"Competency Management: HR for Adults"

Part One of Three
"What is Competency Management?"

WeCrut3.com
www.wecrut3.com

Contents of all Three Parts

PART ONE: WHAT IS COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT?

The Right Approach

HR professionals have been talking about competency management and competency based approaches for a number of years. Conferences have been held in both Canada and the United States. Competency has been an HR buzzword since the late 90's. But just what is competency management? How does it relate to the operation of modern organizations?

The best way to understand competency management is to begin by over-simplifying. Competency management is just skill management by another name. Although this is largely true, it also hides some important points. This will become clearer after a little bit of history.

Competency based approaches are not new. The first classic academic article on the topic, David McCelland's "Testing for competence rather than intelligence" was published in 1973. Essentially, McCelland argued for a behavior based approach to ability assessment, wanting to get away from the mystique and the mystery of formal intelligence testing. Given the fame of this Harvard psychologist (known for his work on both "the achievement need" and the "power need" in adults), his call was taken seriously.

At the same time, the behavioral objective movement in curriculum development stressed the need for educators and staff development professionals to be concrete about the new behaviors they expected participants to demonstrate at the end of the training programs.

A Competency = Observable Behavior

A competency based approach starts and stops with observable behavior. An individual's competencies are what that person can do, and in fact does do.

A person's competencies may be the result of any one of a number of things:

- ◦ personality traits,
- ◦ past education or training,
- ◦ coaching or mentoring by peers or superiors,
- ◦ short or long term developmental assignments to a position or project,
- ◦ self initiated reading or education,

or finally,

- ◦ personal values that lead one to prefer certain behaviors over others.

One, or more in interaction, of these may be the reason that a person does things "competently" in a job. Behavior visible to others is the sign

that the person has the capability to do a task – a competency.

The problem with these underlying factors is that it is difficult for others to access them directly. You may believe that another person has a value, but you can only infer this from what the person said or did. You may read a statement in a resume that says a person has taken a course, but does that mean they can in fact do the things suggested by the course title? You make guesses about another's personality traits, but even trained psychologists can only suggest what they might be, based on their testing procedures or their careful detailed observation of the individual. Matching people to jobs on a day-to-day basis does not work well when based on such indirect tools. Fortunately, competency management provides more elegant and useful one.

Competencies are observable behaviors. Others experience your competencies when they interact with you in work and social settings. They perceive and react to your behavior. You respond to theirs.

Others have immediate access to your competencies. They can describe what you have done. They have evidence of what you can do. Past behavior is a good predictor of future behavior. Competencies, therefore, have great potential for use as a person-to-position matching tool. But they need to be placed in a framework of disciplined practice in order to do so.

A Framework That Creates Repeatable Practices

This framework starts with the idea of a competency description. A competency description is a sentence which uses day-to-day business language to describe behaviors that people do at work. The fact that the language used is day-to-day work language, *not the specialist language of a psychologist*, is crucial. It allows all of us in the work place to understand, and to work with, competencies as a useful tool.

A competency description starts with a **verb**, and describes something a person **does** or **produces**. There are two general forms. The first focuses on what people do (process competency descriptions). For example;

> "Prepares and cooks the vegetables included in each night's menu"

might very well be a competency required of the vegetable chef's position in a hotel kitchen.

The second form focuses on what it produced. It emphasizes result (result competency descriptions). An example from the desktop publishing world follows.

> "Produces camera ready art work for client brochures, using the latest version of Quark Express on a Windows 7 computer, importing text as

from word processing programs including Microsoft Office and Word Perfect and artwork from graphics programs such as Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, CorelDraw …"

Notice that it is possible to include specialist business language. After all, one of the necessary competencies a person working in desktop publishing must have is the ability to communicate effectively with others in this work place. Including terms from the day-to-day language of people working in the area is appropriate.

When you look at these two examples, you see that the first one states both the process and the product. The same is true of the second. This is normal. The point is to produce behavioral descriptions which are useful, rather than procedurally pure.

Process competency descriptions are most helpful for describing work that is ongoing and repetitive. The same result or product is produced over and over again, so it helps to focus on the processes or tasks.

Result competency descriptions are most useful where there is a variety of different ways of getting to the same result. How individuals produce the end product is not as important as what is produced. Taking a result approach works best in work environments where each example of an end product is significantly different from the others.

The process/result distinction gets blurred in day-to-day work with competency models. It is more helpful for educating people about how to create competency descriptions than it is for actually reading and using them. What counts is producing competency descriptions that anyone can read and understand. This allows them to make judgments about whether or not they and others can do the behaviors described.

Competency Descriptions are Organized into Competency Dictionaries.

At their simplest, these dictionaries are organized lists of the competency behaviors used in an organization. Selections are made from the lists and used to describe the competencies required in a specific position. In actual practice, the competencies in such dictionaries are broken down into two types: technical and social. [1]

Technical competencies are specific to the technical work done in a job. Two examples follow.

---

[1] Today, most commercial HRIS systems, e.g. PeopleSoft, provide competency dictionary functionality. They often have "start lists of competencies" preloaded into the competency dictionary. The competency dictionary functionality is linked to the position description functionality. This makes the job of the HR professional much easier. Energy that used to be needed for mechanics can now be directed to improving the quality and relevance of the competencies provided by the dictionary, and their use through the organization.

One comes from IT.

Translates business requirement specifications received from business analysts working with end users into automated business applications using the PHP programming language and the MySQL database environment Translates includes the following activities: designs, codes, debugs, and implements into production.

The second comes from manufacturing.

Runs the gear stamping production line using dies for gears produced by the die design group, passing the results to the gear finishing and polishing department. Run includes the following activities:

- o turns production schedules into specific production runs,
- o ensures the raw materials required for a run are available at appropriate points on the production line,
- o starts and monitors the production line during the run,
- o intervenes if necessary if difficulties are encountered during the run, correcting them and restarting the production run,
- o terminates the production run when complete.

The technical part of a competency dictionary can become quite large. Its size and complexity depends upon the technical complexity of the organization's work environment Technical competencies are firm/industry specific, being closely related to the technical characteristics of the assets and tools used to the work of an organization.

