Key Questions to Answer before Building Competency Models

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Practical Questions for HR Professionals Who Are Building Competency Models—a Consultant's Experience
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When planning the development of a competency model or models, there are practical considerations that affect the design of the project, the format and content of the competency model, and the success of the project's implementation. The following seven questions may be useful to Human Resouces professionals responsible for planning and implementation:

1. What HR application should be included in the initial model building project?
2. What will the key users of the model need from it?
3. How should key stakeholders be involved?
4. How extensive should the data collection be?
5. How should research be balanced with intuitive approaches?
6. What format of behavioral descriptors will best suit the application?
7. How can additional, future competency models be accomodated?

1. What HR application should be included in the initial model building project?
Competency models have many potential uses – for diverse areas including selection, assessment, development, performance management, training design, and planning career paths. Some organizations do not always feel a need to have an initial application in mind when building a competency model. To some, competency models are a novelty, and they want to build one first, and only afterwards think about how to apply it in the organization.

Too often, organizations build a competency model but never get around to applying it. And a competency model alone provides little value to anyone. It is essential to have a particular Human Resources (HR) application in mind when building a model and build the implementation of that application into the initial project plan.

There are three important reasons for doing this:

a) the nature of the intended application can shape the data collection and analysis. For example, in a project to construct a competency model for sales professionals in a consulting firm, the competency model would need to be incorporated into a sales training program. Since the training program would be built around the selling process, it was important to understand how the selling process worked for different types of consulting projects. A day-long resource panel focused on defining the sales processes for both simple and complex consulting projects. When the competencies were identified, they were linked to steps in the two sales processes.

b) the planned application can shape the format of the model, especially its behavioral descriptors. For example, if the model will be used by managers to assess jobholders' demonstration of the competencies, as part of a performance appraisal, it is important to include behavioral descriptors of less effective behaviors as well as effective ones. In one instance, the leader of a work unit charged with redesigning a high tech organization's business processes wanted to be able to give regular performance reviews in which he assessed people on their demonstration of the competencies. After considering various formats for rating levels of competency demonstration, it was decided to identify three or four key dimensions for each competency and to create rating scales for each dimension with specific behavioral descriptions of effective and less effective behaviors for each dimension. The bipolar rating scales made it easier for the manager to give accurate feedback and to explain low ratings to jobholders. With this application in mind, groups of subject matter experts were convened to consider the requirements for each job. The group drew on a set of generic competencies to help identify and conceptualize the most important competencies for the job in question. Next, the key dimensions for each competency were identified and effective and less effective behaviors associated with each dimension were identified.

The information from these sessions was used to prepare draft competency models with key dimensions and bipolar rating scales for each dimension. At a second session with the subject matter experts for the job, the model, key dimensions, and behavioral descriptors were reviewed and revised. The final product for each job included a competency assessment rating form to be used when conducting performance reviews. In this case, having a clear idea of the model's intended application shaped both the data collection plan and the format in which the model was presented. As a result, the model helped the manager provide a high level of clarity about desired behaviors and thus to create a high-performing unit with high morale.

c) to ensure that money and other resources will be available for the application. If the initial application is not part of the budget for the model building project, there is a chance that financial support will no longer be available when the competency model has been completed. The organization receives little benefit from its investment, until the model is applied in a way that enhances productivity.

2. What will the key users of the model need from it?

The planning of a competency model requires identifying the most important stakeholders and users and considering how they will want to use the model.

People in the job often want to use a competency model to provide a recipe for success. These users are asking, "What could I be doing differently that would make me more effective?" They are likely to value very specifically worded behavioral indicators that describe what to do, with whom, and in what circumstances. A matrix linking the competencies to major job tasks is also helpful to job incumbents.

Supervisors can use the same detailed information to assist in coaching jobholders. Since part of a supervisor's job is also providing detailed feedback about effective and less effective behaviors, descriptions of less effective behaviors associated with each competency are beneficial. For the same reason, supervisors may find it useful to have a matrix linking the competencies to key performance criteria and measures. Because supervisors are also in charge of hiring for the position, they need a competency model that includes all of the important skills and qualifications required for the position, including technical skills and educational credentials that are baseline requirements for all jobholders.

