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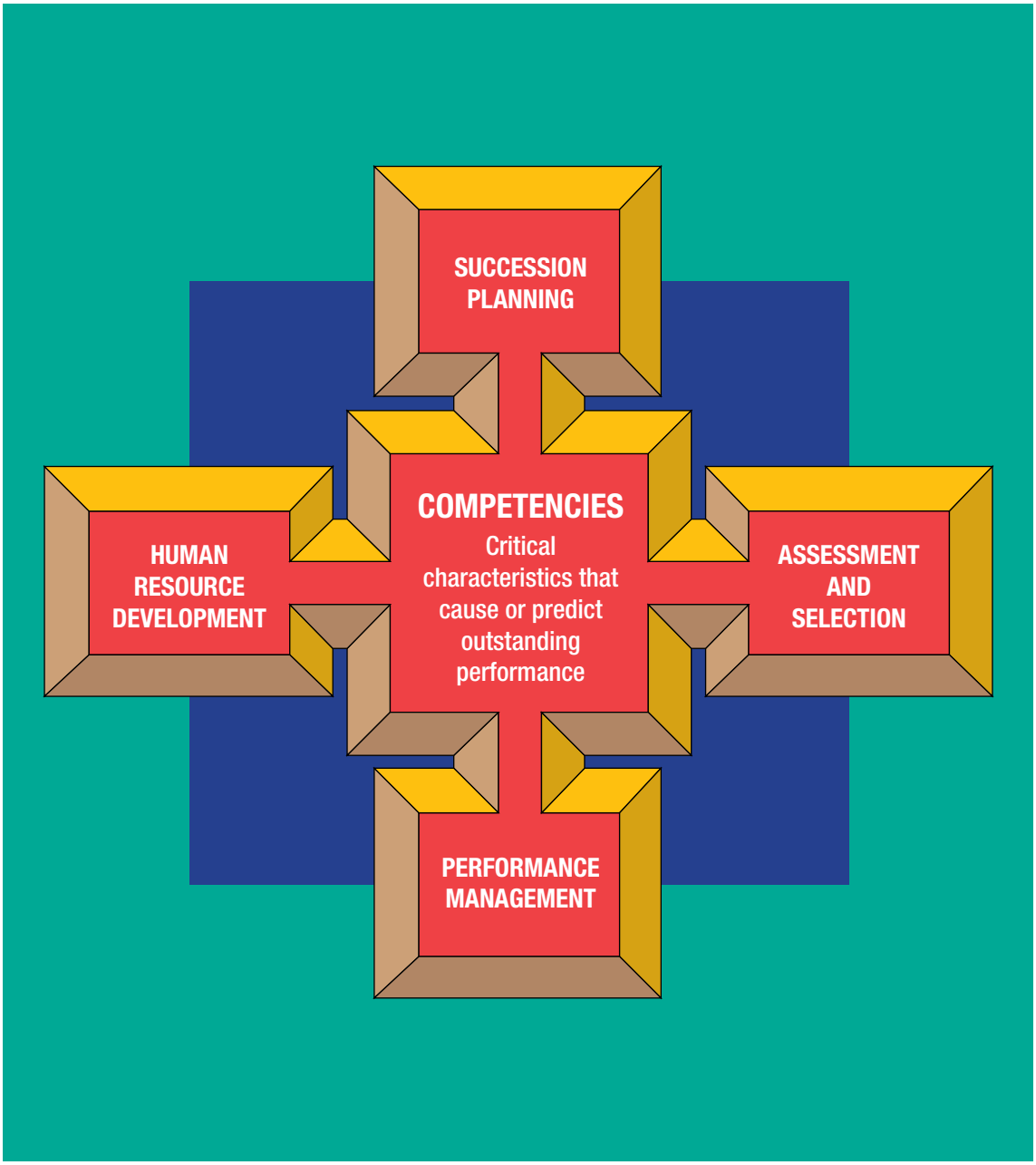
Blueprints for Superior Performance

Integrating HR & Talent Management Processes

Using Competency Assessment Technology to Attract, Develop, and Retain Talent



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Background

Workitect, Inc. provides research-based human resource assessment and development consulting services to help organizations to improve their performance and to attract, develop, and retain talent.

