

Chief Operating Officer

FF01 General management and executive · ISCO-08 1120 · CBS 0511 Chief Executive Officers · seniority lead · Also known as: COO, Operations Director, Head of Operations

Holds end responsibility for operations, scales processes, capacity and quality in line with strategy, and balances cost against delivery reliability across the business.

The chief operating officer sits on the executive board beside the chief executive and runs the delivery column, from production and logistics to service and planning. The difference from an operations manager is that decisions here span multiple sites and capacity investments. Selection often fails because only process improvement is tested, while this role must intervene in staffing levels and the investment agenda, at times against the wishes of site managers.

Key figures for this profile

27 skills · 10 competencies to measure · 5 knockout skills · centre of gravity: Leadership and organising 31%, Business operations, commerce and entrepreneurship 27%, Cognitive ability and problem solving 12%

1 Competencies to measure

These are the behavioural and ability constructs in this profile. Each one shows which hrmforce questionnaire measures it.

Competencies to measure	Target level	hrmforce instrument	Assessment method	Behavioural anchor at target level
Decisiveness Competency (50-framework): Decision-making ability Knockout	 N5	Big Fifty, 360 Feedback	Situational Judgement Test	Decides on irreversible matters with major consequences, records the trade off and sets which decisions others may take themselves.

Competencies to measure	Target level	hrmforce instrument	Assessment method	Behavioural anchor at target level
integrity and dependability Competency (50-framework): Integrity Knockout	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty (Integrity Scale), 360 Feedback, Structured interview	Personality questionnaire	Sets the organisation's integrity standards, enforces them also with influential parties and explains the resulting choices publicly.
Developing vision Competency (50-framework): Vision Knockout	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback	Assessment centre	Formulates a multi-year vision for the whole organisation, underpins it with scenarios and uses it as a test for investments.
Persuasiveness Competency (50-framework): Persuasiveness	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback	Assessment centre	Wins board and external parties over to a far reaching change of course and sustains that support when resistance increases.
organisational awareness Competency (50-framework): Organizational Sensitivity	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback	Situational Judgement Test	Sees through relations between organisational units and external parties and steers decision making by organising support at an early stage.
Entrepreneurship Competency (50-framework): Entrepreneurship	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty, Competency Check, Career Interest, 360 Feedback	Assessment centre	Sets up new activities or ventures for the organisation and carries the responsibility for investment and result.

Competencies to measure	Target level	hrmforce instrument	Assessment method	Behavioural anchor at target level
Taking difficult personnel decisions Competency (50-framework): Decision-making ability	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback	Assessment centre	Decides on far reaching reorganisation and dismissal cases, weighs legal and human consequences and accounts for the choice to board and works council.
Stress tolerance Competency (50-framework): Stress resilience	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty, 15PF, Mental Resilience (4C)	Personality questionnaire	Keeps the organisation workable in crises, takes decisions under high uncertainty and sets the standard for composed action under pressure.
Market orientation Competency (50-framework): Market Orientation	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback	Assessment centre	Translates market developments into the strategic agenda of the organisation and repositions the offering for the longer term.
Dealing with ambiguity Competency (50-framework): Flexibility	■■■■■ N5	Big Fifty, Mental Resilience (4C), Competency Check	Situational Judgement Test	Sets direction under high uncertainty, makes the remaining uncertainty explicit and keeps the organisation moving until a decision can be taken.

2 Full skill profile

Every skill in this profile, sorted by weight. The behavioural anchor under each skill belongs to the target level.