Human Resources professionals who will be using a competency model have a different set of needs. HR staff may need to build a shared conceptual framework of competencies and a common language for describing the competencies. They can then facilitate matching skill profiles to different jobs through selection, promotion, and career-path planning; and the creation of training and development programs for people across a broad range of jobs. HR staff also need easy ways to compare the requirements of different jobs in the organization. It is useful for the human resources staff to be able to say which competencies are required for a job and the level at which the competencies need to be demonstrated, to achieve effective performance. Since Human Resources staff often need to communicate and explain a competency model, they prefer competency models that are clear, simple, and written with powerful language.

Because HR staff want others throughout the organization to use the model, they need to ensure buy-in to the model by key stakeholders. All key stakeholders should be consulted or included in generating data to build the model and in reviewing draft versions of the model, to ensure that it is complete and accurate.

Human Resources staff must also ensure that the competency model can withstand potential legal challenges, which are more likely if the model will be used to guide selection and hiring of staff. Using a rigorous, systematic process of data collection and analysis is the best protection against possible legal challenges.

The Human Resources staff may be interested in acquiring not just a competency model but the technology and training to build other competency models in the future. If so, the project plan should include training of HR staff and their participation in all phases of the project.

When competency models are needed for critical jobs, especially leadership positions, the organization's top executive is an important stakeholder. Top executives often want to use competency models to drive organizational change. Top executives want competency models to be aligned with the organization's strategy and most important values. It may be important to include competencies describing needed leadership skills, such as "Change Management" or "Business Partnering," as well as desired values, such as "Personal Credibility" and "Customer Orientation."

It may also be important to include competencies that reinforce changes in the organization's structure, work processes, and culture. For example, for organizations that are moving away from hierarchical structures with supervisors to flatter structures in which much work is done by self-directed work teams, competencies in areas such as coaching and team facilitation become important.

When an organization's top executives take an interest in a competency model, they are likely to want it written with powerful, high-impact language that can inspire and motivate. Top executives are also likely to want the competency models to provide a clear, consistent message for all employees. One way to do this is to have a common set of core competencies that are the same for all employees.

3. How should key stakeholders be involved?

To be successful, a competency model building project must involve key stakeholders. There should be careful consideration of how and when to involve people most effectively. An example from the development of a sales competency model for an information services consulting firm can illustrate the process at work. To achieve buy-in from the sales organization, the human resources staff of the organization wanted to engage many of the sales representatives and their managers, who were deployed in different sales regions. In the initial project plan, a standard resource panel was planned that would involve six sales representatives and six managers of sales representatives. There was to be an additional 12 interviews with superior-performing sales representatives. But the Human Resources staff wanted to involve more than these 18 sales representatives without incurring the large costs of conducting and analyzing additional interviews. In addition, another key stakeholder for the project was an internal sales consultant who was charged with building an intranet system for tracking the progress of each sale. To involve this key stakeholder, and to increase the number of sales representatives in the model building, an extra resource panel was held. This panel, with 12 more sales representatives, focused on defining the complex sales process, an activity that would meet the needs of the internal consultant, while adding value to the competency model.

This project had another set of key stakeholders: the four members of the organization's top management team. Meetings were arranged with each of these individuals, to provide a briefing on the project plan and progress to date and to seek ideas on how to ensure the project's success within the organization.

4. How extensive should the data collection be?

The extent of the data collection depends on the significance of the job for which the model is being constructed, the budget for the project, and the intended uses of the model. Almost every model building project includes a resource panel or group meeting of subject matter experts. A resource panel can accommodate up to 15 participants. With larger groups, it is difficult to allow time for all participants to respond to every question. Sometimes an organization decides to hold more than one resource panel, to accommodate two important groups that are geographically remote from each other, or to gather separate perspectives from job holders, their managers, and their direct reports.

If the job is essential to the organization, it is important to include critical event interviews with superior performers. There are three key benefits to adding interviews to a competency model building project.

First, it is primarily through critical event interviews that the research team can develop good behavioral descriptors of a competency. Good descriptors specify what outstanding performers actually do when they demonstrate the competency.

Second, analysis of critical event interviews may reveal some competencies that would not be mentioned in a resource panel. Interpersonal and influence skills are areas that are often not well articulated by participants in resource panels.

Third, conducting and analyzing interviews adds to the rigor of the research process, an important consideration if the model will be used for selection.

The number of interviews should be large enough to permit detection of themes demonstrated by as few as a quarter of the interviewees. If each theme must be noticed in at least two interviewees, a minimum of eight interviews is needed. Ten to twelve interviews are more commonly used. Samples that must include representatives from major geographical, functional, or demographic groups may need to be a little larger.

