

Historical Snap Shot of Competency

Author: Newturn Wikirefu . September 2020

The roots of the competency framework can be traced over 50 years ago. During that era, contributors to the field included John Flanagan, Robert White, David McClelland, Richard Boyatzis, Daniel Goleman, Patricia McLagan, Lyle and Signe Spencer, C.K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel, David Ulrich, David Dubois, and William Rothwell. According to Draganidis & Mentzas (2006), the introduction of competency-based approaches within the corporate environment has started gathering momentum in the 1970s and their development and use since then have been rapid. David McClelland, a noted Harvard Psychologist has pioneered the competency movement across the world. His classic books on “Talent and Society”, “Achievement Motive”, “The Achieving Society”, “Motivating Economic Achievement” and “Power the Inner Experience” have brought several new dimensions of the competencies.

The article was written by David McClelland in the *American Psychologist* in 1973, ‘*Testing for competence rather than for intelligence*’ has marked a turning point in the history of the competency movement. In the article he presented that traditional achievement and intelligence scores may not be able to predict job success and what is required is to profile the exact competencies required to perform a given job effectively and measure them using a variety of tests. Later, McBer, a consulting firm co-founded by David McClelland and his associate Berlew has specialized in mapping the competencies of entrepreneurs and managers across the world. They even developed a new and yet simple methodology called Behavior Event Interviewing (BEI) to map the competencies.

Consequently, the quest for theory and tools that could reliably predict effectiveness in the workplace began (McClelland, 1973). In 1982 it was adopted and popularised by the prominent scholar called Boyatzis, who first drew together comprehensive data that had been collected in the USA using the McBer & Company ‘*Job Competence Assessment*’ method. According to Simpson (2002), since then competency has become a formidable force to reckon with in HR development practices. The word competency comes from a Latin word meaning “*suitable*” (Bueno & Tubbs, 2004).

Raising the business case for competency profiling in your organisation.

There is ample evidence that competencies form the bedrock for effective and superior performance but many organisations do not have competency frameworks. The reasons for introducing a competency model in your organisation lies in the many benefits it entails. According to Hondeghem et al., (2005) competency management is seen as a vehicle for bringing about cultural change and injecting more flexibility, adaptability, and entrepreneurship into organisations. It helps to attract and develop talented employees, identify the right person for a job, performing succession planning, training analysis, and other core human resource (HR) functions (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006). Competencies can be used as a powerful communication tool because they provide a common language and a common understanding of the behaviours needed to achieve organisational objectives. The competency framework can be streamlined into various human resources functions:

Planning and Organisational Design:

- It is used as the basis for assessing competency needs and gaps, performance, aspirations, ability, engagement, and potential.

It supports an organisation's strategic plan by:

- enabling the organisation to promote its values, goals, and objectives
- Identifying core competencies for specific jobs
- Providing a common and same language for understanding the organisational needs, values, and culture
- Directing the systematic management and growth of talent
- Facilitating organisational learning
- Developing succession plans for key organisational roles.

Recruitment

- It provides indicators for the behaviours, attitudes, skills, and technical knowledge required for specific jobs within an organisation
- Meaningful indicators support a standardised and competency-based recruitment and selection process.
- It also provides candidates with clear expectations for both the hiring process and the job itself, enabling them to prepare and showcase their most relevant experience.
- when business-critical competencies are targeted in interviews and assessments, the talent entering the organization is better prepared to meet business needs

Learning and Development

- Competencies provide the framework on which individuals can build development plans and managers can provide feedback.
- It identifies the desired levels of personal and organisational performance.
- By comparing the framework's expectations with actual staff performance, managers and supervisors can identify areas where additional training or support are required
- Competencies offer clarity to senior leaders as they build talent pools to meet business needs.

Performance Management

- A competency framework sets out values, acceptable behaviour, and expectations for new and existing staff.
- It sets clear objectives and benchmarks and identifies gaps between expected and actual levels of performance.
- It serves as the basis for both self-assessment and supervisory performance evaluations.
- Enables employees to know what is expected of them

- The competency framework is useful in evaluating employees and providing feedback throughout the performance cycle.

What is Competency?