The second part of a competency dictionary contains competencies that describe work-related social interaction. Its structure and size is related to the social nature of the work environment. It tends to be structured by level: worker, supervisor, manager and executive. Overlaps often occur between these levels, with some competencies applying to all levels, and others specific to one or two.

Social competencies that describe how people interact tend to be generic across organizations and industries. This part of an organization's competency dictionary may be taken from, or based upon, generally available sources. WCI's General Management Competency Model[2] which is included in the

---

[2] This model is included as an appendix. It was developed by Workplace Competence International based on research done into

appendix is one example of such model.

Many competency models already exist. Some general management models have been published and are available in the public domain. Others can be bought from competency consulting firms and other organizations that have done extensive competency modeling in the past[3]. Technical competency models are often available through industry associations or professional groups.

All these sources are a good starting point for an organization's internal competency dictionary. Starting with such competency models teaches their users much about the process of creating competency descriptions. They are also a solid base that can be adapted to create a specific, locally relevant competency dictionary for an organization.

Adding Performance Grids

As organizations gain experience with competency based approaches, they often add "performance grids" to their competency dictionaries.

the nature of management work in North American enterprises.

[3] Professional associations and commercial organizations often provide similar models, either for free or under license. As long as the model is reasonably robust, achieved through careful research validation development, the differences between them matter less than the care and thoughtfulness with which they are used.

The competency dictionary is set up as a table or matrix. The competency behaviors form the left hand side, the rows of the table. Various performance levels appropriate to each competency behavior form the columns. Again, it is essential that they are observable behaviors.

Generally, there are between 3 and 5 columns, showing progressively higher levels of performance from left to right. The table that follows provides an example of a management competency described in this way.

Performance grid competency models are extremely useful for identifying superior performers. They also have benefits for managing individual development and career progression over time. They take considerably more work to develop than competency dictionaries which include only the lists of competency behaviors.

These grids are based on an underlying generic model of the observable difference between the levels. If an organization chooses to develop performance grids, the consistent use of the same underlying generic model of the observable differences between the levels will do much to increase their usefulness. Each specific grid needs to be checked back against the generic model to ensure that it is consistent.

An example of a generic model of performance grids follows. Once

again, because competency descriptions tell us about observable behavior, the generic scale below is presented in language that describes what others can observe.

1. **No** observable use of the competency at all.

2. Shows **beginner levels of capability**. More capable/experienced individual **actively coach or supervise the individual** to ensure that the results produced are of required quality and increase the capability of the individual to demonstrate the capability.

3. **Demonstrates the behavior described by the competency in most situations**. Only occasionally needs to refer to a more experienced individual for coaching or advice. Almost always produces results at the quality level required. When this is not the case, investigation by more experienced/capable individuals discover that there were unusual difficulties that led to quality of results being less than required.

4. **Demonstrates the behavior described by the capability in all situations**. If difficulties are encountered, goes to references or problem solves until the difficulty is resolved without referring to others. Output produced is always at the quality level required, even when difficulties are encountered. When appropriate, adjusts quality of results to the specific requirements of the situation.

5. **Demonstrates the capability in all situations. Always produces results of the appropriate required quality. Coaches/supervises others** in this competency, ensuring that their results are of the required quality, and that their capabilities in this area increase.

Figure 1.
An Example of a Competency Description
and a Performance Level Grid
Taken from a General Management Competency Dictionary

Competency 10	**Developing Others**
Behavior 2	Gives assignments to, or creates training opportunities for, others in a way which expands and deepens their abilities.

Performance Level Grid

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Gives others task assignments that are "learning" assignments, in that they require the person to acquire capabilities they do not currently have.	Gives others assignments that are clearly "learning" assignments, taking steps to dialogue with the person about what they need in the way of support and time to complete them successfully.	Plans and works with individuals to lay out a program of training opportunities and work assignments, tailored to allow each individual to acquire a new set of skills and abilities over a period of months.	Works with individuals to create a timetable (6 months to 2 years) of learning opportunities, work assignments and project postings that allow each individual to acquire, to prove and to deepen the skills and the abilities they need for career advancement.	Mentors individuals over a number of years, working with their direct supervisors and others, to ensure a series of position postings and training opportunities that develop an individual's full future potential.

Using Competency Models

As behavioral descriptions, competencies can be used in two ways. First, a person can describe his/her abilities by selecting elements of the competency dictionary to communicate what they are capable of to others. Second, a manager can select elements from the competency dictionary to describe the work that makes up a position. When applied to individuals, competency descriptions state what a person **can** do. When applied to positions, competency descriptions tell what an incumbent - a person deployed to this position - **must** do. Matching "can" to "must" is the essence of effective placement. Competency descriptions are excellent tools for this purpose.

Organizations often compile position or job descriptions for each type of position or job that exists in the organization. Competency descriptions taken from the organization's competency dictionary are used to describe the elements of the work done by each position. This position description can than be used in recruiting. Managers, and the people who work for them, can also use position descriptions to develop time specific performance targets and contracts[4]

---

[4] Modern HRIS computer applications often contain the functionality needed to develop position descriptions, catalogue personal competencies, and develop performance contracts. However, any size organization can still do all of this using tools such as Microsoft Office and e-mail if they do not

A single competency description may be re-used in many position descriptions in the organization. To create a new position description, an existing position description that is as close to the position as possible is selected. The competency elements of this position description are modified as necessary. Other competency elements from other existing position descriptions, or from the competency dictionary, are added as appropriate. Any new competency descriptions created for this position are placed in the competency dictionary, so that they can be re-used in future.

Competency Models Tend to be Industry Specific

Work tends to have similar characteristics across all of the organizations that make up an industry. As a result, position descriptions have elements which tend to be similar across an industry. Much of the work required to build competency based position descriptions useful to an organization may already have been done. The modifications to such available models will focus on adapting the language to match the organization's culture, and adding specific competency elements which are unique to the organization.