Because it is expensive to conduct and analyze interviews, few competency studies today involve more than 20 interviews for one job. When there are 20 or more interviews, the analysis team has difficulty working with the large volume of themes and examples.

In addition to resource panels and interviews, other sources (e.g., internal or external customers) may furnish useful data. The human resource professionals making the decision about the project plan need to consider whether the anticipated benefits of collecting additional data will justify the additional cost.

5. How should research be balanced with intuitive approaches?

Research approaches to competency model building emphasize systematic data collection and analysis, and a priori decision rules about how much evidence is sufficient to warrant inclusion of competencies and behaviors in the model. Research approaches also emphasize identifying coherent constructs of personal characteristics that are conceptually and empirically separate from each other. The earliest competency models built by McClelland and his colleagues used a research approach. Traditional job analysis, as practiced by industrial psychologists, also uses a research approach.

The principal advantage of a research approach is the validity of the resulting competency model. A research approach can accurately identify the behaviors currently demonstrated by superior performers and the beliefs by jobholders and other subject matter experts about what is currently important to superior performance. Because of its validity, a competency model developed using a research approach can withstand potential legal challenges.

But research approaches are not as useful for identifying what will become important in the future, especially when only a few individuals in an organization have a clear strategic vision. Nor will a research approach generate a competency model that is linked to a leader's vision of where he or she wants to take the organization.

Intuitive approaches rely heavily on the judgment and insights of the model building team. There may be little, if any, data collection and analysis, and the results of the analysis do not determine what is included in the competency model. Instead, the model building team generates ideas about what to include in the model and, after discussion, reaches consensus on the content of the model. Intuitive approaches are driven more by values than by empirical results.

The main advantage of intuitive approaches is that they can produce competency models that include all of the elements that the model building team and upper management believe are important in the model. Intuitive approaches are also less expensive, since they do not require collecting and analyzing data.

The chief disadvantage of intuitive approaches is that they risk creating competency models that describe behavior appropriate for a desired future state, rather than for the current reality. In addition, the lack of methodological rigor in constructing the models makes them vulnerable to legal challenges.

Few competency models today are constructed with a pure research approach or with a pure intuitive approach. Most Human Resources staffs want to collect and analyze data as part of the model building process. But they also want the freedom and flexibility to add competencies and behaviors to the model to ensure that it reflects the organization's values and strategic direction, and to demonstrate responsiveness to the concerns of key stakeholders. Finding the right balance between research and intuitive approaches depends on the values of the internal Human Resource team, the preferences of external consultants (if they are involved), and the extent to which the team feels a need to be responsive to the desires of upper management and other stakeholders in the model building process.

One method for balancing research and intuitive approaches is to use a research approach to develop a draft competency model and then to review the model with key stakeholders. If one or more of the key stakeholders urges a change in the model, the internal HR team may decide to make the change (e.g., by adding a competency to ensure that the model is more closely aligned with the chief executive's values).

This method was used in building a competency model for managers of consultants in an information services consulting firm. When the initial competency model was reviewed with one of the senior executives of this firm, he suggested that a competency called "Managing Through Processes" be included. The firm had grown rapidly through acquisitions and by hiring staff from many other organizations, and it needed to integrate and control this diverse talent. The consulting staff was being taught to manage projects using a few standard methodologies. The addition of the proposed competency, which had not been evident in critical interviews with outstanding performers, supported the organization's expansion strategy.

Another hybrid method involves using an intuitive approach to develop a prototype competency model and then collecting data and revising the prototype model based on analysis of the data. This methodology was used in developing a leadership competency model for a large financial services company. The CEO of this company wanted to change the company's culture to ensure continued competitiveness in a faster-moving marketplace. In the future, this organization would need to develop products and services more quickly, to form more business partnerships with other organizations, and to demonstrate more teamwork and open communication.

The external consultants, working with a team of internal HR staff, used an intuitive approach to develop a prototype model that reflected the values and behaviors that leaders would need in order to implement the desired cultural changes. The intuitive approach involved reading speeches to clarify the CEO's values and strategic direction and helping the Human Resources staff to articulate their own views of the current leaders' strengths and weaknesses. This information was integrated with our knowledge of generic competencies for senior leaders to produce an initial draft version of the competency model. The behavioral indicators for this model were mostly drawn from a set of generic competencies that we had distilled from our experience creating many other leadership competency models. Then, over a one-week period, a series of telephone conference calls with an HR team were held to revise and refine the prototype model. Since the prototype model had to be shared with the CEO and other senior leaders, it was critical that the model be credible. In addition, the HR team believed that the model should have no more than ten competencies.