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
G	Decisiveness Decides on irreversible matters with major consequences, records the trade off and sets which decisions others may take themselves.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Situational Judgement Test	Big Fifty, 360 Feedback
V	Stakeholder management Maintains a network reaching governance and political bodies, connects parties with differing interests and safeguards the position of the organisation.	■■■■■ N5	5	no	Assessment centre	Competency Check, 360 Feedback
G	integrity and dependability Sets the organisation's integrity standards, enforces them also with influential parties and explains the resulting choices publicly.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Personality questionnaire	Big Fifty (Integrity Scale), 360 Feedback, Structured interview
G	Developing vision Formulates a multi-year vision for the whole organisation, underpins it with scenarios and uses it as a test for investments.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Assessment centre	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Process management and optimisation Defines the process architecture of the organisation, sets standards for process management and steers improvement programmes across value chains.	■■■■■ N5	5	no	Work sample test	Knowledge test (client-specific), Work sample test
K	Reading and interpreting financial reports Assesses annual accounts and management reports of the organisation, sets the reporting standard and advises the board on it.	■■■■■ N5	5	yes	Knowledge test	Knowledge test (client-specific)
V	Risk assessment Sets the risk appetite and the assessment method for the organisation and accounts for accepted residual risks.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Work sample test	Competency Check, Work sample test
G	Persuasiveness Wins board and external parties over to a far reaching change of course and sustains that support when resistance increases.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Assessment centre	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback
G	organisational awareness Sees through relations between organisational units and external parties and steers decision making by organising support at an early stage.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Situational Judgement Test	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Change management Leads organisation wide change programmes, aligns with works council and supervisors and sets the change approach of the organisation.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Assessment centre	Competency Check, 360 Feedback
V	Continuous improvement Embeds continuous improvement as a way of working across the organisation, trains improvement coaches and reports gains to the executive team.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Work sample test	Competency Check, Pulse Survey
G	Entrepreneurship Sets up new activities or ventures for the organisation and carries the responsibility for investment and result.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Assessment centre	Big Fifty, Competency Check, Career Interest, 360 Feedback
V	Planning of operational processes Determines the planning model for several departments and decides on capacity expansion or outsourcing of work.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Work sample test	Work sample test, Competency Check
V	Managing service levels and performance indicators Determines the system of service levels for the organisation and negotiates these with customers and suppliers.	■■■■■ N5	4	no	Work sample test	Work sample test, Competency Check

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Strategic thinking Places figures, customer signals and trends side by side and names two or three strategic options with their consequences.	 N4	4	yes	Assessment centre	Ability Scan, Competency Check
V	Budgeting and cost control Makes the budget for an own project, follows realisation per period and proposes measures in case of deviation.	 N4	4	no	Work sample test	Knowledge test (client-specific), Work sample test
V	Scenario thinking and futures literacy Draws up scenarios for the organisation with a horizon of years and links decision moments and measurable signal values to them.	 N5	3	no	Assessment centre	Competency Check, Structured interview
G	Taking difficult personnel decisions Decides on far reaching reorganisation and dismissal cases, weighs legal and human consequences and accounts for the choice to board and works council.	 N5	3	no	Assessment centre	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback
V	Decision making in governing bodies Chairs decision making at executive level, weighs conflicting interests explicitly and determines which decisions belong where in the organisation.	 N5	3	no	Assessment centre	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
G	Stress tolerance Keeps the organisation workable in crises, takes decisions under high uncertainty and sets the standard for composed action under pressure.	■■■■■ N5	3	no	Personality questionnaire	Big Fifty, 15PF, Mental Resilience (4C)
G	Market orientation Translates market developments into the strategic agenda of the organisation and repositions the offering for the longer term.	■■■■■ N5	3	no	Assessment centre	Big Fifty, Competency Check, 360 Feedback
V	Developing business models Revises the business model of the organisation or chain and determines which revenue streams are built up or wound down.	■■■■■ N5	3	no	Work sample test	Work sample test, Knowledge test (client-specific)
V	Talent development and succession Assesses with fixed criteria who is ready for a next step and makes a development plan per person.	■■■■■ N4	3	no	Structured interview	Career Orientations, Competency Check, Development Review
V	Process automation Describes a process in steps, automates the repeatable steps and builds in checks on errors and exceptions.	■■■■■ N4	3	no	Work sample test	Work sample test, Portfolio

