

## An overview of Managerial Competencies

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### ABSTRACT

*It is a borderless and fast changing world. Competition is the order of the day. Any organization not able to meet the demands of competition will perish. It is neither capital, technology nor other material resources, but the caliber of people across levels that provides the much needed competitive edge to the organization. Our changing world demands that people in organization be equipped with right competencies to meet the need of an ever-changing landscape. Organizations world over have found that they are successful only when their employees have the competencies necessary to meet both current and future business needs. There is no denying of the fact that it is an organizational necessity to have competent people, and it is also a necessity on the part of the individual employee to have the required competencies to contribute and grow. This is vital for the survival and success of both the organization as well as the individual employee.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Competency, Managerial competency*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Human resources are what provide a competitive advantage to any business. In the current business environment, the identification, application and development of managerial competencies has become critically important in the management and development of human resources.

Human resources are what provide a competitive advantage to any business. In the current business environment, the identification, application and development of managerial competencies has become critically important in the management and development of human resources. This paper deals with understanding, what is competency? What are management competencies?

#### What Is Competency?

‘Competencies are sets of behaviors that are instrumental in the delivery of superior job performance’. In other words, competency describes a specific set of behaviors that leads to superior job performance. The behavior is based upon an individual’s knowledge, skills, attitude, talent, values & motives. It is possible to observe competencies because it is something that someone actually does. Skill and knowledge makes the smaller segment and are relatively easier to observe, whereas the deep underneath elements of attitude, talent & values are difficult to observe.

Someone who is successful leader could be observed ‘to provide the team with a clear sense of direction, take charge, organize resources & steer others towards successful goal achievement’. These behaviours can be clubbed into a cluster and the whole cluster can be termed as ‘providing direction’ which is a subset of leadership competency.

Competency has its origins in the Latin word 'competentia' which means “is authorized to judge” as well as “has the right to speak” (Caupin et al., 2006). The competency approach to human resources management is not new. The early Romans practiced a form of competency profiling in attempts to detail the attributes of a “good Roman soldier” (Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006). McClelland (1976) described “competency” as the characteristics underlying superior performance. He is credited with introducing the idea of “competency” into the human resource literature; in his efforts to assist the United States Information Agency improve its selection. The terms Competence and Competency are sometime used interchangeably. However there is a substantial difference. While it is possible to define the terms with substantial clarity it would be better to understand the difference from an example, an analogy. A simplest analogy can be drawn from ‘driving a motor car’. Operating a timely combination of clutch, gear, accelerator, steering and brake is the basic knowledge and set of skills. That is ‘Competence’. Only learning this basic knowledge and skills and getting to drive does not make ‘Competency’. Pre driving checks, adjusting rearview mirror, driving within speed limits, following driving norms & rules, respecting pedestrians, not honking unnecessarily, not jumping lanes, checking tyre pressures regularly, ensuring safety of car, its occupants and of others, getting best fuel efficiency by well balanced speed and gear changing and such other ‘associated behaviours’ make driving a competency. A “Competence” is a skill, an ability, a capability, some form of dexterity, a functional proficiency which makes it possible to get a job done. Another more complex analogy can be drawn from a ‘Successful Leader’. Giving orders and making people complete a task is not Leadership Competency. A successful leader could be observed ‘to provide the team a clear sense of direction, shared objectives, taking charge, making resources available, motivating and empowering team members, taking timely review and steering the team towards completion of a task’. Leadership, as a competency is a cluster of related behaviours which a successful leader demonstrates consistently. An excellent performer demonstrates such behaviours on the job consistently and makes out a clear comparison between an excellent performer, a good or an average performer and a poor or a non performer. Skill and knowledge make a smaller segment of the competency and are relatively easy to observe whereas deep underneath elements of attitude, values and motives are difficult to observe but a competency would not be complete without them.

Managerial Competencies assume a specific meaning with reference to the role of a manager in an organization. While anyone who has a responsibility to manage resources for getting synergistic output from resources would mean manager, for the purpose of this study, the researcher has covered managers in different functions at different levels – junior, middle and senior, in industrial organizations as stated in the abstract. The researcher has studied competency models prevalent in industries and dealt with at length in this study.