Workitect uses a unique technology called "job competency assessment," which focuses on identification of the competencies of superior performers in key jobs in a client's organization. The best people in positions to make the most difference provide the best templates for assessment and development of incumbents or candidates in similar positions. Emphasis on a firm's most important job families offers the highest potential return to the firm.

Workitect undertakes projects with a view to helping clients develop an integrated Talent Management System (ITMS). In brief, this means working to ensure that Workitect's work fits with other parts of a client's HR system.

Workitect works to transfer its competency assessment technology to clients' HR professionals to ensure implementation of programs recommended and increase the firm's long-term capabilities.

What Are Competencies?

Workitect has worked with numerous client organizations to create competency models for various positions. In effect, these models are the "blueprints" for outstanding performance – both in thought and action – in any given job.

Workitect uses Job Competence Assessment (JCA) to create "job blueprints." This research technique systematically identifies the critical characteristics that cause or predict outstanding job performance. Competencies include personal characteristics, motives, self-concept, knowledge, and behavioral skills. The more complex the job, the more important the competencies.

The More Complex the Job…

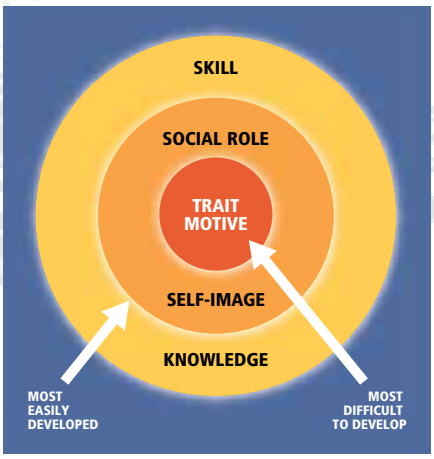
…The More Important the Competencies

Competency Levels

Job competencies do not discriminate on the basis of race or sex (Austin, et al., 1986). To fully understand the capability that a person must bring to a job, we distinguish between the various levels and types of competencies. These distinctions have implications for selection, assessment, and development systems and programs. They also affect how each type of competency is measured or assessed.

Different types of competencies predict the ability to demonstrate job behaviors. For example, a planning competency predicts specific actions such as setting goals, assessing risks, and developing a sequence of actions to reach a goal. An influence competency predicts specific actions such as having an impact on others, convincing them to perform certain activities, and inspiring them to work toward organizational objectives.

Competencies exist at various levels. As shown in the graph below, skills and knowledge exist at the behavioral or outermost level; social role and self-image exist at an intermediate level; and motives and traits exist at the deepest, or core, level.



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Examples of competency levels are as follows:

Behavioral

- Skills: An individual's ability to do something well. Example: Demonstrating a product.
- Knowledge: Usable information that an individual has in a particular area. Example: In-depth information about competitors.

Self-concept: Attitudes And Values

- Self-Image: An individual's perception of his or her identity. Example: Seeing oneself as a "professional" (individual contributor) or a "manager."
- Occupational Preference: The work an individual values and enjoys. Example: working with people versus things.

Personal Characteristics

- Traits: A typical way of behaving. Example: Being a good listener.
- Motive: Natural and constant thoughts in a particular area that determine outward behavior. Example: Wanting to influence the behavior of others for the good of the organization.

Workitect's competency models identify competency types and levels for the job being assessed.

"Core" motive and trait competencies are hard to develop; it is most cost-effective to select for these characteristics. Knowledge and skill competencies are relatively easy to develop; training is most cost-effective for these abilities. Self concept, attitude, and value competencies can be changed, albeit with more time and difficulty; these attributes are most cost effectively addressed by training with developmental job assignment.

Competencies which differentiate superior from average performance (differentiating competencies) and are hard to develop are most important for selection. Competencies more easily developed (minimal competencies) are less important for selection.

Minimal and differentiating competencies for a given job provide a template for personnel selection, succession planning, performance appraisal, and development.

