

CORE COMPETENCY IDENTIFICATION

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Introduction

This brief paper provides some background and suggestions for facilitating the selection of core competencies.

Today many organizations are identifying competencies that are required for all employees, as well as competencies that are job-related. There is considerable benefit, as competencies form the foundation of integrated talent management systems. In other words, competencies are used to recruit and hire new employees, onboard and train, to assess employees, for career development, succession planning, employee certification, and performance reviews, for project assignments, and sometimes even for outplacement.

In every job, some persons perform better than others. Top performers are different than others. They do the important things more consistently, and they also do different things. *Competencies* separate top performers from average performers. *Competencies* are knowledge, skills, abilities, values, or behaviors that contribute to performing well. They become apparent by studying top performers.

Competency Models are groups of competencies (typically from 5 – 30 per model) that are required to perform a job or role well. Each competency model is composed of competencies selected from some of the following categories:

- Core Employee Competencies (for all employees in the organization)
- Core Manager Competencies (for supervisors and managers)
- Core Leader Competencies (for executives)
- Cross Functional Competencies (job related competencies, but not can apply to many types of jobs. For example, time management, communication, or basic computer skills).
- Technical (or Functional) Competencies (job related competencies related to one's key specialty or function. For example, accounts payable, heavy water chemistry, computer programming, or security procedures).

"Core" competencies are fundamental requirements for all organization members that vary from one organization to the next based on the value proposition of an organization. Core competencies help communicate the organization's areas of strategic advantage which is why it is important that each employee be responsible for exemplifying the core competencies. *Customer service, integrity, safety, innovation, and accountability* are examples. Some organizations identify a second set of core competencies for leaders and sometimes a third set of core competencies for managers. Managers and leaders are also responsible for individual core competencies.

Ideally, core competency identification involves a look outward as well as a careful look inward. Looking outward allows benchmarking of best in class and competitors, consultant models, and definition of the environment in which one must operate. Looking inward involves synchronizing the competency model with internal vision, strengths and strategies, and culture. Core competencies should be selected with the organization's capabilities clearly in mind.

Core Competency Identification Steps

Organization core competency models should reflect the particulars of an organization: one core competency model does not fit all organizations. Typically, organizations achieve this internal linkage by embedding competencies into a structure that includes their organizational strategy. For example, they may link together Vision, Mission, Critical Success Factors, and Core competencies. Another approach is to do a “SWOT” Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). Whatever approach is used, ensure that you follow through and link your core competencies to your strategy. Here are two approaches for developing core competency models:

Traditional

- 1) Review organization mission, vision, and strategy
- 2) Review best in class organization core competency models
- 3) Review models of Talent Management thought leaders
- 4) Review consulting firm models
- 5) Interview opinion leaders within organization
- 6) Hold Focus Groups
- 7) Consolidate findings from steps 1-6
- 8) Present findings to Sr. Leadership for feedback
- 9) Revise
- 10) Finalize with Sr. Leadership and Communicate

Expedited Approach

- 1) Identify persons who will provide input into process. Assemble group.
- 2) Considering mission and vision, strengths, and strategy, brainstorm organization capabilities key to success. Review list, explain why each has been selected, and narrow list to those that have the greatest agreement (10 or less).
- 3) In small groups, recall and tell brief positive and negative stories that impacted organization success in customer facing activities such as sales, fulfillment, and customer service. What were the critical competencies that spelled success or failure?
- 4) Review *focus 54* list or other competency library for additional critical competencies
- 5) Review, fine-tune list. Ensure competencies are critical, strategic, and unique.
- 6) Using competency list, individually cast votes on core competencies. Select top 5-7.

Next Steps:

- Vet competencies with significant others.
- Build behavioral examples and rating scales leveraging data from step 3 as possible
- Determine how core competencies will be incorporated into integrated talent management, short term and long term.
- Develop, implement communication strategy

Example of a Core Competency Model

Typically, organizations have 4-7 core individual competencies. If they also use manager and leader core competencies, they typically have 3-6. Therefore, an individual contributor might have 5 core competencies for individual contributors. A leader might have the an additional 4 leadership competencies. Here is an example of an individual core competency model.

Integrity	Customer Focus
Learning Agility	Accountability
Teamwork	Leveraging Resources

Common Individual Core Competencies

1. Integrity	2. Communication
3. Customer Focus	4. Learning Agility
5. Adaptability	6. Teamwork
7. Initiative	8. Innovation
9. Problem Solving	10. Commitment
11. Business Acumen	12. Accountability
13. Judgment	14. Values and Respects Others
15. Safety	16. Leveraging Resources

Common Supervisor/Manager Core Competencies

1. Drive for Results/PM	2. Coaching Others
3. Developing Others	4. Strategic Thinking
5. Supporting Change	6. Decision-Making
7. Team Leadership	8. Motivating and Rewarding
9. Planning and Prioritizing	10. Leveraging Diversity

Common Leader Core Competencies

1. Visionary Thinking	2. Leading Change
3. Continuous Improvement	4. Financial Management/Resource Stewardship
5. Conflict Resolution?	6. Team Building
7. Political Savvy	8. Human Capital Management
9. Negotiating	10. External Awareness