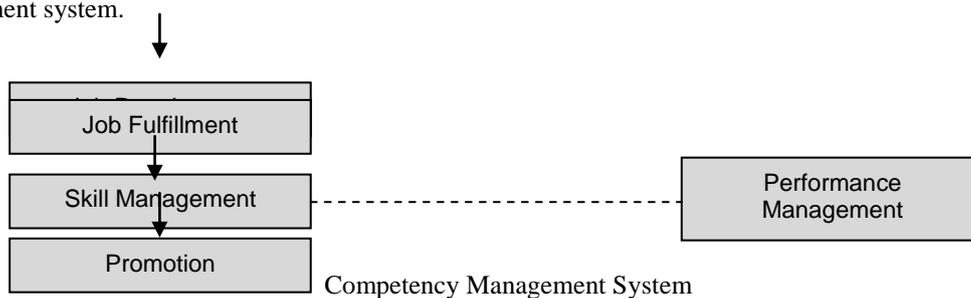
The ‘Management’ as a function, process, task, and responsibility happens at different hierarchical levels – broadly understood as Junior, Middle, Senior and Top, The junior level has a narrower compass of responsibility, the task/ job is very well defined, performance parameters are far too clearer and results are quick

to be seen/ observed. The consequences of an error are easier to be corrected. As the level in hierarchy increases, the job is not so well defined, performance parameters are increasingly more complex and not so easy to be seen and observed ‘there and there’ itself. The consequences of error could be far more damaging and not easy to be corrected. At the highest level – at Chief Executive Officer’s level, the job is so complex that it cannot be defined in parts, fractions and components. An error at this level would have huge consequences for the organization and there would be a very minimal chance to correct the error to minimize the damage. The damage may not only be a single occurrence but a perpetual one as well. There the competencies at each such level differ in terms of associated behaviours. While some competencies may be common for these hierarchical levels, the associated behaviours will be distinctly different. Also, some competencies may not be applicable for some levels of hierarchy.

### Myths about Competency

Competence is not performance but is a state of being, a qualification to perform. It is, in relation to performance, a necessary but not sufficient condition. Workers cannot perform to standards without competencies. But competencies cannot guarantee that workers will perform adequately. Sometimes, extremely competent workers may fail on the job due to a variety of personal or environmental factors. Those lacking competencies can make up for a lot of shortcomings with exceptionally hard work. Competence has to be there but it cannot guarantee results, nor can its absence always predict failure. Competency measurement should not be confused with performance measurement. Competencies are all about being qualified to do the work in a particular position. Performance, on the other hand, is the result of the actual work. A blend of these two activities may cause confusion and eventually disaster. The organizations, by mixing them up, may end up doing a poor job of both competency assessment and performance management which is detrimental to the entire organization.

As shown in Figure below, it is critical to keep a competency management system separate from a performance management system.



Competence is not process input -- The classic four M’s of Total Quality Management have nothing to do with a worker’s qualification to do a job. They are resources that are used to complete the process. Herein, manpower denotes the number of people required to perform the process, not their capabilities; materials, methods and machinery are part of the process as designed. These are resources used by the people to complete the process. Thus they are tools, not competence.

Competence is not process output -- outputs are the business results of a process. They are productive outcomes of competent workers. Results are not competencies. Process results are just one of the many measures of

competence. It is easy to mistake outputs for competence because competence is closely related to output. But, these are cause and effect relationships, not equivalencies.

Competence is not a trait -- A trait is a distinguishing characteristic of personality. Personality traits are formed at an early age and it is believed that certain elements of personality may be genetically determined. Even with the help of a trained therapist it is hard to change personality. Traits end up being what someone brings to the job. Once people are on the job, typical development activities have little chance of changing personality. It is said 'hire for traits, train for skills and fire for attitudes'. Traits are attributes such as kind obedient, reverent timid, thrifty and courteous. However, traits that have creped into the competency model are openness, team oriented, empathy, achievement oriented, problem solving, etc. Each competency should be defined by what it means. Competency projects deal with performance issues only. Consequently, traits have no place in a competency model.

Competence is not capability or ability -- Capability is a work-place capacity. It connotes potential future performance. Ability is a reflection of talent, of being able to perform. Neither of them guarantees performance. One may have sales ability, administrative ability, one may be capable of taking independent action or capable of resolving problems on his/her own.

The competency process should consider not what workers can potentially do or what talents they could have, if they choose to use them, but what workers actually need, to be qualified to do. Thus capabilities and abilities are not part of the model. Competence is not a motivational attitude -- Motivational attitudes are integral to the personality of a worker, such as aggression, self-confidence, decisiveness, ambition, commitment. Do not make the mistake of including motivational elements while defining competence.

## II. CONCLUSION

Competency is underlying characteristics of an individual, which are related to effective performance. A competency is a set of skills, related knowledge and attributes that allow an individual to successfully perform a task or an activity within a specific function or job. The liberalized economy has intensified the spiral of competition. The scene has undergone a major change. Instead of capital, licenses and such other factors, people have become the primary source of competitive advantage. In this business environment, there is increasing pressure on managers to perform better and better. The organizations are getting thinner and leaner and the role of a manager is not regulated by standard job descriptions. The role is no more purely hierarchical but has become highly networked. An excellent academic record automatically does not guarantee success on the job. A job demands competencies and performance of a manager in accordance with the competencies exhibited by best and successful performers.

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