Using the Competency Process to Drive Change

The process of identifying job requirements and required competencies means that the organization must first be clear about its short and long range direction. Once the direction is clear, it is important to determine the competencies that will be key to carrying out the organization's strategy and reaching its long range goals. These competencies may differ from what had been important in the past. In fact, the process of developing competency models may indirectly force the organization to think through its strategy.

In order to carry out the strategy, it then becomes critical to build human resource support systems that enable the organization to:

- assess the competencies of current employees,
- fill positions with people possessing the required competencies,
- reward employees who meet job goals and develop competencies, and
- provide training and development experiences that build the key competencies.

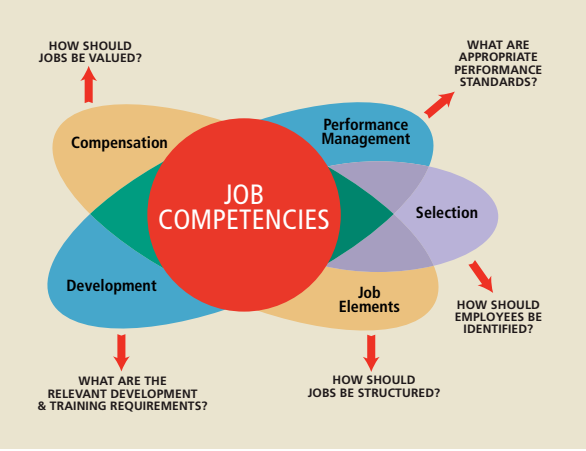
Creating an Integrated Talent Management System

An Integrated Talent Management System is a comprehensive set of human resource functions and programs which:

- Share a common architecture or "language"; and
- Are organized to complement and reinforce one another.

This integration of HR information systems and programs contrasts with the typical system in which functions do not share a common language or complement one another: e.g., in which selection decisions are made on one set of criteria, performance is appraised on a second set of criteria, the training function teaches a third set of skills, etc. An integrated use of the competency assessment process is shown below.

Integrated Uses Of Job Competency Assessment



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Components of a System - Job Elements:

The "nucleus" of an ITMS is a set of core data about:

- Purpose of position
- Content: tasks, responsibilities, and functions
- Performance: standards and measures
- Measurement: points for compensation
- Competency requirements: the skills and characteristics that predict effective and superior performance in the job
- Employee competencies: the skills and characteristics individuals bring to their jobs

Job elements are determined by a firm's strategy and structure (design). Job element variables in turn drive the firm's human resource planning and human resource management functions: recruitment, selection and placement, performance appraisal, development, succession planning, and support activities.

Benefits of an Integrated System

Enabler of Cultural Change and Organizational Improvement: Rather than being a barrier to change (as is the perception of human resource systems and functions in some organizations), a competency-based integrated human resource system provides a supportive linkage to the organization's strategic direction. Selecting and developing competent people produces a competent organization. A competent organization is more likely to survive in a highly competitive global economy.

- Cost Savings/Increased Productivity: Separate functions do not develop and maintain duplicate (and often competing) data bases, training and administrative overhead.
- Empowered Management: The tools and language of HR management are clearly defined and communicated; by understanding more of it, managers use more of it.
- Employee Participation and Reinforcement: Employees participate in the studies that define selection, compensation, appraisal, and development criteria; each and every employee contact with the HR system consistently communicates and reinforces these criteria.

How To Develop Competency Models

We suggest focusing on one critical job family – to be identified by the company – and utilizing this as a pilot program. We would also demonstrate how to replicate this for other job families and develop a long-range implementation plan.

A Workitect Job Competence Assessment consists of the following steps.

1. Define Performance Effectiveness Criteria. To identify superior job incumbents, it is first necessary to define measures of performance effectiveness in a given job. Ideal criteria are "hard" outcome measures such as sales or productivity data. In the absence of such criteria, supervisor, peer (where peers have an opportunity to observe one another's performance), subordinate and/or customer ratings can be used.

2. Identify A Criterion Sample. Job incumbents who are consistently rated superior on a number of different performance criteria provide a "template" standard for comparison analysis with a sample of average performers in the following steps of the research process.