There is no common definition of competency but different scholars came up with different definitions of competence. Competency is “a collection of related knowledge, skills, abilities, and other personal characteristics working in concert to produce outstanding performance.

Roe (2002), **competencies** are a set of *personality traits, knowledge, skills, abilities* and *behaviours* that an employee applies in performing his/her work and are the key employee-related levers for achieving results that are relevant to the organisation’s business strategies.

Boyatzis (1982) defines a competency as “an underlying characteristic of a person which results ineffective and/or superior performance in a job”. According to Boyatzis (1982), a job competency represents ability.

Sparrow (1997), competencies are people’s behavioural repertoires, i.e. their sets of behavioural patterns, which are related to work performance and distinguish excellent from average performers

Vakola et al. (2007), stated that “an individual job-related competency is the underlying set of behavioural patterns of an employee related to effective and/or superior work performance, acting both at the individual and collective level (effective/superior performance both in solitary and inter-personal work), and that provide the organisation in which they are implemented and applied with a sustainable competitive advantage.

According to Karts and Khan competency is “A cluster of related knowledge, skills and attitudes that affect a major part of one’s job (a role or responsibility), that correlates with performance in the job, which can be measured against well-accepted standards, and that can be improved with training and development.

What is a Competency Model?

To use competencies as a strategic HRM tool, they need to be integrated into a competency model or framework. A competency framework is a narrative description of the critical competencies required for fully successful or exemplary performance in a job, role, or an organization.

A competency model is developed through competency profiling. **Competency Profiling** is the process of breaking the job into its constituent parts and identify specific skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours needed to perform the same successfully.

According to **Lucian Cernusca and Cristina Dima (2007)**, a competency model is a valid, observable, and measurable list of the knowledge, skills, and attributes demonstrated through behaviour that results in an outstanding performance in a particular work context. A competency model is a set of

competencies that include the key behaviours required for excellent performance in a particular role.

A competency framework describes the various levels of knowledge, skills, and attitudes individuals must show to advance the goals and objectives of the organisation or sector. A competency framework clarifies both organisation-wide and job-specific expectations to ensure consistent performance, measurement, and results. The components of a competency framework include:

- Competency domains that describe sets of related competencies
- Individual competencies that fall under each domain
- Behavioural indicators that demonstrate proficiency for each competency at each of three performance levels.
- The core values of a competency framework are often represented within the individual competencies.
- Limited behaviours can also be included and they define unconstructive behaviour that needs to be changed.

What are the objectives of a Competency Model?

- To develop a competency framework that is aligned with your organisation's vision, mission, values, objectives and strategy
- To assess the current competencies and, to identify the competencies required and gaps in alignment with your organisational strategy
- To develop behavioural anchors for those competencies
- To identify and define the current core and technical competencies
- To establish the job families and map them to your competency framework
- To develop behavioural descriptors for each requisite competency
- To develop competency indicators that are observable and definable actions which show what performance should look like.
- To develop a competency rating scale, which allows for determining the level at which an incumbent has a specific competency to determine any gaps and possible developmental needs for improvement in performance.
- To integrate competencies into various HR processes

What needs to be done when developing and implementing a Competency Model?

- Identify and define the current ***core, technical and behavioural*** competencies
- Establish the ***job families*** and map them to the competency framework
- Develop ***descriptors*** for each requisite competency i.e develop a document with skills, knowledge and behavioural indicators for each identified competency
- Develop ***competency indicators*** that are observable and definable actions which show what performance should look like
- Develop a ***competency rating scale*** which determines the level at which the incumbent has a specific competency to determine any gaps and possible development needs for improvement in performance

- Assess the competency levels

What are the Desired Results of a Competency Framework?

- identification and definition of core, technical and behavioural competencies
- specification of the main competency clusters/domains
- classification of competencies
- establishment of behavioural anchors for each competency cluster
- identification and definition of proficiency levels for each competency cluster
- ranking of the competencies
- establishment of job families
- assessment of the competency levels

Sources:

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Newturn Wikirefu is the Talent Acquisition Manager at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm.

Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950/2900276/2900966 or cell number +0784 597343 or email: newturn@ipcconsultants.com or visit our website at www.ipcconsultants

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