



Competence of managing a research team

Interview with **Prof. Visente Martinez Tur**, University of Valencia

Conducted by:

prof. dr hab. Barbara Kożusznik, University of Silesia in Katowice

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ICSD

The Interdisciplinary Centre for Staff Development



Prof. Visente Martinez Tur

University of Valencia



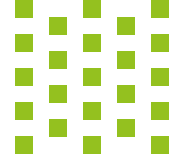
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C4RE *talks*

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- **Barabara Kożusznik: Welcome to the Interdisciplinary Centre for Staff Development. I would like to invite you to listen to the interview with Prof. Vicente Martínez-Tur from the University of Valencia in Spain. The topic of the interview will concern competency management at the university. The interview will be conducted by Prof. Olaf Flak and myself, Barbara Kożusznik.**
- **Olaf Flak: Our guest today is Prof. Vicente Martínez-Tur, who is a Professor at the University of Valencia in Spain. He is a coordinator of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degree in work, organisational and personal psychology. He has made substantial contributions to applied psychology and represents all the requirements for members at large in the AI IP. For many years his main research projects concern organisations for individuals with intellectual disabilities, psychology of service, service quality, and customer satisfaction. He has collected research findings on the Third Sector, organisational justice and trust. He also had a substantial impact on this important area in practice. Prof. Vicente, we welcome you to our interview; it's a great pleasure to meet you there, and I would like to ask you the first question about you. What scientific projects are you involved in now? What is your job at the moment?**
- **Vicente Martínez-Tur:** Thank you for letting me participate in this project. Well, regarding your question, I am currently involved in different research projects. One of them—the most important one for me—is a project funded by the Spanish government, it is a project that continues over time, and I have coordinated a number of them dedicated to the study of workers with intellectual disabilities, and how to ensure that such a person has a good work context, and they have been well incorporated into the labour market. The second project is related to the investigation of digitalised competencies and how the digitalisation process has changed the content of work, the content of jobs around the world, and the way of working to help to evaluate the importance of these competencies for people beyond digital competencies, how to adapt these to

their different jobs and importance in terms of the labour market and health, well-being etc. Another one is a project related to the contextual factor in Latin America, and now we are going to start it in Africa. It is the project that we call “This works in my place;” in this project, we have an international team within the International Association of Applied Psychology. The idea is to investigate the contextual factor in these regions, in order to explore how the work and organisational psychology can contribute to the development goals of the United Nations but considering the reality of the regions, and not the mentality of developed countries in Europe or the United States. I also participate in other minor projects, but I think these are the main areas where I work.

- **O. Flak: And what do you think about management by competencies as a method of managing a university? Because we are engaged in several initiatives in this area, we are looking for some patterns, advice and ideal situations where you can find management by competencies at the university.**
- **V. Martínez-Tur:** I think this is a crucial aspect at universities. It is important to define the competencies very well, and—in addition to the concrete and core competencies in each role at the university—it is important to consider that the definition of competencies itself refers to the contextual elements. For me, competencies are an effective way of working but in a specific context. The problem or challenge at the university is that we have different contexts and different roles, and then the performance is different in each context. For example, it’s not the same to pay attention to the administrative staff or to manage a project and focus on publishing or teaching or any other area of university life. Because competencies are contextual, it is important to consider the context in order to manage the competencies at the university well, and I know this is a challenge for universities.
- **B. Kożusznik: Thank you that you confirmed our assumptions of the project. Could you answer the question about competencies? Which ones should a researcher have in order to receive grants or financing?**
- **V. Martínez-Tur:** In order to receive this type of help, I think that there are three or four elements to be considered in terms of competencies. One of them is the capacity to be sensitive to the problems and challenges that the institutions and associations have. In some cases—at least in my country—researchers are more focused on problems based on their discipline rather than on what the problems of the disciplines are. They have an internal view of what research is. I think that, in order to receive suitable funding, it’s also important to have an external view and to see what the challenges and the strategic areas of institutions and governments are. In addition, I think that an important issue is to write the project very well, to send the message clearly, to write the project in an attractive way, to convince the people, the readers, that you have substantial frontier

