12 Competencies: Which Ones Should Your People Have?

By ExecutiveBrief

Employees who have the right attitude that translates to the best behaviour are said to be the more competent. Find out why.

The concept of competency as a factor in recruitment, selection, hiring and employee performance evaluation has become very popular not only among HR practitioners but to the management echelons as well. Yet, in the more than three decades since it became a buzzword, still many are really unfamiliar with the details of the concept. More so with its appropriate application and utility.

Competency is still equated or defined as skills, ability to perform, capacity, and knowledge. As such, the term has been used loosely. While it does not really matter much when used casually to mean physical and mental abilities, it does matter when used in job analysis to describe job requirements and performance standards. Competency takes more than skills and knowledge. It requires the right and appropriate attitude that eventually translates to behaviour.

Competency is the sum total of skills, knowledge and attitudes, manifested in the employee's behaviour. It is the "means" to achieve the "ends." A golfer for example, may have the skills to drive 300 yards, the knowledge why the golf ball fades or draws, yet he is not competent if he does not practice or if he gets easily affected by his opponent's better shots. A computer service customer representative may be very skilful and knowledgeable in repairing computers, but if he does not arrive on an appointed time to the client, is similarly incompetent.

For managers, competencies are vital if they want better performance in their employees. Whether during recruitment and selection phases or while already on board, competencies should be identified and studied. It should always be borne in mind that the competencies required of each job position differ from one another. In the job analysis and writing of job descriptions, quick guides can make the task easier. The following factors should be considered in determining the appropriate competencies:

1. Level of Decision-Making, Responsibilities and Authorities
2. Level of Internal Personnel Inter-Action
3. Level of Customer Contact and Inter-Action
4. Level of Physical and Aptitudinal Skills and Knowledge

Many studies have been undertaken on the subject of job competency for managerial and supervisory positions, and they are one in categorising and lumping them into:

1. Administrative Competencies;
2. Communication Competencies;
3. Supervisory Competencies, and;
4. Cognitive Competencies

These competencies were found to be the most important or vital for managerial and supervisory effectiveness. For the rank and file employees, the level of physical and aptitudinal competencies form the larger part in consideration. This is due to the lack or absence of decision making tasks that involve significant physical and manpower resources of the company. In many cases, their jobs entail routines, clerical and manual. Common to all jobs in the rank and file category are competencies that enhance inter-personal relationship, physical skills, and job knowledge.

As one goes up the higher ladders of organisational positions, responsibilities widen in scope, authorities increase, and people management becomes more exacting. As a consequence, competencies will have to change or the mix of it will have to be altered in order to adjust to the requirements of the job. If an accounting clerk or a bookkeeper for example, is promoted to the position of an accounting supervisor, his competencies will have to be enhanced. Aside from maintaining his technical skill in computing and bookkeeping, he would need to be skilful in coaching, mentoring, scheduling of work, monitoring, appraising staff, and team building. The same goes true for a Finance Manager who is promoted as General Manager, where the competencies would require more of weighing risks and making decisions, setting goals and standards, plotting directions, leading the organisation and inspiring the employees to excellence, rather than competencies in supervision, resource management and solving specific problems. In detail, these competencies would be the following:

**Administrative Competencies which involves "management of the job" and this includes more specifically:**

1. Management of Time and Priority Setting
2. Goals and Standards Setting
3. Work Planning and Scheduling

**Communication Competencies that comprise of:**

1. Listening and Organising
2. Clarity of Communication
3. Getting Objective Information

**Supervisory or Building Teams Competencies that encompasses:**

1. Training, Mentoring and Delegating
2. Evaluating Employees and Performance
3. Advising and Disciplining

**And, Cognitive Competencies which involve:**

1. Problem Identification and Solution
2. Assessing Risks and Decision-Making
3. Thinking Clearly and Analytically
1. Management of Time and Priority Setting

Cutting across all position levels, time management is considered to be a required competency that must be possessed by everybody. It is the ability to manage both one’s time as well as others’. It includes self-discipline, controlling interruptions by moulding the behaviour of others who have varying priorities, and being time-effective and time-efficient.

2. Goals and Standards Setting

Setting goals and standards are usually competencies that are required of managerial and supervisory positions. It is about the ability to determine activities and projects toward measurable goals and standards, setting these in collaboration with others so as to arrive at a clear understanding and elicit commitment.

