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2013 - We are  
celebrating 20  
years of service to  
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## *The Leadership Competency Craze- Part 3 of 3: conquering competencies*

In Part 2 of The Leadership Competency Craze I provided an overview of how you can correct competency confusion. For Part 3 I will give you some ideas about how you can go about developing a competency model for your organization.

Remember: The intent of a competency definition is:

- to provide enough details about the competency so that someone using the model can recognize the competency in action and notice opportunities for competence and
- can recommend development actions.

Behavioral definitions offer the most promise for helping users relate competency models to the real world. The first move toward application is helping users understand that a valid competency model can strengthen your current practices.

### **So, what do you do?**

First, thoroughly analyze your business environment to provide a foundation for your competency project. Conduct interviews with senior executives to outline the corporation's future. Discussions should include:

- Strategic and operational direction
- Anticipated changes in the business
- Knowledge, skills, behaviors necessary to achieve goals.

You can research other competency models and best practices. These may provide an external validation benchmark for your study. Moreover, use behavioral interviews with top performers to get examples of exceptional performance then analyze the results. Themes will emerge and you can interpret the results to construct the initial competency model.

Focus groups will provide additional input regarding knowledge and skills required for specific competencies. They will also facilitate lively debate among participants to create ownership and commitment to the process. Then analyze the data from the focus groups which will help you further define and hone the competencies.

The interview and focus group participants should then meet to validate the specific competencies. Senior management should review the core competency model to ensure that it reflected the desired competencies.

Second, it might make the most sense to adapt an off-the-shelf, research-based model, especially for organizations that lack the resources to create and validate their own competency models.

It's unlikely that the management and leadership skills of effective people are unique or different across functions and organizations. You can save a lot of time and money by using an existing research-based management model and building management and leadership development strategies around it.

You can find a lot of information about competencies from academic studies and professional journals. Here are just a few of my favorite examples of "off the shelf" research based competency tools:

*Google's Project Oxygen:* In early 2009, statisticians inside Google embarked on a plan code-named "Project Oxygen." They wanted to build better bosses. Google began by analyzing performance

reviews, feedback surveys and nominations for top-manager awards. They correlated phrases, words, praise and complaints. You can see the “8 Point Plan to Help Managers Improve” in the article from the New York Times article published in March 2011 or you can just Google it!

*The Objective Selection of Supervisors* (1978) published by the Industrial Research Unit, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. This is a comprehensive look at eight industries practices in selecting supervisors and two validated methods for selecting supervisors objectively.

*Performance Based Supervisory Development* (1982) published by Human Resources Development Press. It was adapted from a large, long term study at AT&T derived from interviews and observations of hundreds of “master performers.” These people were select group of highly proficient supervisors in a variety of job situations.

*Effective Competency Modeling and Reporting: A Step-by-Step Guide for Improving Individual and Organizational Performance* by Kenneth C. Cooper. New York: AMACOM, 2000, 353 pages + CD, \$95.00.

In the early 1990s, management-development experts Michael Lombardo, EdD, and Robert Eichinger, PhD, created a toolkit for the assessment and development of management and leadership skills. It's built around a set of 67 research-based competencies, 19 identified behaviors that can stall or advance careers, and an approach to leadership development that heavily weights experience. That toolkit is now a offered by the company the two men founded, Lominger International.

James M. Kouzes and Posner, Barry Z. (2007). *The Leadership Challenge*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass). Two recent research reports offer strong empirical support for the impact of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model.

*The Critical Aspects of Successful Talent (CAST)*™ is a tool I developed to identify, rate and rank competencies. CAST uses data from seminal, complimentary long term studies, and more than 140 employers and over 200 interviews. The tool provides a process to identify essential competencies for jobs at all levels in the organization. The rating and ranking results in content valid set of six to eight essential competencies for the job analyzed.

Finally, I whole heartedly agree with Karen Phelan’s simple description of what makes a good leader in her book, *Sorry I Broke Your Company*:

“Being a good manager isn’t that different from being a good person... 1. Show you care... 2. Communicate... 3. Be flexible/adaptive/responsive... 4. Think and plan ahead.”

The real payoff involves fostering work environments in which people have opportunities to learn how to become more effective and in which we are willing to evaluate and modify our practices. List making is a distraction. Competency models are not a silver bullet.

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