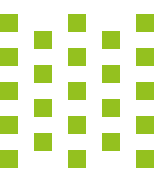
knowledge about the topic, that you can provide practical applications according to the resources that you will be granted. I think this is another element to be considered in order to be successful in this type of project. Another element, I believe, is to have a good team. A good team does not only mean that you have a good group of professors. For me, it is more important to have a good combination of roles, for example, people who can support the project in terms of methodology, people who can help more in terms of data collection, contact with other companies or with the sector involved in the project, people with a more commercial approach to the project, etc. Then you have to convince a reader or evaluator that you have a good team not only in terms of productivity but also in terms of differentiating a variety of roles to achieve the objective. And the network, of course. In more and more projects, you need people from other universities and from other countries. Then it is necessary that you manage this network and cooperation with other people coming from other cultural frameworks, training, development etc. This is a challenge but it is required by institutions more and more.

- **O. Flak: As you talk about team building and the roles, I would like to ask about the trust or trustfulness of the researcher. What are the factors which inspire confidence and the researchers' trustfulness?**
- **V. Martínez-Tur:** This is a good question, especially for people who coordinate their teams. I think that one important factor is honesty. You have to be honest and transparent with the information in the decisions you're making; I think this is very important. I think that one important factor is to fully achieve this. Your decision-making is perceived as fair, and it's based on rational information; it's transparent, consistent, etc. This is an important issue. Of course, there is an important factor which is competence. If you want to gain the trust of others, you have to be competent. If you are not, it's extremely difficult to have others trust you if you don't demonstrate that you are competent in a given project or in a given research area. An important factor as well is the capacity to distribute tasks correctly and to recognise the effort of people; this is also a factor that could facilitate people trusting you. In achieving trust, you have two or three challenges. The first of them is to be competent; the second is to be honest, transparent, and fair in the relationship with your colleagues, with the team members, and, of course, to try to recognise the efforts of people in the team. I think that—at the very least—these free factors should be considered.
- **B. Kożusznik: Yes, it is a very fragile word. We have to be very careful. It is not easy to build confidence and trustfulness. You are a leader of many projects, Vicente. Would you please tell us when did your adventure of building the competencies of the leader of research teams begin? And when did you realise that this is extremely important to build your competencies as a leader?**

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- **V. Martínez-Tur:** I remember very well that it started radically about twenty years ago. Because more or less 20 years ago, I had the opportunity to propose a project to the national government here in Spain, and it was an opportunity to coordinate a team of young people. And then, I discovered that the role of the leader is totally different from the role of a team member. Why? Because I was forced to have a general view of the situation from the perspective of different people. I was forced to distribute the tasks, and then I learnt the difficulties of satisfying different members of the team and, at the same time, achieving good performance, publications, etc. Then I discovered the importance of being a good leader and the difficulties connected with taking this role. This was a personal challenge for me; but step by step, I discovered that it is important to play this new role and to delegate the tasks to your colleagues. A very good example of that for me was the methodology issues. When I was a member of a team, before starting with this role of a leader, for me, the methodology was something that I had to implement, compute, test and so on. When I started as a leader, this changed. Why? Because my role was different. Up until this moment, my role was to be attentive to the advances, the progress in methodology, how to implement this methodology in the project, and how to achieve that other members learn and develop the skills in order to compute these statistical analyses. And then my role changed. When I started 20 years ago, it was a personal challenge, and—most radically—it was a change of perspective. As a team member, I had to focus on a specific task; as a leader, you have to play another role, one that is related to searching for resources, exploring new possibilities, distributing the tasks, facilitating the learning of others etc.
 - **O. Flak: You started 20 years ago, but what kind of competencies would you like to develop in the future? What kind of competencies would you like to acquire?**
 - **V. Martínez-Tur:** This is a very interesting question. When I thought about this, it was a challenge. I think that there is a very important challenge for me in the future in this role, which is related to the values of young people. As you know, these research projects and the research area are possible because of the cooperation between the young and the seniors. Within all those projects, we have senior professors but we also have young people doing their degrees and so on. In the past, while people were involved because they needed, let's say, a career, and some professors needed to have an interesting job, and life projects, money, etc., now I feel like more and more young people are motivated by other elements or factors related to creativity and personal expression. And they don't feel so obligated to follow the rules, procedures, or topics that they want to implement, or that they want to investigate. This, for me, is a challenge. A challenge of incorporating these new generations and the values they have in a process that is implemented over time with a trajectory of the past and tradition, etc. For me, it will be a challenge, and I would like to be attentive to these changes in