Of course, if the organization is at the leading edge of its industry, it may not be able to take advantage of

---

have access to an HRIS (Human Resource Information System).

past work in this way. The organization must then build new competency based position descriptions for positions which may not yet exist in the industry.

Often existing position descriptions provide a good starting point for thinking about the concrete details of a new position. Working with existing competency based position descriptions gives the people designing these future jobs insight into how to go about organizing work and tasks. As a result, the competency modeling process adds depth and concreteness to operational planning. It is often the best way to take a strategic initiative down to the operational level.

Performance grids are least amenable to this type of adaption. The generic model of difference in performance levels that underlies performance grids in an organization is related to beliefs about performance that pervades that organization's culture. As a result, simply taking over others' performance grids does not work well. You are taking over the performance beliefs of the other culture as well. Modifying performance grids to reflect the generic model of performance level difference prevalent in your organization is common sense. It substantially increases the usefulness and relevance of performance grids to your managers and workers.

A Common Language for Work and Performance

Over time, each organization will build a library of competency based position descriptions, supported by an internal competency dictionary. The dictionary is the underlying base for a common organizational language for describing work and performance. The members of the organization share this language. It is based on observable behavior. It is expressed in business terms. It ties people together and gives them a common language for talking about personal ability, work, positions, performance and professional development.

The Benefits of a Competency Management Approach

All of this makes it a very powerful tool for carrying out the HR processes needed by an organization: work planning, recruitment, performance management, individual development and people deployment. It bases all of the HR processes on a shared, common base: behavioral competency descriptions. Extending the common language of competency to all of these processes is a sign that an organization has adopted a full competency management approach to managing its human assets.

"Competency Management: HR for Adults"

Part Two of Three
"HOW DOES COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT IMPACT THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS?"

WeCrut3.com
www.wecrut3.com

PART TWO: HOW DOES COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT IMPACT THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS?

A Commitment to Competency Based Position Descriptions

Competency based approaches to recruitment start from the same place as competency management in general. All competency based approaches involve a commitment to using competency descriptions. A competency description is simply a description of a piece of observable behavior. In its simplest terms, it is a sentence that starts with a verb, and states what observable work is done, or what observable results are produced, by any incumbent in a position.

The behavioral description must have two core characteristics. First, another person must be able to observe the behavior. It must be public. Second, a person reading the description must be able to say "yes" or "no", in answer to the question "Can you do this?" This means the description must use general business language.

The language may still include specialist terms, because part of having a technical competency is being able to recognize and to use the language normal to the technical environment. People who perform specialist work often use unique terms. The language has to come from the work setting, not some other professional specialty such as organizational psychology[5].

Competency descriptions move beyond traits, motivations, skills, values and all the other internal things that lead to a person's behavior. They start and stop at behavior, asking what behavior is required in a position, and what behavior an individual can do.

Recruiting for a Position

At the start of a competency-based recruitment, 3 possibilities exist.

- First, there may be an up-to-date competency based description for the position. If one exists, the organization had done past work to identify the competency behaviors that describe the work required in this position.

- Second, the position may exist, have a number of incumbents, but not have a competency based position description.

- Finally, the position may be new, and not have any incumbents.

---

[5] Unless of course, the competency descriptions is about the work done by organizational psychologists.

If A Position Competency Model Exists

In this case, the individuals involved in the recruitment process must make a choice. They can do a broad recruitment based on what is known. Or they can take steps to identify the characteristics of existing superior performers, and recruit others like them.

In order to recruit for superior performers, the existing incumbents must be split into two sub-groups - *superior performers* and *others*. This must be done on the basis of objective performance criteria. Care must be taken that this is not simply the short-term judgment of one or two people, but that it actually represents their superior contribution to the organization over time. This is not always easy to do.

Once the two sub-groups have been identified, their up-to-date personal competency profiles can be compared. If the *superior performers* all share a set of current competency behaviors that is clearly different from the competency behaviors shown by the *others* group, it is easy to proceed. These distinguishing competencies are treated as the most important competencies during the recruitment process.

Performance grids can make a great contribution to the ability to do this type of analysis. Often, it turns out that the superior performers are a higher level on certain competencies, when compared to the *others.*

Sometimes, an immediately apparent pattern does not clearly separate superior performers from the others. A second decision must then be made. The people involved in the recruitment process - HR and line management - must discuss the possibility that there is no clear distinguishing pattern. It may well be that the *superior performers* have personal internal characteristics that lead them to work harder or more effectively than the *others*. The existing competency based position description will form the basis for the recruitment.

Sometimes, the current competency based position description does not adequately capture the competencies currently being demonstrated by the *superior performers* in the position. Once again, performance grids can help clarify this. The position description must be updated to capture them.

In either situation, one or both of the two sub-groups – superior performers and others - may be engaged in interview or focus group processes to identify these missing competencies. Their managers may be asked to participate in this analysis work.

The investigation will clarify the "just noticeable differences" between the two groups. The results will be used to update the position description. The version of the position description that describes the

superior performers will form the basis of the recruitment.

No Competency Model Exists

In the second case, there are people in the position, but no competency based position description exists. The current incumbents and others who are knowledgeable about the work can participate in an interview or focus group process to start the process of compiling a competency based position description.

HR professionals will do the preparatory work to identify position descriptions from inside or outside the organization that describe similar positions. These position descriptions will contain competency descriptions that will greatly speed up the modeling process. They can be adapted and added to until a position description that makes sense to the HR professionals and the line managers involved is created. It will model the basis for recruitment.

A New Position

In the last case, modeling work will need to be done with the people most knowledgeable about what the new position will entail.
The competency dictionary and competency based position descriptions for similar and related positions will be the starting point. Dialogue between HR professionals and line managers, grounded by this starting point, will lead to "thoughtful" guesses about what competencies

will be required to successfully do the work of this new position. These thoughtful guesses will be compiled into a future-oriented position description for this new position. It will be the basis of the recruitment.