Criterion samples for job families should include superior and average performers at key ascension levels, e.g., from Trainee to Branch Manager:

Level	Superior	Average
1. Trainee	4	2
2.	4	2
3.	4	2
4. Branch Manager	4	2
Totals	16	8

3. Expert Panels. Managers and knowledgeable employees are asked to identify for key jobs the career paths which typically lead to the job, and the competency requirements (behaviors and characteristics) employees need to perform at an adequate or "threshold" level, and at a superior level in the job.

Use of expert panels to define job elements offers a number of benefits. Panels collect much valuable data quickly and efficiently. Participation in panel sessions educates panel members in HR assessment methods and variables, and through involvement develops consensus and support for overall project findings and recommendations.

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4. Job Competency Requirements Survey (JCRS): A representative sample of managers and employees in the target jobs are asked to complete a survey on competencies required for threshold and superior performance in the job. Surveys permit collection of sufficient data to do statistical analysis and have the added value of broad employee participation, which builds support for survey findings.

5. Behavioral Event Interviews: Twenty-four individuals (sixteen superior and eight average incumbents from entry and mid-career jobs in the designated job family) are interviewed using the BEI technique to assess competencies. The BEI asks interviewees to:

A. Identify the most critical situations they have encountered in their jobs and to describe these situations in considerable narrative detail:

- What led up to the situation?
- Who was involved?
- What did the interviewee think about, feel, and want to accomplish in dealing with the situation?
- What did he or she actually do?
- What was the outcome of the incident?

B. Identify the key developmental steps and experiences in their careers which led to their current job.

The BEI includes thematic apperception test probes, which elicit data about the interviewee's personality and cognitive style, e.g., achievement motivation or convergent-thinking ability. (Studies by Winter (1981) and Boyatzis (1982) indicate that BEI protocols can be scored as projective instruments with high inter-rater reliability (r=.8 to .9), and that competencies coded from such interviews surpass those of regular projective tests in predictive validity (Winter, 1981). Properly conducted, the BEI makes interview-protocol data usable as a psychometric test.)

BEI protocols also provide a wealth of data for the identification of competencies and very specific descriptions of critical job behaviors in specific situations. Interviewees' career paths can be mapped and it can be determined when, where, and how they acquired key competencies. A significant by-product of these interviews is the generation of numerous situation and problem narratives that can be used to develop highly relevant training materials, e. g., case studies, role plays, and simulations.

Advantages of the BEI method include: Empirical identification of competencies beyond or different from those generated by panels. Precision about what competencies are and how they are expressed in specific jobs and organizations (e.g., not only "use of influence" but examples of how influence is used to deal with specific job situations).

6. Thematic Analysis and Development of a "Competency Model" for the Job: Data from the expert panels, surveys, expert system, and BEIs are content-analyzed to identify behaviors and personality characteristics that distinguish superior from average job incumbents. Two or more analysts (one from Workitect, one or more from the client company) examine the data and identify candidate competencies that are present or absent in superior as compared with average performers. These elements are refined until they can be recognized with acceptable inter-rater reliability. A detailed competency dictionary and codebook is prepared to guide empirical coding of interview, assessment center, or other operant data from job incumbents or candidates. This dictionary/codebook provides the competency model for the job.

The output of the Job Analysis step will be comprehensive Job Competency Models, which include:
A. Purpose and content of the job: tasks, responsibilities and performance measures for the job rated as to level, frequency, and importance in a form which can be used to compare the job's content with other jobs.
B. Competency requirements: the skills and characteristics required for adequate and superior performance in the job.
C. Career paths for the job, with focus on when, where, and how key competencies for the jobs are developed.

Designing a Model Building Process Tailored to your Needs

Where appropriate, other sources of data can be used to create a competency model. These include:
- Interviews with people in similar jobs in other companies.
- Interviews with subordinates, supervisors or customers of persons in the target job.
- Focus groups of job incumbents.
- Review of competency models of similar jobs in other organizations.
- Literature searches.

