the community, the five major themes are not linearly developed in order, and there may be overlapping or small-loop concepts.

#### ***4.1 Entering the Field to Establish Relationships***

In addition to those who are originally in the community, the rural youth basically enter the community with the teacher during the student-period or because of the teacher's recommendation. Therefore, having a reasonable "role" to contact the community becomes a very important starting point. Meanwhile, almost all respondents were quite sure that SWCB had deeply helped young people to enter the arena of community revitalization. Because of governmental program, there is a greater chance of reducing community suspicions.

In the relationship-building stage, most respondents said that it is very important to have "the sense of existence in community". They had to take the initiative to seize any opportunity, participate in community activities, provide professional assistance, appear in any form in the community gathering, or even conduct unusual visits to the local residents' homes. If there is a community that needs help, the contribution to the community can be immediately demonstrated. For those who need to participate in the community activities, the rural youth and their teams have more opportunities to establish closer interaction with the community. Therefore, if the rural youth or the team have some specific achievements before, it may also affect the community's assessment of them. Therefore, if the aforementioned reasonable role is used as a stepping stone, it is easier to establish a relationship.

In addition, most respondents indicated that it is important to engage with community-interest groups or stakeholders. Establishing contacts in various social activities in the society can help to expand interpersonal relationships.

However, whether it is an indispensable part of building relationships with the community, is not for sure. Because there may be different community development associations in the community, there may be different leaders. If you establish a relatively close cooperative relationship with a certain unit or individual, it may affect the interaction in the community with other groups in the future.

The related competencies in this stage are presented in the following table:

**Table 1.** Competency for “Entering the Field to Establish Relationships”

Competency	Competency Description
Self-Efficacy	Consider the needs and aspirations of yourself, the team, or the community in the short, medium, and long-term, and deeply believe that you have the ability to influence the course of the event, even if there are uncertainties, frustrations, and transient failures.
Motivation & Persistence	Determined to turn ideas into action and be prepared to be patient and constantly strive to achieve long-term personal or group goals.
Proactive	Find the opportunities to participate in community activities, actively participate and show yourself everywhere to enhance the impression of the community.

### 4.2 Proposing Feasible Opinions and Opportunities

The researchers originally assumed that rural youth should have a general idea of what to follow before entering the community, but most respondents did not respond. The main reason is that the opportunity or role to enter the community may not be clear at first. It is simple to use the professional knowledge of themselves to help the community and provide feedback to the society, or to simply implement the plan. After rural youth stay in the community for a period of time and increasingly interact with the community, interest groups or stakeholders are willing to show real ideas. Then there are more opportunities to participate in community activities, before they can deeply think about the community development. Some interviewees pointed out that it was very likely that there was no direction when they first entered the community, and they might not know much about the community problems. Therefore, even if some of the predetermined goals have been completed, it is still necessary to interact extensively with the community to find a breakthrough point for long-term development.

The related competencies in this stage are presented in the following table:

**Table 2.** Competency for “Proposing Feasible Opinions and Opportunities”

Competency	Competency Description
Finding opportunities	By exploring social, cultural, and economic factors, try to identify and capture the development opportunities of the community to create value. Bring together the scattered elements of the community to create new connections and create new development opportunities.
Creativity	Integrate existing knowledge and resources to explore and experiment with innovative approaches to develop multiple ideas and opportunities, including better solutions to the existing and new challenges.
Vision expression	Clearly express the ideas about the future and translate them into action plans to illustrate future work and actions in easy way.
Morality and sustainable development thinking	Responsible assessment of valuable ideas and the impact of entrepreneurial actions on target communities, markets, society, and the environment, and on the sustainability of long-term social, cultural, and economic goals.

### 4.3 Integrated Development Resources

First, there will be a field research to analyze the resource inventory. When the feasible opinions or development opportunities are relatively certain, the respondents indicated that they can more deeply clarify whether the existing resources need to be increased, decreased, or adjusted. For example, researchers originally expected that it is important to the rural youth to have good interaction with local community development associations or village officers. However, many interviewees mentioned that it might be necessary to establish relationships with community-related units at the beginning, but community-related units had their own organizational and development priorities, which were not necessarily consistent with the development goals of rural youth. Therefore, if there were differences in the development route, the community-related organizations might not be suitable for development resources.

Therefore, respondents mentioned that cross-community or different community organizations could become the development resources. Meanwhile, the resources of different government units, such as the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs had been mentioned as well. Why are the resources of government units usually mentioned? The first reason is the project’s financial support. Many interviewees mentioned that it might be impossible to begin the community revitalization activities without government project assistance. Following, it is very important to find the appropriate government projects and to write good proposals. The second reason is the counsellor assistance. The respondents all said that the counsellors

could help the rural youth diagnosed and adjusted the community development priorities, and provided relevant information on the supplementary resources. The third reason is the interaction of the governmental officers who undertake the project. Since each project has different policy objectives, each governmental officer will have different priorities as well. If it is just in line with the development direction of the rural youth or the community, it is better to increase the effectiveness of project resources. Furthermore, the establishment of a work team has also been mentioned by most respondents as an important development resource. Many interviewees said that it might be better to find like-minded people at the beginning. Therefore, in addition to good friends and classmates, male and female friends may become the important core team members. During the development period, there may be differences in life planning or development direction, so the team's people come and go. However, whether or not there is a shared vision or goal among team members can be an important factor in continuing them. It is also possible to combine with colleges and universities to directly participate in the implementation of the project through external links.

Most respondents also mentioned the need to participate in different activities to increase the exposure and build the awareness of the community or team. It does not only attract the attention of units with resources, but also allows rural youth or teams to interact with different organizations and teams. It is especially possible to find partners with common goals by expanding the resource network.