After using a purely intuitive approach to develop the prototype model, the research was shifted to validate and refine the model, interviewing 12 outstanding senior managers. The HR staff selected a sample of high-performing senior managers who were also thought to demonstrate at least two of the competencies in the prototype model. Since one purpose of the interviews was to clarify the behaviors by which the prototype competencies were demonstrated, some of the interview questions were designed to elicit critical events involving demonstration of specific competencies that the interviewee was thought to possess. For example, if a senior manager was thought to possess the competency "Influence Skill," she might be asked to describe a situation in which she needed to get another person or group to provide resources or support for an initiative.

Another purpose of the interviews was to reveal competencies and behaviors that were contributing to effectiveness but were not part of the prototype competency model. For this purpose, several questions were developed to elicit more general critical events. For example, one prompt was, "Tell me about a time when you believe you demonstrated leadership within the work unit that you manage."

Twelve interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Each interview was analyzed by coding for each competency and behavioral indicator in the prototype competency model, and for a set of additional generic competencies not included in the prototype. The coding enabled the model building team to tabulate the frequency of demonstration of all of these competencies.

The results of the coding analysis led us to recommend some changes in the prototype model, including the addition of one competency: "Motivating and Energizing People." The HR team, after much discussion, decided to include the new competency, even though this meant having one more competency than the desired ten in the final model.

6. What format of behavioral descriptors will best suit the application?
Much of the value of a competency model comes from its behavioral descriptors. There are three main options for Human Resources staff to consider: (1) behavioral indicators, (2) evaluative competency levels, and (3) competency levels describing job requirements.
Behavioral Indicators
The majority of competency models use the first and simplest option, behavioral indicators. Behavioral indicators are descriptions of behaviors and thought patterns that are hypothesized to contribute to superior performance. A competency's definition represents an underlying ability or trait, and the behavioral indicators describe specific ways in which that ability or trait is demonstrated. For example, in a generic competency framework the competency, "Interpersonal Awareness," has the following definition and behavioral indicators:

Interpersonal Awareness: The ability to notice, interpret, and anticipate others' concerns and feelings, and to communicate this awareness empathetically to others.
a) Understands the interests and important concerns of others.
b) Notices and accurately interprets what others are feeling, based on their choice of words, tone of voice, expressions, and other nonverbal behavior.
c) Anticipates how others will react to a situation.
d) Listens attentively to people's ideas and concerns.
e) Understands both the strengths and weaknesses of others.
f) Understands the unspoken meaning in a situation.
g) Says or does things to address others' concerns.
h) Finds non-threatening ways to approach others about sensitive issues.

When behavioral indicators are used in a specific competency model, they are sometimes altered or written more specifically, to describe how the behavior is demonstrated in this job. For example, indicator (b) above was rewritten for use in a sales competency model:
* Notices nonverbal behavior and asks questions, when appropriate, to clarify its meaning.
Creating good behavioral indicators depends on conducting and analyzing critical event interviews with outstanding performers. Each behavioral indicator is a theme derived from examples from several interviews.

Behavioral indicators can also be taken or adapted from a generic competency dictionary, which includes generic competencies and behavioral indicators previously identified in several competency models.

Evaluative Competency Levels

The second option for behavioral descriptors is to use evaluative competency levels. Under this option, several key dimensions are identified for each competency, and each dimension is ranked in order of effectiveness. The highest level describes outstanding performance, and the lowest level describes poor performance. Lyle and Signe Spencer used this approach to develop a generic set of competencies with levels. For example, one generic competency, "Interpersonal Understanding," has two aspects: (a) depth of understanding of others, and (b) listening and responding to others. Listening and responding to others has these levels1:

-1	Unsympathetic
0	Not applicable or makes no attempt to listen
1	Listens
2	Makes self available to listen
3	Predicts others' responses
4	Listens responsively
5	Acts to help

Each level has more specific behavioral descriptors, which are too lengthy to reproduce here. But, as an example, the behavioral descriptor for Level 4 is, "Reflects people's concerns, is easy to talk to; or responds to people's concerns by altering own behavior in a helpful, responsive manner."

When this approach is used, the levels form a behaviorally anchored rating scale. Whether this kind of rating scale improves the reliability and validity of measurement is open to question, since behaviorally anchored rating scales have generally proved to be no more reliable and valid than other, simpler rating scales.