A model can often be built quickly and at low cost through interviews with superior performers, a panel session with managers and incumbents, and/or a focus group of job incumbents. Another consideration is that with re-engineering, new jobs are being created for which there are few, if any, precedents. This is another reason to design a model building process that meets the specific needs of each client.

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APPLICATION:

Succession Planning

The objective is to provide senior management with a system for providing and identifying a pool of ready replacements for key jobs, and to provide professionals with a clearly defined career path and a process to optimize their advancement. We will work with the client organization to develop and implement these systems. Key components can include:

- Detailed career paths with key job steps and profiles;
- A process to identify ready replacements for next level jobs;
- Development-rotational and temporary assignments, tasks, and training;
- Communication packages for management and professionals;
- Development of a 360° feedback tool based on the competency model;
- A resource guide that participants and their managers can use to guide development planning;
- Questions to guide participants through analysis of their assessment data and ultimately to a development plan;
- Development planning forms;
- A workshop on development planning, during which participants receive competency feedback and training on development planning;
- A developmental assessment center, where participants engage in assessment activities such as a case analysis and oral interview, an in-basket, role plays, a leaderless group discussion, etc., and also receive training in development planning.

Application: Assessment and Selection

Competency-based recruiting systems usually focus on screening methods used to winnow a small number of strong candidates from large numbers of applicants quickly and efficiently. Assessing recruits involves special challenges, e.g., recruiters must screen many applicants a short period of time (30-minute interviews), applicants straight from college may have little work experience on which to base judgments.

Competency-based recruiting systems developed by Workitect, therefore, stress identification of four to ten core competencies that meet the following criteria:

A. Competencies that applicants will have had the opportunity to develop and demonstrate in their lives to date, e.g., initiative.

B. Competencies that are likely to predict candidates' long-run career success and which are hard to develop through employer training or job experience, e.g., such master competencies as Achievement motivation that are more cost-effective to select for than to develop.

C. Competencies that can be reliably assessed using a short, targeted Behavioral Event Interview developed for this purpose.

The underlying principal of the BEI method is that the best predictor of what people will do is what they have done in the most similar, critical experiences in their lives. The BEI asks interviewees to identify the most critical situations they have encountered in their jobs or lives and describe these situations in some narrative detail: what led up to the situation; who was involved in it; what the interviewee thought about, felt, and wanted to accomplish in dealing with the situation; what he or she actually did; and the outcome of the incident.

BEI responses can be coded for the presence or absence of interviewee competencies with high inter-rater reliability and predictive validity. For example, if "collaborative team leadership" is a competency a company is looking for, interviewees might be asked, "Tell me any group experience in which you have been involved." Their responses would be coded for consensus-building versus adversarial behaviors. Applications for the recruiting function can include:

- Integration of competencies with profiles developed by recruiting and selection task force.
- Training for company recruiters to conduct and code Behavioral Event Interviews to make screening decisions.
- Integration of applicant competency, tracking and administration information in the IHRS data base, including follow-up evaluation of new hires to ensure recruiting system effectiveness.
- Tools to support an entire selection system, including forms to use in screening interviews
and forms to use in comparing and deciding among candidates.

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Application: Performance Management

An additional human resource function which bears in important ways on development, retention, and career paths, is performance management. Competency assessment data can contribute to performance management systems in several ways.

Workitect's approach to performance management is to identify:

A. Job performance standards and measures.

B. Job behaviors required to accomplish specific job tasks and meet job responsibilities.

C. Competencies demonstrated by average and superior performers in key jobs.

Most performance appraisal systems assess one or more of these variables. Effective performance appraisal turns on the proper use of each type of data given the objectives of the system and the degree of control the employee has over his or her performance on variables assessed.

Performance results data are usually used for decisions about rewards, e.g., merit bonuses based on sales or production quotas. If, however, an employee has little individual control over results, outcomes, e.g., in a team production setting, rewards based solely on results can demotivate superior people. In these cases, some portion of rewards might better be based on job behaviors.

Competency and job behavior data are usually used for decisions about development, e.g., if manager A is appraised as lacking group leadership skills, he or she might be advised to attend a leadership course to develop this skill. Skill-based compensation systems also explicitly tie rewards to skills developed. As noted, this is particularly appropriate when employees have little control over performance results.