order to incorporate these people and in order to make sure they are motivated to do research. And the second future challenge for me is how to incorporate digital elements and digital advances in the research process, for example, in the data collection, the possibilities that digital technologies provide and will provide in the future, and how to incorporate these, how to analyse this data. For me that is an important challenge. For example, how to monitor the variables of workers over time continuously. This is an important input for research. Today it is probably still in its initial stages but I think that it would be an interesting challenge in the future. And we have to be prepared and ready for this. This is another challenge.

- **B. Kożusznik: Yes, and continuing this line of thought, could you tell us what qualities are needed to be a good leader of a team?**
- **V. Martínez-Tur:** I think that we need a lot of qualities in our leaders or in leaders of research. One important quality is persistence. You have to be resistant to frustration, not only when it comes to publishing, which is very challenging all in itself. But also in terms of relationships with your European members, relationships with other people. This is an important quality. And other qualities: a passion for research, for knowledge, for making progress in our knowledge. If the leader doesn't have passion, it's very difficult for the team members to be passionate about the research, so I think this is another quality the leader has to have in order to achieve good results within their team. Another quality that is extremely important is the skill of managing the relations among team members. Leaders have to manage this aspect like good parents. And it's difficult because you know that conflicts will happen, and you have to manage these professionally and try to manage your emotions and make it explicit that we need each other within the team in order to achieve tangible results for everybody. And we can't follow only emotions. This is important for everybody, including the person at the centre of the conflict. Then, it is important for the leader to be able to manage the conflict, to elaborate and convince people, so management of conflict is an important skill. Especially because, as you know, people are biased and they are usually egoistic. Frequently, people believe that they contribute to a lot, and then these types of biases exist and it is important to consider these. Another quality is the capacity to recognise the contributions and efforts of people. There is more orientation to quality and productivity in research but also respect for the person, their lives, etc. And this combination should be managed as well, productivity and quality of the publications, but also the personal issues.
- **O. Flak: Considering what you said, which factors would you say allow a team member to identify with the purpose of a research project? How can you make sure that the team members identify with the purpose?**

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- **V. Martínez-Tur:** I think there are different ways to achieve this objective. One way is to verify and properly communicate the importance of the project itself, the content, and why this project, doctoral thesis, or paper is important. Not in terms of publishing or in terms of career but in terms of how to achieve that, to convince the members, the colleagues, that this is important in itself. I think that if you achieve that, if they see the importance of a project or research, then you can achieve this type of identification. Secondly, I think it is important that you also manage the impact outside of the team, for example, the impact in a newspaper or in other institutions, etc. This is an important issue in itself to achieve this type of identification. The capacity to create a good atmosphere and a good social climate within the team is also important for this objective. For example, organising some activities beyond the research activity and other, let's say, social activities, like coffee or even a dinner with the team, in order to create a good atmosphere within the team, a good outlook on the project, and allow your team to identify themselves with their purpose and the objective that we have. At the very least, these elements should be considered; if not, it's very difficult as identification is only possible because something that you do is important in itself, not only extrinsically but intrinsically. And because we are part of a team, and I am a member of these teams, I am recognised within these teams, and then not only productivity is the reward, but also the social elements of life.
 - **B. Kożusznik:** **Yes, I completely agree with you, Vicente, and now let's consider evaluation because the evaluation of the results of the functioning of the team members is kind of a natural phenomenon at the university. What kind of evaluation, according to you, leads to the development of the team and which ones are good? Because not every form of evaluation will produce this development. Do you agree with this?**
 - **V. Martínez-Tur:** Yes, I agree, and it's one of the problems we have. I can more or less describe the evaluation that we have in our team and at our university but then I can say what I think is better, and what could be improved in this evaluation system. In our team at the University of Valencia, and in Spain in general, there is a well-established system of evaluation. This is a system at the university level—and also at the national level by the Spanish government—based on productivity itself. What's important is the number and the quality of the journals you publish in. The positive evaluation is based on how many articles you publish, and the quality of the journals where you publish them in is. Then, in principle, it is expected that you publish some articles every year continuously, and a number of them should be published in the first and second quartiles of the best journals in the Web of Science. If you don't manage to achieve that, it's very difficult to achieve a good score, and then you have to deal with obstacles in your career; it's very difficult to achieve an increase in your salary, and it's even difficult to become a leader of a team or be in a project as a member, etc. This is more or less