T	Skill	Target level	Weight	Knockout	Assessment method	hrmforce instrument
V	Digital strategy and transformation Translates an organisational goal into concrete digital improvements, builds support and tracks whether the intended effects occur.	 N4	3	no	Structured interview	Structured interview, Portfolio
G	Dealing with ambiguity Sets direction under high uncertainty, makes the remaining uncertainty explicit and keeps the organisation moving until a decision can be taken.	 N5	2	no	Situational Judgement Test	Big Fifty, Mental Resilience (4C), Competency Check
K	AI literacy Judges per work task whether AI is suitable, names the main limitations and explains how it works to colleagues.	 N4	1	no	Knowledge test	Knowledge test (client-specific)

3 Levels per seniority

The same profile with the job family seniority adjustment applied. Target levels are clamped to 1 to 5.

Skill	lead
Decisiveness	N5
Stakeholder management	N5
integrity and dependability	N5
Developing vision	N5
Process management and optimisation	N5
Reading and interpreting financial reports	N5
Risk assessment	N5
Persuasiveness	N5
organisational awareness	N5
Change management	N5
Continuous improvement	N5
Entrepreneurship	N5
Planning of operational processes	N5
Managing service levels and performance indicators	N5
Strategic thinking	N4
Budgeting and cost control	N4
Scenario thinking and futures literacy	N5
Taking difficult personnel decisions	N5
Decision making in governing bodies	N5
Stress tolerance	N5
Market orientation	N5
Developing business models	N5
Talent development and succession	N4

Skill	lead
Process automation	N4
Digital strategy and transformation	N4
Dealing with ambiguity	N5
AI literacy	N4

4 The proficiency scale

Level	Label	Autonomy	Complexity	Scope	Depth of knowledge
N1	Guided	works under supervision and follows instruction	routine, one variable at a time	own task	basic understanding of terminology
N2	Applying	works independently within set frameworks	familiar situations with limited variation	own role	working knowledge, applies standard approach
N3	Proficient	sets own approach and seeks input proactively	several variables, some ambiguity	own team or process	thorough knowledge, weighs alternatives
N4	Advanced	directs others and decides on the approach	complex, with conflicting interests	several teams or a department	in-depth knowledge, advises others
N5	Leading	sets the standard and the policy	strategic, under high uncertainty	organisation, value chain or profession	authority, advances the profession