Finding the Most Important Competencies

The behavior described by 5 to 12 technical and social competencies core competencies usually account for the major part of the performance required in a position – 60% to 80%. The remaining competencies cannot be ignored. They may be the very behaviors that lead to exceptional performance over time, or effective performance in times of exceptional circumstances. Competency based recruitment pays attention to the overall *match of candidates to all of the competencies* required by a position, and *their crucial fit to the core 5 to 1*2.

> Note: 5 to 12 is a considerable spread. For positions at the working level, technical competencies are often key core competencies, although with some key social ones.
>
> At the higher levels, past technical experience, combined with progressively more complex social competencies are the key to performance in the job. At the management level, technical experience is often necessary. But individuals without the required core

social competencies may under-perform significantly.

Experienced HR professionals and managers have an intuitive understanding of these dynamics. Competency based position descriptions help sort out what competencies are core to future performance, and which are secondary or only required in exceptional circumstances.

When the position description is finalized, each of the competency descriptions contained in it can be printed on a small card[6]. Give full sets of the cards to a number of the current incumbents and their managers. If possible, select the superior performers and their managers. Ask them to sort the cards into rank order, running from most important to least important to successful performance. Tell them their results should reflect the importance of the competencies to successful performance in the job.

Collate their individuals results into a matrix using a spreadsheet or other computer program. Separate the managers and the superior performers.

Average the rank orders for each competency. Sort the results into a

rank order that shows the relative importance of each competency to successful performance in the job. The top competencies will be the core competencies. The others will be less important, or be used only in exceptional circumstances.

Run a correlation matrix across the individuals[7]. Examine it. See if there is a useful degree of agreement among the individuals - lots of correlations greater than +.70 in the correlation matrix. If so, move on. If not, take time to examine the reasons for the lack of agreement.

If the correlation matrix shows a great deal of variation among the superior performers, the content of their jobs could be very different. Ask them. Find out. Discover which content will make up the work content of the position for which the recruitment is being done.

Do the same thing for the managers. If it shows a great deal of variation among the managers, they could either:

- ◦ be managing very different types of performers,

---

[6] A computer tool makes this straightforward. The label-printing functionality in most modern word processing packages can make this very easy to do.

---

[7] Technically, this is called a Q-correlation, a correlation across individuals rather than variables. Spreadsheet programs make this easy to do today.
Q-correlations should be interpreted literally. Think of +1 as perfect agreement between individuals , -1 as perfect disagreement, and the numbers in between as percentage of agreement (positive numbers) or disagreement (negative numbers).

◦ or the jobs their performers are doing could be very different, even though it is covered by the same position description.

Discuss the results with the performers and mangers to sort out what is happening before starting the recruitment. Sometimes, this discussion will lead to people wanting to re-do or to re-arrange their rank order results. Let them. Use the updated results in what follows. Or re-arrange the competency descriptions' rank order results based on the dialogue with the performers and managers.

Identify any competencies that are used only in successful circumstance, but where performance failure in the situations leads to unacceptable or disastrous results. These may be quite low in the rank order results, but be extremely important in the recruitment. Any position with a crisis management component is likely to have such competency requirements.

This kind of analysis will be very insightful to the recruiter, and often is to the hiring manager. It is a sound basis for recruiting new individuals for the position.

This process is quick and effective. It usually takes less than a half hour for each person to sort the cards. It generally takes less that a day to the analysis and any required follow up with the managers and the incumbent performers. The final rank-ordered competencies provide the information needed to assess candidates on their match to the overall position requirements and their fit to the core competency requirements.

Starting the Search

The initial search for candidates proceeds in the normal way. The search may be internal or external, or mixed. Recruiting staff will use job posting, Internet job boards[8], advertising, referrals from other staff members or head hunters to generate a long list. This is pared down to between 2 and 50 people, depending on the organization and the position. At the very least, this can be done by simple resume review. The long list is usually organized into sub-groups such as "most likely", "maybe", and "probably not - unless the other candidates don't work out".

Focusing on the Most Likely Candidates

Focusing on the top part of long lists makes economic and time sense. Generally, recruiters work with some

---

[8] Internet job boards such as Workopolis and the Monster Board offer "key word search" algorithms to sort the often overwhelming number of resumes received into a rank order based on the key words match to words in the resume. Although this makes the job of the recruiter easier, it can decrease the effectiveness of the search for the right candidate. It has a tendency to reward "resume key word loading" skill rather than on the job performance. It may work where a "good enough" candidate is acceptable. But it definitely has its drawbacks when the organization is looking for excellent or superior candidates.

number less than 10. The top individuals can be asked to do a card sort similar to the one used to rank order the position competencies. However, the candidates will be instructed to describe themselves, ranking the cards from "most like me" to "least like me". For internal individuals, this may be done as part of a first interview investigating interest. For external candidates, it will be done as part of a "first interview by the recruiter, where the prime purpose is to get a first impression of the candidate's fit to the performance requirements of the position and the culture of the work group.

Evaluating the Top Candidates

Candidate card sort results can be entered into a "recruiting assistant" computer program or spreadsheet which uses the simple mathematics of rank order correlation analysis to provide first analysis fit of the person's self description to the performance requirements of the position. Correlate all of the competencies for this first analysis. The result will be expressed as a number running from -1 (precise exact opposite) to +1 (precise exact match). This is a *general indicator of match* between the individual's self-description and the ranked ordered position competencies. The closer the number is to +1, the better the match.

Next, focus on the top 10 or 12 competencies the required for the position. These are the core competencies. Again, calculate a rank order correlation. The person's *fit to the top 10* required Again, the closer the number is to +1, the closer the person's top ten self-descriptive competencies are the same as the position's top ten position required competencies.

Finally, if any of the position description competencies have been identified as being critical to exceptional circumstance performance in the job, identify where the candidate has place them in the self-descriptive rank order sort.

A quick scan of these numbers for the most likely candidates on the long list will quickly lead the recruiter to sort them into a final short list. Looking at the *general match number* and *the top 10 fit* numbers together is important in determining which candidates appear best at this stage.

One person could fit well on the *top 10* competencies, but match less well on the general requirements. This might be a person who performs well on the majority of the work, but does less well on the exceptional or occasional requirements.