a summary of the evaluation of the research. The problem with this evaluation is that competencies and the process are not directly considered. A lot of articles never have an impact on other researchers or other powers, institutions, societies, etc. And I think that the problem is this type of evaluation focused on scores, high numbers, quality of journals etc., should be combined with a more qualitative process. In the qualitative process, I think that the performance of people, their behaviour, and the social impact of the research could be explored and considered. At least in Spain, this is not considered. They don't consider this, at least in terms of salary, career and so on, and they focus only on top-level publications. And this is a problem because you can publish a lot but without any social impact or you can have a very big impact and never publish in this type of journal. I think that these things are related, and probably if you publish in good journals, you make an impact. But I think that it would be beneficial to consider also this qualitative element when it comes to the evaluation.

- **O. Flak:** As we talk about the competencies, could you point out, for example, your three main competencies which allow you to lead a team? What do you think, which competencies of yours are the most important and make you successful in leading?
- **V. Martínez-Tur:** Well, it's difficult to talk about, but I think I understand your request. I think one important competence is to secure funding resources. This is an important competence because it's tough to maintain a project if you don't manage to do that. Then, an important part of my tasks used to be being attentive to resources and trying to acquire them for my colleagues and my team members, and this is an important issue. And then, one important question related to resource distribution. It is important to recognise the people in a fair way, the correct way, considering the contributions they make, as well as their effort in order to distribute the resources. But this is always a delicate issue, and one important example of this is authorship. How to decide the order of the authors in the paper? Because in complex research projects, different people participate over time, and then it's very difficult to decide, for this paper, based on this data collection, this design, where these people participated, how to decide which is the correct order of authors, etc. This is an example of how to distribute resources because publications are the most important outcome. Because according to the publications, your salary and your career could change or could stop, and—for me—this is an important element. Another competence I'm trying to develop and implement is the stimulation of the career of people. I am aware that this is an important issue; you have to stimulate, even challenge people, “You can achieve it, you can achieve the promotion,” and I help them, and I try to revise the documents and the criteria for the valuations in their promotions and in their careers. I am totally convinced that this is an important competence. If you don't do that, I think that the team cannot work. Another competence that is also important for me is how to manage boundaries between your team and

other possible activities. I am entirely aware that the team members, my colleagues, this team and our projects are central to all of us. But we have other possible initiatives outside the team, and each member can have other possible initiatives. For me, this is good, there is no problem, and I think that this is the way to achieve the goal of this project. And it's good for the team because they are free to participate also in other activities and projects. I think that this is another competence worth developing and implementing. Of course, the distribution of tasks is very important, as well as having the right mix of competencies among the members, and I always try to have people who have complementary competencies in order to achieve our results. For example, some people are more dedicated to the methodology, other people are more dedicated to the data collection and the contact with the company, commercial attitude, being their frontier of knowledge in the different topics, and trying to have a good social climate. I don't have the time to be excellent at this, but I have to organise something each year in order to facilitate it, to have some informal contact. I think that maybe there are other aspects, some orientation to results, we have to publish every year a number of articles, and this is a must, but it is for me an assumption.