5 Behavioural anchors per skill

Anchors sit at N1, N3 and N5. N2 and N4 are deliberately not anchored: raters interpolate between them, following the O*NET convention.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Decisiveness Makes a choice within the time available, also when not all information is present, and stands behind its consequences.	Decides on standard cases within the own task and refers deviating cases to the supervisor in good time.	Cuts through conflicting advice, communicates the decision and states when it will be evaluated.	Decides on irreversible matters with major consequences, records the trade off and sets which decisions others may take themselves.
Stakeholder management Mapping who has an interest in an initiative and maintaining contact with those parties so that decisions keep their support.	Maintains a list of those involved and informs them about progress according to the agreed rhythm.	Assesses influence and interest per party, chooses a fitting form of contact and discusses conflicting wishes before a decision is taken.	Maintains a network reaching governance and political bodies, connects parties with differing interests and safeguards the position of the organisation.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
integrity and dependability Acting in line with applicable standards and agreements, also without supervision, and being transparent about own interests, mistakes and doubtful cases.	Keeps to agreements and rules of conduct made and reports an own mistake to the manager.	Reports a possible conflict of interest on own initiative and asks for review before a decision is taken.	Sets the organisation's integrity standards, enforces them also with influential parties and explains the resulting choices publicly.
Developing vision Sketching a coherent picture of where the organisation or team will stand in a few years, based on trends, signals and own judgement.	States in own words where the team wants to stand in a year and which work belongs to that.	Connects trends in market and profession into a picture for the own team and tests it with colleagues.	Formulates a multi-year vision for the whole organisation, underpins it with scenarios and uses it as a test for investments.
Process management and optimisation Describing, measuring and improving work processes by analysing waste, lead time and handover moments and recording the new way of working.	Works according to the recorded process steps and reports steps that do not match daily practice.	Maps a process with those involved, measures lead time and implements improvements with a measurable effect.	Defines the process architecture of the organisation, sets standards for process management and steers improvement programmes across value chains.
Reading and interpreting financial reports Reads balance sheet, profit and loss account and cash flow statement and derives from these how an organisation or unit stands financially.	Points out the revenue, cost and result items in a periodic report and names the period used.	Compares reports across several periods, calculates ratios and names which items explain the deviation.	Assesses annual accounts and management reports of the organisation, sets the reporting standard and advises the board on it.
Risk assessment Names what can go wrong, estimates likelihood and impact and links control measures or a deliberate acceptance to them.	Spots unsafe or deviating situations in the own work and reports them according to the applicable procedure.	Estimates the main risks for the own process, orders them by likelihood and impact and takes measures.	Sets the risk appetite and the assessment method for the organisation and accounts for accepted residual risks.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Persuasiveness Moving others towards a position, decision or behaviour they initially resisted, using substantive arguments, examples and personal presence.	Puts forward an own proposal in a meeting and supports it with one concrete example from practice.	Chooses per counterpart the argument that matches their interest and checks along the way whether the agreement is genuine.	Wins board and external parties over to a far reaching change of course and sustains that support when resistance increases.
organisational awareness Recognising how formal and informal relations, interests and decision making work in the organisation and taking these into account in own actions.	Asks who needs to be involved in a topic before a proposal is shared with others.	Assesses which interests a proposal touches, involves the right people beforehand and chooses a suitable moment to raise it.	Sees through relations between organisational units and external parties and steers decision making by organising support at an early stage.
Change management Planning and guiding change by involving stakeholders, phasing steps, influencing behaviour and tracking the results the change is meant to deliver.	Adapts own way of working to an announced change and asks for explanation when steps are unclear.	Makes a change approach for the team with those involved, chooses interventions per group and follows the implementation.	Leads organisation wide change programmes, aligns with works council and supervisors and sets the change approach of the organisation.
Continuous improvement Finding, testing, measuring and sustaining small improvements in daily work, together with the people who carry out that work.	Brings improvement ideas to the work meeting and tries out a proposed small change in own work.	Organises short improvement cycles in the team, measures the effect of a change and secures what works in the work instruction.	Embeds continuous improvement as a way of working across the organisation, trains improvement coaches and reports gains to the executive team.
Entrepreneurship Takes initiative to create new value, seeks resources and support for it and accepts responsibility for the outcome.	Puts forward an own idea for better or new work in the team meeting and asks for a response.	Sets up an own initiative with goal, planning and budget and keeps it running until the result is visible.	Sets up new activities or ventures for the organisation and carries the responsibility for investment and result.
Planning of operational processes Distributes work, people and resources over time so that the required output or service is achieved with the available capacity.	Fills in the daily roster following the fixed planning rules and reports staffing bottlenecks to the planner.	Makes the weekly planning for a team, takes peak load and absence into account and replans when disruptions occur.	Determines the planning model for several departments and decides on capacity expansion or outsourcing of work.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Managing service levels and performance indicators Agrees measurable service and performance standards, measures the actual results and takes action when agreed levels are not met.	Reads the performance overview and reports which agreement was not met in the past week.	Draws up indicators and standards for a service, reports per period and carries out improvement actions on deviation.	Determines the system of service levels for the organisation and negotiates these with customers and suppliers.
Strategic thinking Analysing developments in the environment, market and technology and deriving strategic choices and alternatives from them for the longer term of an organisation or unit.	Collects data on market and competitors on request and summarises the main developments for the manager.	Places figures, customer signals and trends side by side and names two or three strategic options with their consequences.	Develops scenarios for the whole organisation, weighs uncertainties explicitly and sets the strategic agenda together with the executive board.
Budgeting and cost control Draws up a budget for a task, team or project, tracks spending against that budget and intervenes when overspending threatens.	Tracks spending in the supplied overview and reports deviations above the agreed limit.	Makes the budget for an own project, follows realisation per period and proposes measures in case of deviation.	Sets the budget framework for the organisation, decides on reallocation of resources and accounts for it to the board.
Scenario thinking and futures literacy Explores several possible futures for an issue, describes the consequences per scenario and names signals that point to a scenario.	Names two possible outcomes for a plan and states what would then have to change in the own work.	Works out three scenarios for the own process with assumptions and consequences and names the first signals per scenario.	Draws up scenarios for the organisation with a horizon of years and links decision moments and measurable signal values to them.
Taking difficult personnel decisions Deciding on improvement tracks, transfer or termination of employment, with careful documentation and a clear explanation to the people involved.	Raises concerns about the performance of a colleague in time and with examples to the responsible manager.	Takes a substantiated decision after a completed improvement track, discusses it in person and records the grounds in the file.	Decides on far reaching reorganisation and dismissal cases, weighs legal and human consequences and accounts for the choice to board and works council.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Decision making in governing bodies Preparing, tabling and taking decisions in bodies such as a management team or steering group, with clear options, substantiation and recording of the decision.	Delivers requested documents on time for a meeting and summarises the decision taken correctly.	Writes a decision memo with options and consequences, defends the proposal in the meeting and records the decision.	Chairs decision making at executive level, weighs conflicting interests explicitly and determines which decisions belong where in the organisation.
Stress tolerance Keeps delivering work of the same quality under time pressure, opposition or unexpected turns and maintains a businesslike tone with others.	Keeps working on the current task as pressure rises and asks the supervisor which task can wait.	Keeps working in a structured way at peak load, keeps agreements with clients clear and flags early which results are at risk.	Keeps the organisation workable in crises, takes decisions under high uncertainty and sets the standard for composed action under pressure.
Market orientation Follows what happens in the market, with customers and with competitors and includes that information in own choices and proposals.	Reads the customer newsletter and the sector news and raises striking signals during the team meeting.	Links signals from customers and competitors to the own offering and proposes adjustments on that basis.	Translates market developments into the strategic agenda of the organisation and repositions the offering for the longer term.
Developing business models Describes how an activity creates, delivers and captures value and aligns customer groups, channels, costs and revenue streams.	Fills in a model on an existing canvas with the data of a familiar service of the organisation.	Designs a business model for a new service, calculates the cost structure and tests it with those involved.	Revises the business model of the organisation or chain and determines which revenue streams are built up or wound down.
Talent development and succession Mapping talent and potential, agreeing development paths and preparing succession for key positions, so that critical roles remain filled over time.	Notes per team member which tasks they enjoy doing and passes this on to the manager.	Assesses with fixed criteria who is ready for a next step and makes a development plan per person.	Builds a succession plan for all key roles in the organisation and discusses the risks yearly with board and supervisors.