The related competencies in this stage are presented in the following table:

**Table 3.** Competency for “Integrated Development Resources”

<i>Competency</i>	<i>Competency Description</i>
Coordinating resource mobilization	Search for and manage the physical, non-material, and digital resources which are needed to turn ideas into action and make the most utilization of limited resources.
Coordinating and mobilizing others	Demonstrate the effective ability of communication, persuasion, negotiation, and leadership to inspire or motivate relevant stakeholders to work together in the value creation of community / goal.
Team composition	Organize the teams that can work together based on development needs.
Proposal / Plan writing	Can find different grant plans and write a proposal / plan to effectively obtain grant plans to increase developing resources.

#### **4.4 Executive Development Plan**

Many interviewees mentioned that if they entered the community in the role of implementing the government project, of course, the KPI had been completed. However, many interviewees mentioned that if they executed the government projects, they also needed to pay attention to the requirements of the project-submitting briefings and paperwork to fulfill the administrative procedures. If they are unfamiliar with the relevant government operations, it may take longer time to process. At this time, if there is an understanding and assistance from the government officers, it will be a great help for the farmers and the team.

As non-project plan, there are many challenges in preparing the development plan, thus it is necessary to have problem solving and adaptability. How can the rural youth set the reasonable operational goals which not only have real income, but also have enough surplus? For finding a cooperative unit and getting more development resources, it will positively affect the implementation level of the development plan. In addition, each team can go to the government to arrange relevant courses each year to make up for the deficiencies of the team during the project implementation. If there are concrete and immediate performance results, the resource will increase immediately for better long-term development.

The related competencies in this stage are presented in the following table:

**Table 4.** Competency for “Executive Development Plan”

<i>Competency</i>	<i>Competency Description</i>
Executive ability	Can face the challenges, act independently, and achieve the goals to execute project tasks and initiate value-creation processes.
Handling the uncertainty and risk	In the process of value-creation, this includes testing the ideas and prototypes from early stages, and constantly improving, trying various appropriate methods to reduce the risk of failure.
Resilience	The ability to handle fast-changing situations in a timely and flexible manner.
The ability to work with others	Work with others to develop ideas and turn them into action. Resolve the conflicts and actively face the competition when necessary.
Learning through experience	Reflect and learn from the experiences of success and failure, and use any experience as an opportunity to learn.

#### **4.5 Establishing and Revising Business Models**

Almost all of the respondents mentioned that if they had to be able to survive so that the entire community could develop significantly, then it is possible to have a voice in the community. This study sorted-out the business models

mentioned by the three types of respondents: the first category is “the optimization of technical differentiation”, that is, the respondents themselves have certain expertise, and these technologies are extremely low-substitute within a short period of time. However, there is considerable demand in the market, so there is an opportunity to develop across communities. The working team of this type of model has a high degree of relevance to technology, so the level of participation in the community is limited. The second category is “the integration of upstream and downstream”, that is, the raw materials, design, production, and sales of products are all integrated and controlled by the rural youth and team. If the products are highly related to local uniqueness, the connection with the community will be strengthened and deepened. The third category is “the diversified development”, that is, the rural youth and teams may have a main direction to promote, but the scale of business is not enough to maintain the survival of the team, or to attract more community residents. Therefore, the rural youth and team will carry out different business fields at the same time, such as product sales, catering, accommodation, small travel, etc., as well as maintaining the operation of the team through multiple sources of income.

Regardless of the above three categories, many respondents mentioned that if they could benefit from the community and had immediate benefits, they would have more opportunities for long-term development. For example, from the perspective of procurement, they purchase the original materials from the local community. From the perspective of business district management, they try to increase the number of visitors for each store at the same time. For the usage of human resources, they directly hire residents to provide employment opportunities. Considering brand management, they implant the image of community or place as the basis for brand impression. In short, it is great to quickly find a business model that forms "coexistence and co-prosperity", and let the local residents have this impression. It is an extremely important consideration in establishing and revising business models. Continuing the above discussion of the business model, some respondents specifically mentioned the importance of “social influence”, that is, how to create a business model at the beginning for the development of community and team simultaneously. It is the original intention to constantly remind themselves.

In addition, the discussion of entering the business model is to transform the ideas to financial benefits. Therefore, it is better to have certain understandings of business function such as marketing and human resource management, finance and accounting, as well as R&D and operational management. In addition to self-study or participation in relevant workshops, the rural youth must continue to study from different channels or actively seek counsellors for assistance.

The related competencies in this stage are presented in the following table:

**Table 5.** Competency for “Establishing and Revising Business Models”

<i>Competency</i>	<i>Competency Description</i>
Business planning ability	Set long-term, medium-term, and short-term business objectives and identify the priorities and action plans.
Business management ability	Master the management of production, marketing, human resource management, R&D, and finance to maintain organizational operations.
Knowledge of finance & economics	Accurately estimate costs and revenues to plan, implement, and evaluate the financial decisions in order to ensure that the value-creation activities can last long.

## CONCLUSION

This study tried to establish a competency model of the rural youth who involve in community revitalization and related activities. After conducting eight interviews, five main work fields or stages (including Entering the Field to Establish Relationships, Proposing Feasible Opinions and Opportunities, Integrated Development Resources, Executive Development Plan, and Establishing and Revising Business Models) and 19 related vital competencies were extracted. This pilot model might be used as a checklist for proposal review of governmental project. Meanwhile, the youth who have intention to participate the community revitalization might evaluate their preparation level. Furthermore, this model might become an action guideline for community revitalization program. In addition, the design and development of related competency improvement training program, which is for the youth group, might take this model as a reference. However, this study was a pilot study and information was collected only through eight interviews. More empirical evidence and multiple research methods such as observation or AHP are needed to improve and confirm the content of competency model.

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