Rating scales with three or more levels for each dimension of a competency are generally too cumbersome. There are too many behavioral descriptions to read, when assessing someone on twelve competencies, each with two to four dimensions, with each dimension further broken down into four or more descriptors of different performance levels. It may be more useful to specify only the highest and lowest levels, as in the following example of a rating scale used to assess a competency called "Personal Credibility:"

DEPENDABILITY. Has difficulty meeting project deadlines or delivering work when promised. Deliverables fall short of expectations.	1 2 3 4	Completes work when promised, even when this entails personal sacrifice. Often delivers value beyond immediate tasks.
FAIRNESS. Sometimes treats people unfairly. Demonstrates disrespect to individuals or teams during their presence or absence. Shows unwillingness to defend individuals.	1 2 3 4	Makes a special effort to treat everyone fairly and avoid favoritism; defends the interests and rights of individuals not present. Respected as an unbiased contributor.
TRUSTWORTHINESS. Is sometimes dishonest or less than forthcoming with people. Can be perceived as deceiving co-workers or clients through choice of words or actions.	1 2 3 4	Is consistently honest and forthright with people; respects confidentiality. Regarded as a highly trustworthy individual in whom clients confide.

Creating behavioral descriptors in the form of evaluative performance levels is most useful when performance appraisal is planned as an immediate application. Once the competencies for the job are identified, the content for the rating scales can be determined by meeting with managers of persons in the target job. Key evaluative aspects for each competency can be discussed and identified.

Competency Levels Describing Job Requirements.
A third option for descriptors is to create levels describing the extent to which a competency is required in a particular job. This alternative is most useful when the multiple competency models are being created within an organization and the Human Resources staff need a way to distinguish the requirements of the different jobs (e.g., to help people within the unit plan career progression paths).

This approach was used in developing competency models for a variety of jobs in the commercial sales division of a manufacturing company supplying optical fiber for the telecommunications industry. The first step was to agree on a set of generic competencies, including both technical and non-technical ones, to describe the skill requirements for jobs in the commercial sales division. This was accomplished by reviewing, modifying, and adding to a generic competency dictionary. Next, drawing on the generic competency dictionary and other projects involving competency levels, a set of levels for the competencies was drafted. Drafting the levels required first identifying several key dimensions for each competency and then writing behavioral descriptors of several levels. In this case, the internal Human Resources project team wanted three levels specifying basic, intermediate, and advanced demonstrations of each aspect of each competency. The levels for one competency, "Energizing Others," are shown below:

	A. Creating a Positive Climate	B. Energy and Enthusiasm	C. Fostering Teamwork
Basic	Develops a positive climate, marked by productivity and team spirit, in a small work unit of motivated professionals.	Serves as an effective role model for others, by demonstrating hard work and concern for excellence.	Builds teamwork in a work unit. Invites participation from all team members and values everyone's contributions.
Intermediate	Develops a positive climate in a medium-sized organizational unit, composed of several work units of motivated professionals and their managers.	Effectively uses own presence (enthusiasm and energy) to energize small groups.	Builds teamwork in an organizational unit composed of several work units. Fosters collaboration among work units within a department. Effectively resolves conflict.
Advanced	Develops a positive climate in a large organizational unit; is able to turn around a poor work climate.	Energizes large groups through the force of his/her personality; easily engages diverse groups (e.g., employees at all levels, customers).	Builds teamwork in a larger organizational unit composed of several departments. Develops team building skills in others. Fosters teamwork with other, outside work units.

As one moves from the basic level to the intermediate and advanced levels, the competency is demonstrated in larger groups and more challenging situations. The behavioral descriptions often target performance outcomes rather than specific behaviors demonstrated to achieve the outcomes.

In deciding which type of behavioral descriptors to use – behavioral indicators, evaluative performance levels, or levels describing job requirements – the most important consideration is how the model will be used. Sometimes, when a model will be used in multiple ways, more than one set of behavioral descriptors may be created. For example, behavioral indicators might be needed to support development planning, and evaluative performance levels to support performance appraisal.

7. How can additional, future competency models be accomodated?

When competency models are needed in an organization with many different jobs, there are two basic strategies for model building: "one-size-fits-all" approaches and multiple model approaches.

One-Size-Fits-All

The first basic strategy, one-size-fits-all, involves creating a single competency model with one set of competencies applicable to all jobs. Like most other competency models, a one-size-fits-all model usually comprises eight to fifteen competencies needed for effectiveness in a broad job category, such as all management positions. The competencies in such a model must be general skills, traits, and values, not job-specific skills.