Skill	N1	N3	N5
Process automation Analyses a recurring work process, builds or commissions automation of its steps and checks that the outcome stays reliable.	Runs an existing automation and reports when the outcome differs from what was expected.	Describes a process in steps, automates the repeatable steps and builds in checks on errors and exceptions.	Determines the organisation's automation agenda and decides which processes are and are not automated.
Digital strategy and transformation Links technological possibilities to organisational goals, sets out a change route and steers the introduction of new digital ways of working.	Provides input for a digitalisation plan by factually describing bottlenecks in own work process.	Translates an organisational goal into concrete digital improvements, builds support and tracks whether the intended effects occur.	Sets the organisation's digital strategy, prioritises investments and accounts for choices to the board and shareholders.
Dealing with ambiguity Works on when the assignment, information or division of roles is incomplete or contradictory, makes workable assumptions and tests them once more becomes clear.	Asks what is meant when an assignment is unclear and then works according to the answer given.	Formulates explicit assumptions when information is missing, proceeds on that basis and revises the approach once new data arrives.	Sets direction under high uncertainty, makes the remaining uncertainty explicit and keeps the organisation moving until a decision can be taken.
AI literacy Knows how AI systems work, what they can and cannot do, states where they fit or not and uses correct terminology.	Explains in own words that a language model predicts from patterns and can therefore produce incorrect output.	Judges per work task whether AI is suitable, names the main limitations and explains how it works to colleagues.	Defines what AI literacy means in the organisation, measures the level and links it to training and deployment policy.

