

ART AND SCIENCE OF COMPETENCY MAPPING

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Introduction

A lot is going on in recent times on the issue of competency mapping. A lot of resources are spent and consultants are invited to do competency mapping. Corporations across the world have become more aware of the need for competency mapping. This need arose due to some of the following reasons:

- Increased competition and the need to build competency based organizations that can withstand and excel locally, globally and glocally
- Increased costs of manpower
- Need for ensuring that competent people are available for performing various critical roles
- Downsizing and the consequent need to get a lot of things done with fewer people, thus reduce manpower costs and pass on the advantages to the customer
- Recognition that technology, finances, customers, markets, systems and processes can all be set right or managed effectively if we have the right kind of human resources
- The need for focus in performing roles - need for time management, nurturing of competence and increased emphasis on Performance Management Systems
- Recognition of the strategic advantage given by employee competencies in building the core competencies of the organization

In good organisations competency mapping existed already in some form or the other. Traditionally HR Directors and their top management have always paid attention to competencies and incorporated them mostly in their appraisal systems. Competencies in the past used to be referred as attributes, qualities, knowledge, skills etc. For example, an Engineering company in India 'Larsen &Toubro' introduced their open appraisal in mid-seventies they debated and identified a few qualities (competencies) needed to be exhibited by everyone which was later incorporated in their appraisal form: **Initiative, Team Work, Creativity, and Problem Solving** were few of the competencies.

Some firms have treated the tasks with the same weightage as the competencies in their annual appraisals of employees. They assigned 50% points to task accomplishments or results and 50% points to competencies demonstrated and focussed the annual coaching around both the competencies and task accomplishments.

The renewed emphasis on competency mapping across the world comes from the following:

- Especially in the west there have been many consulting firms that have specialized in competency mapping and have come up with new dictionaries of competencies.
- With enhanced global knowledge and access to these consulting firms, most Asian HR Managers have newly become aware of the existence of these competencies and firms
- Some firms have not done this exercise in the past or where they have done it the top management have not taken it seriously as it was done with low cost and as a part of the role of the HR Manager.
- In some of the other firms there have been changes in HR Managers, changes in roles with new organizational structures and hence there was a need to do the exercise all over again.
- MNCs undertake competency mapping worldwide to promote a standardized and internationally known competence culture, for better controls, centralized administration and systems driven approach. These

MNCs undertake competency mapping and share the competency profiles to those in other countries. For example, when Unilevers undertake such competency mapping worldwide they may supply the list to HUL in India and HUL needs to adapt it to Indian conditions.

Thus, there could be a variety of reasons and Indian firms seem to blindly follow this. Some of them unfortunately do not consider their competency mapping as a worth noticeable exercise until they spend a significant amount of money which is worth mentioning in their balance sheet or use an International Consultancy firm which will add to the reputation of the company.

Competency mapping is an important exercise. Every well managed firm should:

- Have a clear organizational structure
- Well defined roles in terms of the KPAs or tasks and activities associated with each role
- Should have mapped the competencies required for each role
- Should have identified the generic competencies for each set of roles or levels of management
- And should use them for Recruitment, Performance Management, Promotion decisions, Placement and Training needs Identification.

What is Competency?

Any underlying characteristic required to perform a given task, activity, or role successfully can be considered as competency. Competency may take the following forms:

- Knowledge
- Attitude
- Skill
- Other characteristics of an individual
- Motives
- Values
- Self-concept

Competencies may be grouped in to various areas. In classic article published a few decades ago in Harvard Business Review, Daniel Katz grouped them under three areas which were later expanded by Indian Management professors in to the following four:

- Technical - dealing with the technology or know how associated with the function, role, task (Also now referred by some as Functional)
- Managerial/Organizational - dealing with the managerial aspects, organizing, planning, mobilizing resources, monitoring, systems use etc.
- Human/Behavioral - including personal, interpersonal, team related and
- Conceptual/Theoretical - including visualizations, model building etc.

