



FOCUS ARTICLE

Competency Models: One Size Does Not Fit All

Karen N. Caruso, Ph.D.

The one size fits all t-shirt is supposed to be designed to fit "most" people but it really does not fit anyone very well. Just imagine if someone starting making one size fits all shoes!

Competency Models Define Performance Expectations

A competency captures the critical knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors which contribute to the successful accomplishment of desired job results within a specific company. Competencies are defined by specific behavioral statements which serve as examples of how a competency may be demonstrated on the job and the expected impact on results.

A competency model is a *set of competencies* that describe what it takes to be successful in a specific job role or organization. As such, competency models cannot be designed using the one size fits all approach. An organization's competency model:

- represents a behavioral dimension to organizational performance on which organizations can truly differentiate themselves,
- establishes a common language for the organization to discuss talent and make talent decisions less subjective, and
- provides a foundation for the integration of all components of talent management.

The business case for the use of competency models has been made clear yet the use of competency models and competency-based management has been criticized by business leaders for not having direct impact on business outcomes. Competency models have been perceived to define 'soft skills' or 'nice to have' capabilities which end up being viewed as unimportant to the business. This type of criticism is to be expected when organizations decide to use a 'one size fits all' approach to defining competencies, thereby failing to recognize the unique aspects of the organization's strategy, culture and values.

Competency models provide clear direction regarding performance expectations when directly linked to an organization's desired results. Direction can only be clear when

competencies explain “how” results should be achieved AND “why” it is important to achieve them. The "how" and "why" can only be defined using sound competency modeling methods.

This example illustrates how the behaviors that define competencies can provide clear direction on expected actions and desired outcomes. While the Generic Behavior offers direction on action, the Specific Behavior clearly articulates expected outcomes of those actions.

Competency: Builds Collaborative Relationships	
Generic Behavior	Specific Behavior
<i>Develops, maintains, and strengthens relationships with others in the organization.</i>	<i>Works effectively with people from various functions and diverse perspectives to execute plans, solve problems, and achieve goals/objectives.</i>

Simply picking from a list of pre-defined competencies likely results in competencies and behaviors being too generic. Competency models that are defined in this way:

- will not provide clear direction,
- will be hard for employees to relate to and identify with, and
- won't do anything to support the achievement of results.

Modifying a competency model used somewhere else (perhaps at another company....) is similar to taking another company's logo, tweaking it a bit, and calling it your own. How is that going to work? Competency models defined in this way will provide clear direction on how to be successful in another company and will result in poor linkage to results and poor alignment with strategy

Organizations should seek to define a specific set of behaviors that define success for their particular organization - as their organization has a unique strategy and unique culture.

A Custom Fit is Required

Some talent management software solutions offer a library of generic competencies from which organizations can pick and choose to define competency models. Most vendors do not have the expertise to advise on competency modeling. However, they are happy to provide these generic models that, in the end, will not likely align with most organization's needs.

If you were going to have a custom made suit made, you would likely go to an experienced tailor - one with the skill and extensive experience required to create a suit that fits you perfectly and makes you look great. Seeking the support of a professional with the required background, skills and extensive experience in the development of competency model is critical. Expertise in competency modeling requires advanced education, training and years of applied experience.

Click here to learn more about [viaPeople Consulting Services](#) and how they can help you create competency models that fit perfectly.

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