6 Assessment methods and validity

The validities are the corrected meta-analytic estimates from Sackett, Zhang, Berry and Lievens (2022) in the Journal of Applied Psychology, which replace the older Schmidt and Hunter (1998) figures. The spread matters as much as the mean: with a high SD, validity varies strongly by context.

Assessment method	rho	SD	What it is
Situational Judgement Test	0.12	0.11	Scenario with response options, scored on knowledge or behavioural tendency.
Assessment centre	0.29	0.09	Multiple exercises, multiple assessors, dimension-wise scoring.
Personality questionnaire	0.40	0.15	Self-report of behavioural preferences. At hrnforce the Big Fifty and the 15PF.
Work sample test	0.33	0.09	The candidate performs a representative work sample under standardised conditions.
Knowledge test	0.40	0.13	Test of declarative job knowledge, usually assembled per client.
Structured interview	0.42	0.19	Behaviour-based interview with fixed questions and a rating scale per question.

7 Assessment instruments for this job

hrnforce instrument	Skills	What it measures
Competency Check	17	Behavioral-Level Competency Assessment
360 Feedback	11	Multiple assessments based on behavioral anchors
Big Fifty	10	Personality questionnaire, 150 items, 25 factors
Work sample test	7	Representative work sample under standardized conditions
Knowledge test (client-specific)	5	Professional knowledge test, customized for each client
Structured interview	3	Behavioral interview with a fixed structure
Mental Resilience (4C)	2	Mental Resilience According to the 4C Model
Portfolio	2	Evaluation of prior work against fixed criteria
Big Fifty (Integrity Scale)	1	
Pulse Survey	1	Periodic measurement at the team and organizational levels

hrmforce instrument	Skills	What it measures
Career Interest	1	Career interests, aligned with the RIASEC framework
Ability Scan	1	Aptitude Test: Verbal, Numerical, and Abstract Reasoning Skills
15PF	1	Personality Profile, a shorter alternative to the Big Fifty
Career Orientations	1	Career Anchors and Work Values
Development Review	1	Structured development interview

8 How to use this profile

1. Agree the profile with the hiring manager before the first candidate is measured. Weights shifted afterwards make the outcome indefensible.
2. Choose the assessment method per skill from the Assessment method column. Combine at most three methods per candidate.
3. Calibrate the assessors in a two-hour session using the anchors in chapter 5. Anchors without rater training deliver little.
4. Fill in the match calculator and discuss the gaps in the development conversation. Type A and type G are selection criteria, not one-quarter development goals.

Source: hrmforce Skills Framework 2.0, version 2.0.0, built 2026-09-08. Crosswalks to ESCO v1.2.1, O*NET 31.0, Lightcast Open Skills, SFIA 9, DigComp 3.0, EntreComp, LifeComp, GreenComp, Allit, WEF Future of Jobs 2025, ISCO-08 and the Dutch CBS occupational classification BRC 2014 edition 2025. This profile is a starting point, not a standard: align it with your own organisation before selecting on it.