This is a convenience classification and a given competency may fall into one or more areas and may include more than one. It is this combination that are made and promoted as competency dictionaries.

Competency Dictionary

A competency dictionary of a firm gives detailed descriptions of the competency language used by that firm. It contains detailed explanations of the combinations of competencies (technical, managerial, human and conceptual knowledge, attitudes and skills) using their own language. For example, Team work or Team Management competency can be defined in terms of organization specific and level specific behaviors for a given origination. At senior management or HOD levels it might mean an ability to identify, utilize and

synergize the contributions of a project team while at the CEO or CXO level it might mean ability to inspire and carry along the top management team including diversity management, and at junior manager level it might mean listening to others and making contributions to team. It is put here in more simplistic way while in competency mapping all details of the behaviors (observable, specific, measurable etc.) as shown by the person occupying that role are specified.

History of Competencies

A team of Educationists led by Benjamin Bloom in the USA in mid-fifties laid the foundation for identifying educational objectives and there by defining the knowledge attitudes and skills needed to be developed in education. The task force lead by Bloom took several years to make an exhaustive classification of the educational objectives that were grouped under the cognitive domain.

David McClelland the famous Harvard Psychologist has pioneered the competency movement across the world. His classic books on “Talent and Society”, “Achievement Motive”, “The Achieving Society”, “Motivating Economic Achievement” and “Power the Inner Experience” brought out several new dimensions of the competencies. These competencies exposed by McClelland dealt with the affective domain in Bloom’s terminology. The turning point for competency movement is the article published in American Psychologist in 1973 by McClelland wherein he presented that traditional achievement and intelligence score may not be able to predict job success and what is required is to profile the exact competencies required to perform a given job effectively and measure them using a variety of tests. This article combined with the work done by Douglas Brey and his associates at AT&T in the US wherein they presented evidence that competencies can be assessed through assessment centers and on the job success can be predicted to some extent by the same. This laid the foundation for popularizing the competency movement.

Later, McBer a Consulting Firm founded by David McClelland and his associate David Berlew have specialized in mapping the competencies of entrepreneurs and managers across the world. They even developed a new and yet simple methodology called the Behavior Event Interviewing (BEI) to map the competencies.

Thus AT&T Studies of Formative Years in Business indicated the predictability of future success. McClelland's studies in early seventies indicated the limitations of Intelligence and Academic Performance data. With increased recognition of the limitations in performance appraisal for predicting future performance, potential appraisal got focus and Assessment centers became popular in seventies.

Competency Mapping

Competency mapping is the process of identification of the competencies required to perform successfully a given job or role or a set of tasks at a given point of time. It consists of breaking a given role or job into its constituent tasks or activities and identifying the competencies (technical, managerial, behavioral, conceptual knowledge, an attitude, skills, etc.) needed to perform the same successfully.

Competency assessment is the assessment of the extent to which a given individual or a set of individuals possess these competencies required by a given role or set of roles or levels of roles. Assessment centers use multiple methods and multiple assessors to assess the competencies of a given individual or a group of individuals. To enhance objectivity, they use trained assessors and multiple methods including psychometric tests, simulation exercise, presentations, in-basket exercises, interviews, role-plays, group discussions etc. The methods to be used depend on the nature of competencies.

Who Identifies competencies?

Competencies can be identified by one or more of the following category of people: Experts, HR Specialists, Job analysts, Psychologists, Industrial Engineers etc. in consultation with: Line Managers, Current & Past Role holders, Supervising Seniors, Reporting and Reviewing Officers, Internal Customers, Subordinates of the role holders and Other role set members of the role (those who have expectations from the role holder and who interact with him/her).

What Methodology is used?

The following methods are used in combination for competency mapping:

- Interviews
- Group work
- Task Forces
- Task Analysis workshops
- Questionnaire
- Use of Job descriptions
- Performance Appraisal Formats
- KRAs and Attributes

How are they Identified?