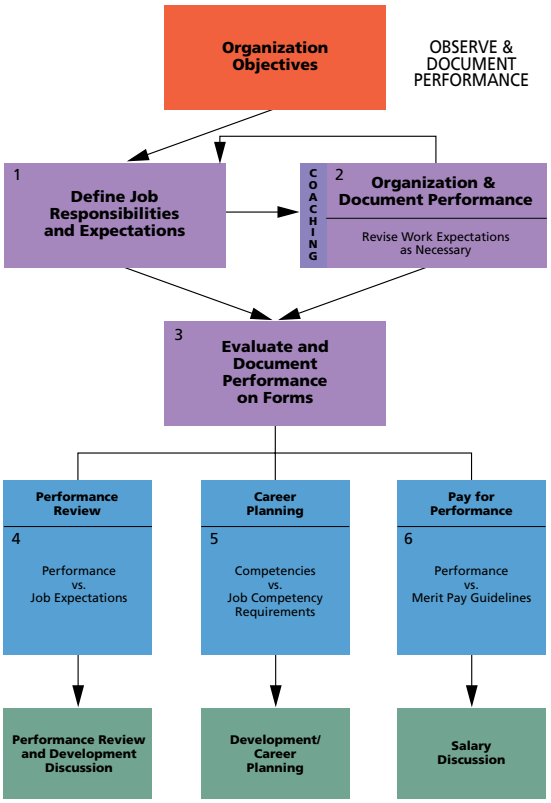
Applications planning for a company's performance management function can include:

- Identification of job responsibilities, performance standards and measures, and competencies to be appraised for employees in the target jobs.
- Development of appraisal methods and training of managers as needed.

The entire process can be woven into a comprehensive performance management process (part of the IHRS) depicted below.

A performance management program (for managers of persons in the target job) usually includes:

- Some training and/or exercises to familiarize managers with the competency model.



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• Materials that clearly link the model to key job tasks and to performance standards.

• Training in a BEI like process that the manager uses to get the direct report to talk in detail about how he/she approached key job tasks in specific instances.

• Training and practice for managers to help the direct report analyze his/her behavior on key job tasks and identify ways that the competencies were applied or could have been applied.

• A demonstration video showing how to conduct a performance management interview.

• Separate training on how to prepare for and hold a performance review meeting, and training on how schedule and conduct FOCUS Coaching sessions.

Application: Human Resource Development

The competency template translates into the target for training activities. The competency modeling process provides a framework for a thorough analysis of training needs. The training needs analysis can then be used as a basis to develop a curriculum to help people acquire key competencies. Workitect has developed a process entitled the Competency Acquisition Process (CAP) for managing training efforts through increasing levels of of competencies. The CAP consists of the seven steps outlined below.

SUMMARY

The output of a typical project includes:

• A comprehensive model of outstanding performance for a critical job family;

• A succession planning and career pathing system;

• System utilization of the model to enhance recruiting, selection, performance assessment, training, and development;

• Transfer of the technology to internal staff;

• Game plan for utilization of the process for other job families.

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Blueprints for Superior Performance

Workitect is a management consulting and training firm that provides competency management systems for human resources and talent management applications.

Workitect uses "job competency assessment" to identify the characteristics of superior performers in key jobs in an organization. These characteristics, or competencies, become "blueprints" for outstanding job performance. Competencies include personal characteristics, motives, knowledge, and behavioral skills. Job competency models are the foundation of an integrated talent management system that includes selection, performance management, succession planning, and leadership development.

Products and services include:

- Competency dictionary/library
- Competency Development Guide (ISBN 978-0-9855598-0-9)
- Resource Guide for Developing HR Competencies
- eDeveloper™ online development guide
- Soundings™ 360° survey feedback instruments
- Virtual Resource Panel
- Competency Interview Guides
- Workshops (public and onsite):
  - Building Competency Models
  - Creating Technical Competencies
  - Managing Performance - With Competence
  - Interviewing for Competencies

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