Another could have a better *general match* on the overall pattern, but a lower fit on the *top 10* competencies. This may be a person who handles the exceptional or occasional demands well, but does less well on the core work. Of course, the person who has both numbers closest to +1 is the most likely lead in the list of candidates.

Focused Behavioral Interviewing

Detailed interviews are now scheduled with the leading candidates. The state of the art in recruitment uses behavioral event interviewing. The problem for the recruiter is determining which behaviors to focus on. The comparative analysis of the candidates described above provides this focus. The recruiter will plan to ask each candidate to provide specific behavioral examples that illustrate their ability in the top ten competencies. The cards used in the competency sorts can be used as specific cues for the question: "Give me a number of concrete examples of when you have done this (show the card) in previous positions". This will make up the first part of the interview.

As well, the recruiter can review the detailed listing which shows how each candidate placed each competency in his or her self-description. This will be compared to the rank of that competency in the position requirement sort. For example, a competency ranked 50 in the self-descriptive sort may be ranked 12 in the position requirements sorts. Such differences identify areas of concern. The recruiter can prepare focused probes that explore the implications of such gaps in the second part of the interview. Behavioral event interviewing becomes a highly focused technique when allied with competency analysis.

Handling Faking During Recruitment

Any candidate who has manipulated the results during the self-descriptive card sort and preliminary interview process will find it progressively more difficult to provide concrete behavioral responses to such probes. Extremely few individuals have the kind of quick, clever and consistent imagination to manipulate their answers in this type of interview. Those that do are exceptional individuals in their own right, even though organizations do not usually want to recruit them.

Indicating that some or all of their responses to these probes will be verified during the reference check process will serve to eliminate such individuals. In fact, indicating this at the beginning of all behavioral interviews. is important. Both practical experience and academic research have shown that individuals are more factual and honest when they know that their responses will be subject to reference verification.

A candidate's interview skill often becomes less important as a result of this type of interview. Current interview skill is useful for predicting future skill in interviews, not performance on-the-job. Competency match behavioral interviewing avoids the situation where a "candidate" skilled in leaving a positive impression but not much else makes it to the top of the short list.

Managing Chemistry

By the end of the behavioral interview, a candidate will either clearly be a serious contender, or have not been able to provide behavioral evidence of the capability to meet the position's competency requirements.

The intangibles of recruitment now come into play. The chemistry between the final candidates and future superior/peers must be assessed through meetings between them. This chemistry checking process is an extremely important part of the recruitment process.

Without competency based recruitment, candidates whose prime skill is managing recruitment interviews are highly likely to make it to the final interview stages. With competency based recruitment, great interviewees will not make this cut unless they also have the competencies needed to perform on-the-job.

"Competency Management: HR for Adults"

Part Three of Three
"Competency Management: Will It Be Useful Here?"

WeCrut3.com
www.wecrut3.com

PART THREE: COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT: WILL IT BE USEFUL HERE?

Competency Management and My Organization

The first part of this article described competencies and competency management. The second looked at competency based recruitment. The third part will provide a template for judging if competency management fits your organization[9].

In general, any organization which treats people as a valuable asset, can benefit from a competency based approach to managing people. At the organizational level, competency management results from three things:

- o implementing a process by which gaps between individuals' capabilities and the organization's position

requirements are described in behavioral terms;

- o building an information system by which knowledge of these gaps and their meaning is made available to individuals in their roles as workers and managers;

- o consistently operating from a set of values for competency management approaches to succeed.

The values deal with the relationship between the individual and the organization. These values can be summarized as follows.

1. Individuals who work for their living are adults and, as such, are capable of, and responsible for, managing their own career development.

2. Organizations who engage individuals to work for them have the capability to, and are responsible for, providing adults with the information they need to manage their career development.

3. Both individuals and organizations are capable

---

[9] Almost all organizations and HR professionals use competency management language in talking about recruitment and other HR processes. This is not the same thing as making an organizational commitment to using competency management as the systematic basis for all HR processes and work. This section addresses this broad decision. It recognizes that it is possible to use competency management language without making this commitment. It also recognizes that some organizations choose to implement competency management approaches for recruitment, without extending them to some or all of performance management, career development, succession planning, staff deployment, staff power planning, professional development and individual skill assessment.

of, and responsible for, being matter of fact in their dealing with one another about position requirements and personal capability. Each side can be honest in its disclosure of relevant data to the other. A straightforward disclosure is the basis for trust in contracting with one another for the exchange of talent for compensation.

These values underlie competency management's success. They allocate responsibility and authority to both individuals and the organization in practical ways. A willingness to operate in a way that is consistent with these values is the first requirement that an organization needs when it considers implementing competency management.

Competency based approaches do not work in an organization where management takes all of the responsibility and authority for determining the individual's future. Very few such organizations can exist today, given the rate of change in modern society. Organizations and individuals need to work out contracts that allow each an appropriate degree of responsibility and control. Effective contracting in these circumstances depends on the kind of personal and organizational information that competency based approaches generate.

Getting into the Details

Values alone are not enough. Competency management is work, and implementing it requires effort. HR professionals can start the process of assessing their organization's need for, and benefit from, a competency management program by examining the following template. It describes the enabling conditions required for competency management programs to work. They have been organized under 6 headings.

The Strategic Environment

Our organization is undergoing significant change or expects to change continuously in the face of competition or fiscal pressure. Our senior group has a well-defined sense of our future. They communicate this to the rest of us in the organization, empowering us to concern ourselves with the implementation issues needed to operationalize this vision. As a result of this dialogue, it is clear that the human resources we need are lacking in the organization or are in scare supply in general.

Knowledge Work

The work of this organization requires continuous learning. Our industry is characterized

by evolving technologies or methods. Competition or fiscal pressure is driving continual innovation and breakthroughs that will change the character of our business. As a result, it is clear that the competencies to succeed in the future will not be the competencies that achieve success today.

