

The Competencies that are important for HR Professionals

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The origin of human resources competency approach can be traced back to the staffing decisions during the World War 2. Over the ensuing years, the theory and application of competencies has become a central paradigm in HR practices and it was adopted and popularised by (McClelland 1976; Boyatzis 1982a; McClelland & Boyatzis 1982; McLagan & Suhadolnik 1989; Spencer & Spencer 1993; Schoonover 1998)

According to Ulrich and Beatty (1999), to function effectively, HR professionals must master the necessary competencies and that mastery of HR knowledge comes from knowing the concepts, language, logic, research and practices of HR. The competencies within HR should vary by type of position (entry level, human resources officer, manager and director). Competence of an individual as defined by Becker, Huselid and Ulrich (2001) is the knowledge, skills, abilities and personality characteristics that directly influence one's performance. According to the Society for Human Resources Management, competencies have evolved from being a specialized and narrow application to being a leading method for diagnosing, framing and improving most aspects of HR.

What are the purposes of HR Competencies?

Over the years the competency approach has been specifically applied to the following purposes:

- to specify human characteristics that are required for job performance (McClelland 1973);
- to communicate and train people to improve performance (McClelland 1973);
- to monitor and measure performance (McClelland 1976);
- to predict superior human performance (Spencer & Spencer 1993);
- to match individuals with jobs (Kolb 1984);
- to implement business strategy and create competitive advantage (Intagliata, Ulrich & Smallwood 2000);
- to integrate and harmonize potentially fragmented management and HR practices (Intagliata, Ulrich & Smallwood 2000);
- to develop high value adding HR departments (Ulrich 1987; Nadler & Nadler 1989; Schuler 1990; Morris 1996; Ulrich 1997; Losey 1999).

What competencies HR professionals should possess in order for them to function effectively?

Alongside the changing demands of the HR professionals are the new competencies enabling HR to be effective in driving the firm's performance and creating sustainable competitive advantages. According to Ulrich (2001) HR cannot expand its role in an organisation without the requisite expertise.

In the popularly cited and used "Michigan's HR Competency Research," Brochbank, Ulrich and James

(1997) identified five major competencies expected of HR professional:

- Strategic Thinking
- Personal Credibility
- HR Delivery
- Business Knowledge
- HR Technology

Becker et al., (2001) suggested adding strategic HR performance management as a sixth competency. Becker et al., (2001), the strategic performance management strategies support the notion that HR managers must think differently about HR. The core dimensions of this competency are critical causal thinking, understanding principles of good measurement, estimating causal relationships and communicating HR strategic performance results to senior line managers. Becker strongly argued that with a stronger competency in strategic performance management, an HR professional would be able to show correlation and causal relationships between HR systems and financial outcomes, customer value proposition and even competitive advantages. According to the research done by Brockbank et al. (1999) HR activities positively impact business performance by 10 % and strategic contribution accounts for 43% of HR's total impact on business performance which almost the impact of any other domain.

A corpus body of research evidence pointed to the relationship of HR and HR competencies to increasing profitability and creating competitive advantages. According to Losey (1999) there was a wake-up call for the human resources practitioners in the 1990s. He further purported that more than ever, organisations now seek greater creativity and productivity from people and part of the strategy in being creative and maximizing productivity is to possess the necessary competencies enabling these outcomes.

Strategic Contribution

The HR professionals should have influence on large-scale strategic contributions such as culture management, fast change, strategy decision making and market-driven connectivity. According to the study done by Ulrich et al. HR professionals who are actively involved in culture management, fast change, strategic decision making and market driven connectivity have substantive influence on business performance and the HR professionals in high performing firms exhibit these competencies to a much greater degree than do professionals in low performing firms. According to Ulrich (2001) et al.'s competency model the strategic contribution accounts for the HR 's greatest influence on business performance. There are four factors that have been found to comprise the strategic contribution dimension and these are:

1. Culture Management

This called for the need for HR Professionals to ensure that the company's HR practices are designed and delivered to create and reinforce the desired culture by translating the desired culture into specific employee and executive behaviours.

1. *Change Management*

This calls for the need for HR Professionals to be change champions. The HR Professionals need to monitor progress of key change initiatives, capture important learnings and apply these learnings to improve future change efforts.

1. *Strategic Decision Making*

The HR Professionals must ask insightful questions related to strategic direction of the company and they need to make a meaningful contribution and in doing that there need to have interpersonal skills as well as the intellectual capacity to play an effective “devil’s advocate”.

1. *Market Driven Connectivity*

It is the process of leveraging dynamic market information to create a unified and responsive organisation

According to Wright, McMahan, McCormick and Sherman (1998) the increase in the global nature of the business has prompted the need for organisations to utilise all of their available resources in order to survive and succeed. The rise of this phenomena has triggered the need for the reconfiguration of the HR function and this called for the need for the HR executive to provide input into the firm’s strategy to ensure that the firm has the human resources capabilities to implement new strategies and the HR function needs to ensure that the HR programs and practices are in place to effectively implement the strategy. Given this background it is apparently clear that HR professionals must be fully competent in strategy development, implementation and evaluation.

In a study done by Hayton (2003) it has been discovered that business knowledge, effective communication, credibility and integrity, and systemic perspective were identified as competencies corresponding to structures and needs in organisations. He further pointed out that revamping HR’s visions, strategies. Structures, systems and processes cannot be effectively implemented if the new competencies required are not being developed. Therefore there is a critical need to develop the core HR competencies in organisations.

HR Delivery

The HR professionals need to deliver the foundational HR infrastructure of staffing, training and development, organization design, and performance management

Personal Credibility

Personal credibility consists of three sub-factors: achieving results, effective relationships and communication skills.

1. Achieving Results

The most important aspect of personal credibility is achieving a track record of results.

1. Effective Relationships

Given that HR professionals focus on the human side of business, the expectation that professionals are able to foster and maintain effective interpersonal skills is reasonable.

1. Communication Skills

The HR Professionals must have excellent verbal and communication skills.

Business Knowledge

The HR professionals must have knowledge of the integrated business value change, the business value proposition, and labour law

HR Technology

This calls for the need for HR professionals to know how to apply technology to HR processes.

Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion there is no credible denial that a competency model can serve as an integrative framework for an organization's entire HR system. It can help align the HR system vertically with the organization's strategic objectives, or horizontally with other HR functions, to ensure harmony and consistency across the many facets of HR activities that impact human performance.

Source:

Brockbank, W., & Ulrich, D. (2004). Competency Toolkit

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