3. Work Planning and Scheduling

Like time management, this competency must be possessed by managerial and supervisory employees and to those that are engaged in production. It is about controlling manpower assignments and processes by using the major tools and techniques of management. This includes the following skills: analysing complex tasks and breaking them into manageable units, selecting and managing resources appropriate to the tasks, using systems and techniques to plan and schedule the work, and setting checkpoints and controls for monitoring progress.

4. Listening and Organising

Listening and organising are communication competencies that deal with relating to people in the organisation. It is about the ability to understand, organise, and analyse what one is hearing in order to decide what to think and do in response to a message. These competencies are appropriate for employees who deal with customers and those who work as a team, either as a leader or a member. Specifically, they include skills like identifying and testing inferences and assumptions, overcoming barriers to effective listening, summarising and reorganising a message for recall, and withholding judgment that can bias responses to a message.

5. Clarity of Communication

Giving clear information is a competency that should be required of managerial and supervisory employees. Whether verbally or in written forms, the messages conveyed to audiences (whether internal staff or customers) should be clear and concise and should attain the objectives. The skills would consist of a) overcoming physical, psychological, and semantic barriers in interactions with others; b) keeping on target and avoiding digressions; c) using persuasion effectively; and d) maintaining a climate of mutual benefit and trust.

6. Getting Objective Information

For positions involving substantial people management, getting objective information is a critical competency requirement in order to ensure fairness. This competency is about the ability to use questions, probes, and interviewing techniques to obtain unbiased information and to interpret it appropriately. It considers such skills as: using directive, non-directive, projective and reflecting questions effectively, employing the funnel technique of probing, using probing methods to elicit additional information, recognising latent and underlying meanings, confirming understanding and attaining agreement.
7. Training, Mentoring and Delegating

These competencies should be required of supervisors and managers as well. They involve the ability to develop people under them to attain higher levels of excellence. The skills could consist of coaching, advising, transferring of knowledge and skills, and teaching and pinpointing employees where tasks can be transferred with trust and confidence.

8. Evaluating Employees and Performance

The ability to undertake a constructive performance evaluation involving joint assessment of past performance, agreement on future expectations are managerial and supervisory competencies. The skills would consist of ability to develop parameters of evaluation, benchmarking and face to face confrontation with the employees being evaluated without any bias and hesitation.

9. Advising and Disciplining

The ability to advise and counsel as well impose discipline in a positive manner are competencies required of managerial and supervisory positions that handle large number of employees. This is to restore, within the acceptable range of standards, the employees' performance while maintaining respect and trust. It also involves the ability to impose penalties and sanctions with firmness and resolve in appropriate cases.

10. Problem Identification and Solution

Problem identification and arriving at solutions cut across organisational functions and job positions. It is about the ability to identify barriers that prevent achieving goals and standards. It also involves the application of systematic sets of procedures to eliminate and reduce the problem origins and causes. It requires skills like distinguishing between problems, symptoms and indicators, inputs and outcomes, gathering and assessing evidence relating to causes, and plotting a decision matrix and eventually choosing and recommending the best options. This competency should be required to positions that engage in evaluation, whether in managerial, supervisory, or technical job levels.

11. Assessing Risks and Decision-Making

Assessing risks and decision-making are competencies required of higher managerial positions where decision-making can involve commitment of company resources and processes that could have company-wide implications. Like problem identification and solution competencies, assessing risks and decision-making involve the ability to construct a decision matrix that aids to identify and evaluate alternatives and options, identify limits, desirables, and risks to be considered, assign weights to each option and choose the best option to achieve the desired goals and standards.

12. Thinking Clearly and Analytically

The ability to apply clear and logical thinking is a competency required for both supervisory and managerial positions. The competencies include skills as determining valid premises arriving at logical conclusions from them, separating fact from hearsay, unwarranted assumption and false inferences, applying inductive and deductive logic appropriately, culling of logical fallacies, invalid premises and conclusions based on insufficient information.
As a basic process in determining competencies during job analysis, writing of job specifications and developing performance assessment instruments, one can easily be guided by plotting jobs against the 12 major competencies previously mentioned. Choosing which competencies and the mix should follow, with the most important competency taking precedence over the others. The degree and level of competencies that will be required will vary according to scope of responsibilities, authorities, people involvement, and decision-making powers. Putting them in a matrix could provide a visual guide that would make the tasks easier and convenient.

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