Performance Management

The culture of our organization rewards results. Individuals who take initiatives to develop themselves are rewarded and supported. They have access to both the time and the financial resources needed to attend professional development programs and state of the art training opportunities. Our organization encourages career development and provides exploration opportunities. Everyone realizes that what is being learned today (or tonight in the case of evening courses) may provide personal and organizational advantage tomorrow.

Response to Experimentation and the Failures Associated with It

Thoughtful and contained experimentation is encouraged. There is an awareness that we must learn through mistakes since we are doing things we have not

done before. But this tolerance is a tempered one, stressing that clear risk management and rapid response at the first signs of failure Is part of future planning. Limits about what can happen are set before hand, and are acted on, so that mistakes do not lead to accumulating negative consequences. Individuals who learn from mistakes in this fashion are rewarded, not punished.

Infrastructure

Our organization is computer capable. Individuals are used to working with terminals and personal computers to manage and to distribute information. The infrastructure to move information from place-to-place, and desktop-to-desktop, exists. The organization is used to buying or building the software tools needed to facilitate organizational processes and change. It will be willing to do so for competency management pilot projects, and eventually for full implementation.

HR Competencies

Our internal HR staff members are either experienced with competency based approaches or are willing and looking forward to

the opportunity to get this experience. We are prepared to invest the dollars and the time. We will carry out pilot projects with knowledge transferring consultants. We will insist that they transfer their know-how, so that we become self-sufficient in our competency management efforts.

Senior Management Commitment

Key members of our senior team are willing to invest the time and the energy needed to champion competency management in our organization. They will do so because they believe it is a better way to run the organization, now and into the future. They will apply competency based approaches to their own positions, as well as to those lower down in the organization.

A Balance, Not An Absolute Need

A reasonable balance is the key. Your organization may not have all of the above enabling conditions. Few do. Steps can be taken to overcome the gaps. However, the strategic environment conditions and the senior management commitment are the key to successful implementation.

Competency based approaches often involve a substantial change in the organization's approach to its people. It gives people responsibility for themselves. It provides them with more freedom to determine how to develop their careers. Those choices often conflict with the short run needs of immediate superiors and other organizational pressures. Having a future focused and committed senior group will help manage such difficulties.

What Will It Take?

Like all change, the best way to start is with a pilot loaded for success. By setting the right scope, supplying enough resources, and assigning people with past competency management experience, your organization can rapidly learn what it will take to succeed and extend competency management.

Keeping the pilot small and manageable also reduces the size of the computer support needed to a reasonable size. Selecting a pilot site that is both visible and very likely to improve because of competency based approaches gives a fair test of the potential benefit and sets the base for the future.

The pilot project will encounter difficulties simply because the approach is new. Adding to them by selecting a pilot area with known performance or operational difficulties, or by severely constraining the project's resources, will not allow you to adequately learn
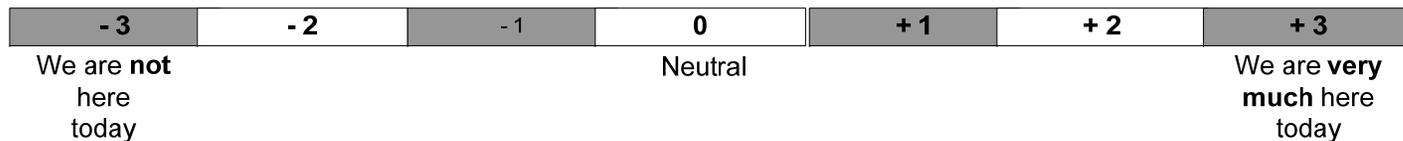
and evaluate competency management.

At the same time, it is important that the pilot project realistically reflect your operations and culture. During it, you will decide what changes your organization will make to the techniques and approaches suggested by the experience of others who have already implemented competency management. You will determine what tools you will need to build or to buy. You may find that you have existing resources in your HR computer systems and among your internal staff who can do much of the needed future work. A pilot project needs to test the future fairly, rather than succeed brilliantly at a limited and uncharacteristic implementation.

Once the pilot is complete, serious internal dialogue with senior management can lead to an informed "go/no go" decision. This decision will happen in a number of steps. Based on the pilot, you will know if competency management fits your organization. If it does, you will need to do planning work which identifies how to go about implementing competency management throughout the organization. A strategic initiative will need to be turned into a day-to-day reality over time. Individuals will need to be committed, changes in existing plans made, and provision for on-going resources committed in yearly budgets and plan. This activity will transform competency management from an idea into a
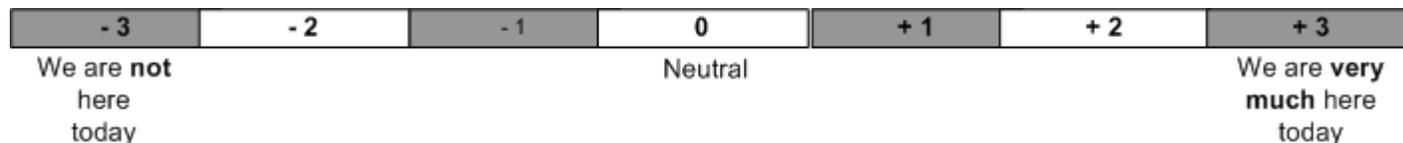
practical reality that shapes your organization's future

Assessing Your Organization's Readiness for Competency Based Approaches

On each of the following scales, indicate where you think your organization is today.

- 3	- 2	- 1	0	+ 1	+ 2	+ 3

We are **not** here today   Neutral   We are **very much** here today
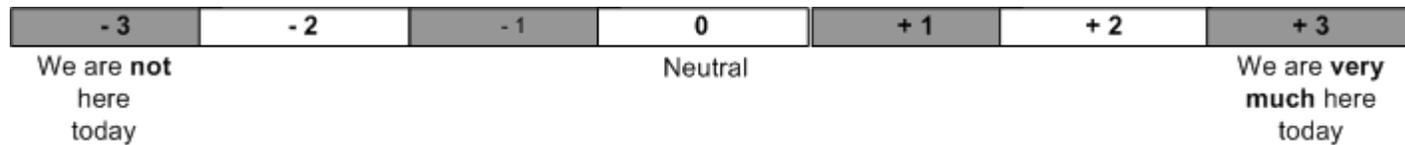
The Strategic Environment

Our organization is undergoing significant change or expects to change continuously in the face of competition or fiscal pressure. Our senior group has a well defined sense of our future. They communicate this to the rest of us in the organization, empowering us to concern ourselves with the implementation issues needed to operationalize this vision. As a result of this dialogue, it is clear the human resources we need are lacking in the organization or are in scare supply in general.

