



Pitfalls to Avoid When Developing Competency Models

'Sell' competencies as an HR initiative

They might not sound strategic to the non HR person, but competency models have the potential to deliver millions in extra revenue and output – don't underestimate or undersell them. Line managers love competency models as they provide a language to describe performance, give feedback and target coaching. Getting buy in from line managers and involving them in the development of the competencies will ensure successful implementation later on.

Forget the application

Before researching and developing your competency model, you should identify how you intend to use them – otherwise you risk leaving an investment tool sitting on the shelf. Including them in recruitment and selection will initially only impact new employees, performance appraisal will impact across the organisation but might require some years to rollout.

Develop competencies based on the status quo

Outstanding performers in complex jobs such as leadership roles, can deliver twice as much output as average performers. Developing a competency model based on what your outstanding performers do/say/think will raise the overall performance of your business. However, if you want to encourage or reward existing performance levels in your organisation then workshop the behaviours and values everyone in the organisation already has in spades and restate these in a shiny new model.

Define competencies which are 'nice to have' or aspirational

To deliver value, competencies must be defined with a job of work in mind. Including competencies which have no relevance to a particular role or function means behaviours are encouraged or rewarded which do not add more or greater output. This can also lead to lack of role clarity and confusion. When competency modelling, define the work and performance measures of a job as a first step to ensure the competencies are grounded in reality.



Spend hours word crafting to get the perfect end result

No competency model will be word perfect each and every time. Phrases such as 'Customer Service' or 'People Leadership' will mean different things to different people. Managing people's expectations about how many drafts and redrafts the model will go through is an important aspect to getting buy in. Spending hours or even days word crafting a competency model is not time well spent. Spending time on how we might measure and coach for better 'Customer Service' is, however, a better use of time and resource.

Use them for downsizing and for inspiring great performance

This is a serious point. Competencies used in any downsizing or redundancy exercise should have a limited shelf life. They need to be thrown out or significantly repackaged if you want to use them again.

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