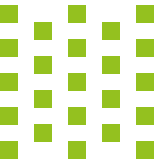
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- **B. Kożusznik: The next question is about your expertise. I know you as an expert on contextual meaning and contextual factors which influence human behaviour or workers' behaviour. Could you tell us, according to you, what external factors enhance the team competencies?**
 - **V. Martínez-Tur:** Good question. In Spain, there is an “important” factor, an external factor, outside the university, which is extremely important for people's careers. When this policy was implemented by the Spanish government outside the University of Valencia—I think it was created 30-35 years ago—it was a radical change in productivity and the quality of publication of researchers in general, including the researchers at my university, in my department, my team. It was the change in the reward system by the Spanish government; this is a contextual factor which was very important. Why? Because they evaluate the performance of each researcher, and what depends on that valuation is the salary of a given researcher, the possibility of promotion, the accreditation for promotion, the possibility to being a supervisor for doctoral theses, the possibility of making a project request, etc., all this could be possible, or not. And the salary aspect is important, increase in the salary, especially if you have successive positive evaluations over time; it is important that you consolidate an increase in the salary over time, in addition to other elements concerning career, promotion, etc. This is a contextual factor that has had an influence on how people evolved over time in developing competencies concerning research, achieving better publications and better results. Of course, there is another important factor in the context, which is the existence of institutions dedicated to supporting research. We have the European

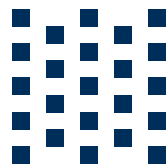
framework, but in Spain, this context or this factor is also present in the form of calls for proposals from the national government and regional government. This is significant as a contextual factor. Moreover, I think that more and more companies and sectors, at least in Spain, are interested in our research. This is another contextual factor that is substantial because if they are open to our research, then we can obtain valuable data from people who work in those companies; the sample is not composed of students, so that's another valuable factor. And also, for me, having a very strict external reward system is an important issue of the context. Only a percentage of researchers submit their curriculum for evaluation, and from this percentage, only some of them achieve positive results, also public institutions support this. And lastly, the possibility of being in contact with companies and organisations in order to establish research contracts. For example, today, I am a coordinator of a specific 3-year contract for customised employment for this company in order to incorporate people with disabilities. This is another contract, but this is a way to obtain funds for your team and the resources. This type of contextual factor is immensely important; but how to manage it? For example, I stimulate my team members to submit their curricula for evaluation because I think it's important to maintain the activity. And as of now, I succeeded in that everybody in the core team has high evaluation scores. I think these are the three main external factors which are important.

- **O. Flak: You said that the higher education system in Spain mostly rewards the results of research work—for example, publications—but what about your university? Does your university have any assessment systems of competencies? Which competencies are praised or rewarded according to you?**
- **V. Martínez-Tur:** At the university level, in Valencia, the university distinguishes between two types of competencies in terms of evaluation. Firstly, competencies related to teaching and management, for example coordinating a Master's or other programmes, so a specific course. This type of competency has a quantitative process of evaluation each year, there is a qualitative process, and then each person receives a quantitative and a qualitative report. The qualitative report is important because you receive a report containing the opinion of your students. This has implications each year because you accumulate these evaluations over time, and every 5 years, the process of evaluation is evaluated again as a whole; through this, you can receive or not receive an external accreditation from the government or based on this, you can get a small increase in the salary. The salary increase is something almost everyone manages to achieve through teaching and management. In general, everybody achieves it but it has an influence on accreditation processes, promotion, etc., as this is the qualitative information that is considered by the external bodies, the external government and so on. This is positive on the one hand, but also negative because—as you know—evaluation by students

in terms of the competencies of teachers is not entirely accurate. And then, we have the second type of competency, which is the research competency. In the case of the university, they focus on the quantity and the quality of publications only. You receive a score each year, this is our ratio, and this ratio is compared with the performance of the researchers in your department. Then, you have to show that over time, most of the years, you do better than the average. If not, you will have problems with supervising doctoral theses or getting other resources. This is a quantitative evaluation that they implement, and they also analyse and prepare reports where they evaluate the productivity of the researchers at the university level but each individual receives a score. And the score is a ratio; you can be better than average or not.

- **B. Kożusznik:** That was our last question, Vicente, thank you very much for your interesting answers to our questions. They were very inspiring. And thank you also for the tips you gave us to improve our competency management at our universities!
- **V. Martínez-Tur:** Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this project. I wish you good results and promising projects in this area.
- **B. Kożusznik:** Thank you very much.





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The Interdisciplinary Centre for Staff Development

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