- 3	- 2	- 1	0	+ 1	+ 2	+ 3

We are **not** here today   Neutral   We are **very much** here today

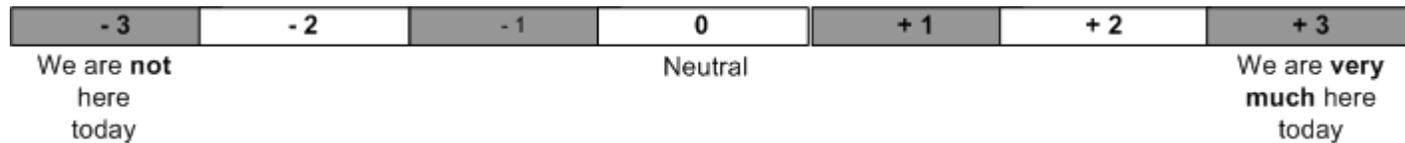**Knowledge Work**

The work of this organization requires continuous learning. Our industry is characterized by evolving technologies or methods. Competition or fiscal pressure is driving continual innovation and breakthroughs that will change the character of our business. As a result, it is clear that the competencies to succeed in the future will not be the competencies that achieve success today.

- 3	- 2	- 1	0	+ 1	+ 2	+ 3

We are **not** here today   Neutral   We are **very** much here today
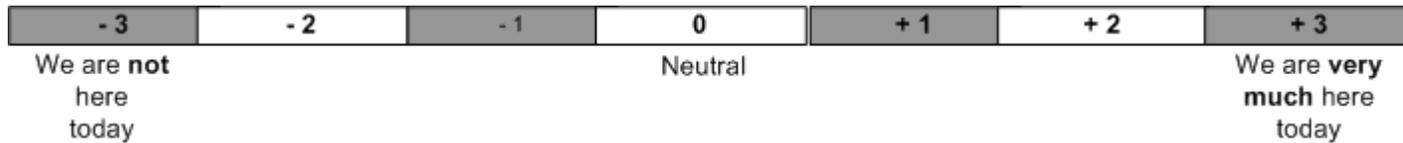
Performance Management

The culture of our organization rewards results. Individuals who take initiatives to develop themselves are rewarded and supported. They have access to both the time and the financial resources needed to attend professional development programs and state of the art training opportunities. Our organization encourages career development and provides exploration opportunities. Everyone realizes that what is being learned today (or tonight in the case of evening courses) may provide personal and organizational advantage tomorrow.

- 3	- 2	- 1	0	+ 1	+ 2	+ 3

We are **not** here today   Neutral   We are **very** much here today
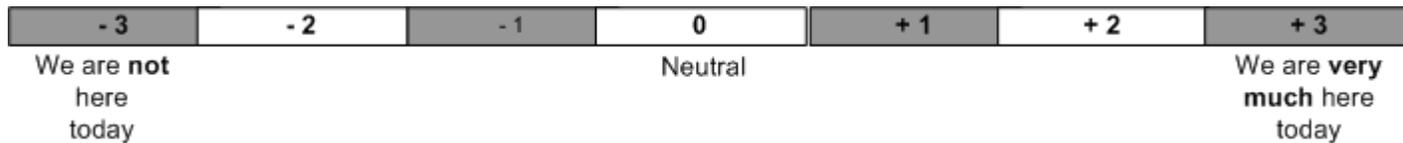
Response to Experimentation and the Failures Associated with It

Thoughtful and bounded experimentation is encouraged. There is an awareness that we must learn through mistakes since we are doing things we have not done before. But this tolerance is a tempered one, stressing that the learning will be accompanied by clear risk management and rapid response at the first signs of failure. Individuals who learn from mistakes in this fashion are rewarded, not punished.
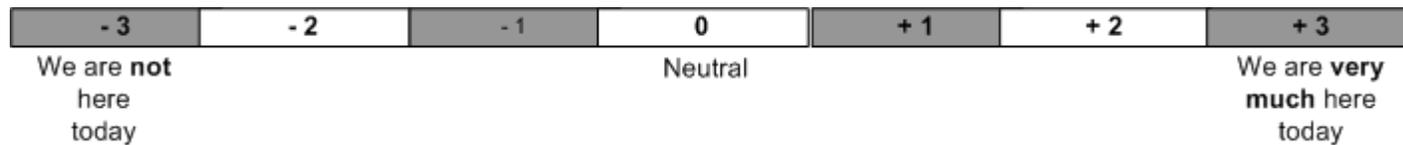
- 3	- 2	- 1	0	+ 1	+ 2	+ 3

We are **not** here today   Neutral   We are **very much** here today

Infrastructure

Our organization is computer capable. Individuals are used to working with terminals and personal computers to manage and to distribute information. The infrastructure to move information from place to place, and desktop to desktop, exists. The organization is used to buying or building the software tools needed to facilitate organizational processes and change. It will be willing to do so for competency management pilot projects, and eventually for full implementation.

- 3	- 2	- 1	0	+ 1	+ 2	+ 3

We are **not** here today   Neutral   We are **very much** here today

HR Competencies

Our internal HR staff members are experienced with competency based approaches and competency management or are willing to learn and looking forward to the opportunity to get experience. We are prepared to invest the dollars and the time. We will carry out pilot projects with knowledge transferring consultants. We will insist that they transfer their know-how, so that we become self-sufficient in our competency management efforts.