The one-size-fits-all approach is often used when upper management wants to drive organizational change by sending a strong message about the values and skills needed for the future. This approach is also used when upper management or Human Resources prefers simple solutions, or when the HR staff want to quickly implement a program that will have broad impact.

The one-size-fits-all approach has several advantages. First, it provides a simple, clear message to everyone about what is important. Second, once developed, the model and applications based on the model are applicable to many employees. For example, one "360 feedback" instrument can be used with everyone whose job is included in the model. Finally, the competency model promotes the development of a common language for describing important skills and characteristics.

But the one-size-fits-all approach also has significant disadvantages. One-size-fits-all models often describe values that are espoused or wished for, rather than describing what it truly takes to be effective in a job. An organization with a conspicuous lack of teamwork might include a "Teamwork" competency in a one-size-fits-all model, even though superior performers are more likely to need political savvy and a "thick skin." Another disadvantage is that employees may believe that the model does not really apply to their own job. They may become skeptical or even cynical about the model. Finally, one-size fits-all models are not as useful as job-specific models in guiding selection and development for a particular job.

Multiple Models

The other strategy for developing models for people in a range of jobs is to plan to build multiple competency models from a common set of generic competencies. The first step is to identify a set of 25 to 35 "building block" competencies to be used for constructing all job models. In applying this strategy, try to meet with senior management and HR staff to customize a generic competency dictionary for use in this organization. Customization often involves changing some of the generic competency names and the language used in the definitions and behavioral descriptors, so that the language is consistent with concepts and terminology that are already used in the organization.

The next step is to hold a resource panel or a meeting with subject matter experts, to gather data to guide the decision about which generic competencies to include in the model for a particular job. Once the competencies for that job are identified, the panel can help select and modify behavioral descriptors from the generic dictionary, to customize the description of how each competency needs to be demonstrated in that job. This process is repeated for each job requiring a competency model. Each competency model includes a subset of the generic competencies and may also include unique, job-specific technical competencies.

The multiple model approach is most likely to be used when competency models are needed for many different jobs and when jobs have few features in common. This approach is especially useful when the planned applications include careful matching of individuals to jobs, for selection, career planning, and succession planning.

The multiple model approach has several advantages. First, because of its flexibility, the approach facilitates development of a set of competency models that encompass the jobs of all or most employees. Second, because the approach generates competency models tailored for each job, the models have high face validity and credibility. A third advantage of this approach is that it facilitates comparison of the requirements for different jobs – to design a compensation program or to plan career paths. When the organization needs to select staff, the multiple model approach helps identify which competencies are essential and desirable for a particular position.

The primary disadvantage of the multiple model approach is its complexity. For each job there is a different competency model, and the different models may generate a corresponding need for different competency assessment forms, selection interview guides, performance appraisal forms, and so on. The multiple model approach is likely to create administrative work for HR staff. To deal with this complexity, some organizations use software programs that help identify the competencies for a job and manage assessments and other HR applications based on the models. Another disadvantage of the multiple model approach is that because no competencies are common to all jobs, top management cannot use this approach to send a strong message about values and skills that are essential for the future.

Some organizations have adopted approaches that combine elements of the one-size-fits-all approach with the multiple model approach. These organizations typically identify a small set of core competencies, such as "Customer Focus" and "Initiative," that apply to all jobs but supplement the core set with additional, job-specific competencies. The core competencies send a message about shared values for the future, while the additional competencies ensure that each competency model truly describes the requirements for that job. The main disadvantage of intermediate approaches is that they tend to result in competency models with larger numbers of competencies than would be the case using either the one-size-fits-all approach or the multiple model approach.

SUMMARY

Planning the development of competency models is an exercise in practical problem solving. There are alternative methods for collecting and analyzing data, for deciding what to include in the model, and for formatting the model and its behavioral descriptors. The choices among the alternatives should depend on goals of key stakeholders, the needs of key users, the budget and time available to develop the model, and the preferred styles of the model building team.

What makes a good competency model? The model must meet the needs of its key users. Each competency should be conceptually coherent and different from the other competencies. The behavioral descriptors should be clearly and crisply worded. The model should also be parsimonious; including too many competencies and behavioral descriptors makes a model ponderous to read and use. Finally, a good model is often supplemented with components that will add value for an intended Human Resources application.

Suggested Additional Readings

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