The process of identification is not very complex. Some of the methods are given below:

1. Ask the role holder to list the tasks to be performed by him one by one, and identify the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skills required to perform each of these
2. Consolidate the list
3. Present it to a role set group or a special task force constituted for that role
4. Edit and Finalize

Alternately appoint a task force for each role. The task force should consist of some current incumbents of the role who are performing it well, the reporting and reviewing officers of that role, some of the past role incumbents who have successfully performed that role. Make sure that the task force consists of at least one or more members who have some understanding of the competencies and the nature of competencies. Most professional managers with MBA degrees should have this competence. If they do not it is easy to acquire by reading a few books.

When the author worked with the Ministry of Health in Indonesia along with Dr. Udai Pareek and Rolf Lynton, a three-day workshop was found to be sufficient to train the local Health Province staff in competency mapping. This despite the author having to work with groups of Indonesians who speak only Bahasa Indonesia.

What Language to Use?

Use Technical language for technical competencies. For example: knowledge of hydraulics. Use business language for business competencies. Example: Knowledge of markets for watch business or Strategic thinking. Use your own language or standard terms for Behavior competencies. Example: Ability to Negotiate, Interpersonal sensitivity, Sales techniques. Too technical and conceptual knowledge align to the organization and people may create more problems than help

Who can do it?

Competency mapping is a task which can be done by many people. Nowadays all Management schools and those specializing in HR train the students in competency mapping.

The person who facilitates competency mapping should have the following competencies:

- Should have some familiarity with competencies and the nature of competencies. This includes knowledge of the terms used commonly in competency identifications (sociability, activity level, monitoring ability, resource mobilization, vision, communication skills, analytical skills, planning, organizing, team building, imitative, strategic thinker etc.) and meaning of most common terms.
- Should know the meaning of knowledge (awareness, information), Attitude (predisposition) and skill (demonstrable ability to perform a task or activity with a predesignated level of proficiency- speed, accuracy, quality etc.)
- Should be able to differentiate knowledge, attitude, and skills. Additional ability to differentiate motives, values, self-concept and traits is an additional competence
- Should be able to differentiate a task from an activity
- Should be able to list a set of activities and tasks for a given role with the help of a role holder (a person who is currently doing a given job)
- Should be able to classify a given competence (knowledge, attitude and skill) into technological arena, managerial arena, behavioral arena and a conceptual arena. This is a very simple competency which is useful but not essential.
- Should have interviewing and probing skills
- Should be able to document and communicate to others through documentation (ability to communicate using precise language and provide explanations wherever necessary)
- Should be familiar with the nature of business done by the firm, its products, and markets, processes etc. or at least would be able to understand and grasp the basics of technology and processes used by the firm. This can be developed through a quick induction program by the firm.

Any Masters in Management or Social Sciences or an Employee with Equivalent Experience and Training can develop these competencies. Conceptual Background and Understanding of the business is important. Familiarity with Business, Organizations, Management and Behavioral Sciences is useful. HR Managers, Management Graduates, Applied Psychologists are quite qualified to do this. Most institutions specializing in HR train the candidates to do this.

Some Tips on How to do it?

The following are some of tips to do competency mapping at low cost:

- Pick up a job or a role that is relatively well understood by all individuals in the company. Work out for this role and give it as an illustration. For example, Sales Executive, Production Supervisor, Assistant HR Manager, Receptionist, Transport Manager, PR Manager, etc. are known to all and easy to profile.
- Work out competencies for this role if necessary with the help of job analysis specialist or an internal member who has knowledge of competency mapping. Prepare this as an illustration.
- Circulate these others and ask various departments to do it on their own.
- Circulate samples of competencies done by others
- Illustrate knowledge, attitudes, skills, values etc.
- Choose a sample that does not use jargons
- Explain the purpose

- Interview of past successful job holders helps
- Current incumbents who are doing a good job along with their Reporting officers is a good enough team in most cases.
- Once prepared even based on one or two individual's inputs circulate to other role set members

For an illustration of the competencies see “Designing and Managing Human Resource Systems” by Udai Pareek and T. V. Rao, Oxford & IBH publication.

YOU CAN DO IT!!