- 3	- 2	- 1	0	+ 1	+ 2	+ 3

We are **not** here today

Neutral

We are **very much** here today

Senior Management Commitment

Key members of our senior team are willing to invest the time and the energy needed to champion competency management in our organization. They will do so because they believe it is a better way to run the organization, now and into the future. They will apply competency based approaches to their own positions, as well as to those lower down in the organization.

Making the Assessment

1. Add up your scores – the final total will be somewhere between – 21 and + 21.

2. The higher the number, the more your organization is ready to adopt Competency Management approaches.

3. If you have a negative total, there is a good chance that you will fail in the implementation. In that case, look at where areas where you are negative. What can you do to change them and improve the probability of success?

Appendix One: WCI's General Management Competency Model

This model was developed based on publications and research done into the general management work in a large number of North American organizations. It has been used in recruitment, professional development and research settings.

Competency Cluster	Competency Area / (3 Letter Code)	Competency Behavior	ID
Getting Things Done	Setting Targets	Sets challenging concrete goals for self and others	1
	(SET)	Finds better, more cost effective ways of doing things	2
	Ensuring Accuracy and Order	Monitors and checks work or information to ensure accuracy and completeness	3
	(ACO)	Sets up systems and processes which establish clear roles or flows of information	4
	Taking Initiative	Seizes the opportunity to act - before being asked to or being forced to by events	5
	(TIN)	Does more than is required to complete a task or an assignment	6
	Searching for Information	Digs beneath what is presented to uncover the non-obvious facts	7
	(SFI)	Seeks information from many different sources to clarify a situation	8

Competency Cluster	Competency Area / (3 Letter Code)	Competency Behavior	ID
Impacting Individuals and the Organization	Impacting Others	<u>Works to make a personal impression</u> on others, in order to achieve objectives	9
	(OTH)	<u>Thinks out</u> and <u>takes</u> <u>action</u> (often in several steps), in order to have a <u>calculated impact</u> on others	10
	Building Relationships	<u>Builds rapport with individuals</u> through informal contacts carried out in the context of day-to-day work	11
	(REL)	<u>Builds long term alliances</u> with others, both inside and outside the organization which can be called upon to achieve work related objectives	12
	Working Within The Culture	<u>Recognizes</u> the constraint's of <u>the organization's culture</u> and politics - times personal action to get the best response given these constraints	13
	(CUL)	<u>Uses</u> the <u>formal structure</u> of the <u>organization</u> to accomplish objectives	14
	Knowing the Organization	<u>Uses</u> personal knowledge of <u>the organization's functional work flow</u> in order to get things done	15
	(KOR)	<u>Finds alternative ways of moving things through the organization,</u> especially in the face of what appear to be blocks or obstacles	16

Competency Cluster	Competency Area / (3 Letter Code)	Competency Behavior	ID
Comprehending Others	Understanding Others	Understands others, using observation, listening and empathy to gain insight into the spoken and unspoken reasons for their behavior	17
	(UOT)	Predicts the behaviors and the responses exhibited by others in response to events and situations	18
	Servicing Customers	Takes personal action to ensure that the needs of internal and external clients are met	19
	(CUS)	Communicates with clients (internal and external), clarifying their needs. Takes steps to involve others in activities which meet clients' short and long term needs	20

Competency Cluster	Competency Area / (3 Letter Code)	Competency Behavior	ID
Managing People and Activities	Developing Others	Gives others detailed, specific feedback in a way which motivates them to improve their performance	21
	(DEV)	Gives others assignments, or creates training opportunities for them, in a way which expands or deepens their personal capabilities	22
	Communicating Directly	Talks to others directly and openly, communicating personal concerns, expectations and limitations clearly and unambiguously	23
	(DIR)	Directs others in what they must do, and if necessary, takes steps to ensure compliance	24
	Creating Teamwork and Cooperation	Solicits the input of others who are affected by planned activities	25
	(TCP)	Promotes a friendly climate, good morale and cooperative work on joint issues and projects - gets others to resolve their disputes	26
	Leading Teams	Positions self as a team leader, through actions which ensure that the others in the group work together to accomplish the group's goals	27
	(LED)	Takes care of a group, protecting its reputation externally, and getting it the resources its needs to do its job	28
	Managing Fairly	Treats people fairly and equally, regardless of their personal background	29
	(FAI)	Takes persistent action to implement employment equity within own sphere of influence and authority	30

Competency Cluster	Competency Area / (3 Letter Code)	Competency Behavior	ID
Using One's Intellect	Thinking Analytically	Understands a complex task, process or concept by breaking it down into manageable parts in a systematic way	31
	(ANA)	Thinks of multiple alternatives, or seeks relationships which may involve more than 1 step, when searching for explanations	32
	Thinking Conceptually	Assesses things realistically, identifying patterns that are not obvious to others	33
	(CON)	Creates or uses principles, models or concepts to explain complex problems, situations or opportunities	34
	Applying Technical, Professional or Administrative Expertise	Applies professional or technical knowledge (acquired through formal education or on the on-the-job experience) in the course of day-to-day work	35
	(EXP)	Applies personal knowledge and experience of administrative principles to organize work	36

Competency Cluster	Competency Area / (3 Letter Code)	Competency Behavior	ID
Handling Emotions	Controlling Personal Emotions	<u>Responds calmly to others</u>, even at times of great personal stress and strong emotion (e.g. anger or frustration)	37
	(CTL)	<u>Works constructively during times of crisis</u> or stress, calming others and addressing the source of the issue or problem	38
	Showing Self Confidence	<u>Approaches new challenges with a confident "can do" attitude</u>, based on a realistic sense of personal capabilities	39
	(SEL)	<u>Takes personal responsibility and admits mistakes</u>, learning from them for the future	40
	Being Personally Flexible	<u>Modifies own behavior or approach</u> to meet the expectations or the needs of others	41
	(FLX)	<u>Applies rules or procedures flexibly</u> to a particular situation, adapting them to meet the larger objectives of the organization	42
	Exhibiting Organizational Commitment	<u>Aligns</u> personal activities and objectives <u>with the larger goals of the organization</u>	43
	(OCT)	<u>Puts the organization's general needs first</u>, before the needs of the person's organizational unit	44