

# Competencies: Linking Assessment to Performance and Development

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Competencies have been defined in a variety of different ways by the scientific community as well as the Human Resources field. Generally speaking, most definitions of competencies required by people to succeed in the workplace include something about the capability to become good at a particular activity by utilizing one's knowledge, skills, past experience and natural talent. The competency of Delegation could therefore be defined as the ability to delegate assignments, projects or tasks to ensure that each person is working on the highest priority activity and the one that they are most likely to be able to successfully complete. It stands to reason then that different jobs require different competencies. Competencies are significant because they can be used as yardsticks to improve performance (both individual and organizational) in at least three ways: Selection, Feedback and Development.

## 1. Selection

To the extent that new employees can be hired into the job already possessing most, if not all, of the competencies required for successful performance, the probability of their learning the job quickly and executing at a high level is much greater. Competencies can thus be used to guide recruitment (wherein the company seeks to identify recruiting sources rich in desired competencies) and selection (where the company builds structured interviews around the critical competencies it requires).

## 2. Feedback

Research has shown that employees receiving feedback about their strengths and weaknesses improve their performance more than those who don't receive feedback (Smither, 1995). Furthermore, it appears that those who need it most are the ones who also benefit the most from feedback. Competencies provide a useful framework for organizing job-relevant feedback to improve performance.

## 3. Development

Finally, competencies can be an effective way to organize and guide developmental activities. Although enhancing one's knowledge or changing one's skill level is not easy, those who make development a priority can improve their resulting performance. By involving oneself in developmental processes designed to enhance or increase a particular competency, overall job performance can more easily be improved.

### The Concept of Critical Competencies

Critical job competencies are the knowledge and skills required to perform a particular job especially well. The critical competency concept is reflected in the fact that employees who excel at particular jobs exhibit similar competencies.

When seeking to fill a position, the objective typically includes:

- Recruiting and selecting individuals who possess relevant job competencies
- Helping individuals improve their performance by further developing relevant job competencies

Meeting these objectives requires a thorough understanding of exactly which competencies are required by the job and how any one person measures up against these competencies.

A comprehensive competency analysis will guide organizations in choosing the critical competencies around which a structured interview, performance appraisal, or multi-rater assessment should be created. Each of these tools will help tie critical competencies to Selection, Feedback and Development.

By identifying the critical competencies required for successful performance in a particular job, organizations can then hire better

people, assess their performance based on the criteria which was used to select them, and most important, provide them with developmental opportunities in areas that will impact successful performance the most. ■

### **About the Author**

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Ame Creglow, M.S., is the global assessment director of operations and principal at Kenexa. Between 1999 and 2005, Ms. Creglow served as a Project Manager and Senior Consultant for the Global Survey and Assessment practices. With more than 18 years of experience in Human Resources, Ms. Creglow has been responsible for the development of more than 75 custom assessments and has designed, validated and implemented large-scale employee selection systems for retail managers, hourly associates, sales professionals, customer service representatives, health care providers, guest-contact employees, technical professionals and engineers. Before joining Kenexa, Ms. Creglow served as a Senior Research Analyst with The Gallup Organization.

Ms. Creglow has also completed a Meta-analytic study that relates employees' perceptions of management to business outcomes. This study, which included over 2,500 business units and more than 105,000 employees, has been featured in *First Break All the Rules*. Creglow holds a Master of Science from The Gallup University in Organizational Research and a Bachelor of Arts from Loras College in Marketing and German.

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