



## Competencies, Part I

By Gina Wilson, Human Resources Assistant

“If you build it, he will come”

*Field of Dreams*

Ray Kinsella, played by Kevin Costner in *Field of Dreams*, heard a voice compelling him to take hold of a vision and do something that would make a difference in his life and the lives of those around him. Perhaps you never watched *Field of Dreams*. Or perhaps you saw the movie and you have a difficult time relating to someone who has heard voices coming from a cornfield. Regardless, it is likely you can relate to having a vision or a dream. Rather than build a baseball field, perhaps your vision is to improve performance in your organization.

In order for Ray, in *Field of Dreams*, to see his idea become a reality, he needed the people around him to align with his vision and strategy. Similarly, the manager or human resources professional must align individual and team behavior with the organization’s vision and strategy in order to achieve business success.

So, how can an organization *align* a group of individuals to accomplish this goal? Do we need to spend a copious amount of time on team building? While it is important to expend energy to create team cohesiveness and a vital corporate culture, an exemplary organizational culture does not guarantee exemplary outcomes and results. Likewise, an organization may sabotage their success with myopic focus on numbers, statistics, and generally ignoring the people-part of the formula. According to Steven Moulton of the

Society for Human Resource Management, “organizations that seek balance seem to have resilience over the long term.” Two essential areas an organization must include in this balancing act are performance competencies and core competencies.

What exactly is a competency? According to Moulton, a competency can mean many different things to different people. States Moulton, an organization can view a competency “as the technical capability that differentiates that organization from the competition.” Yet, on “an individual level, a competency can be defined as a group of related knowledge, skills and abilities that influence job performance.”

Competencies fit into a much bigger corporate picture. Stepping back into our *Field of Dreams*, imagine this picture as a baseball game. *The Game* is held together by a foundation or infrastructure of policies, systems, and structure. Sitting in the stands, the fans don’t see this, but if this foundation were not in place *The Game* would be chaotic. The purpose of this infrastructure is to support the mission/vision – to entertain – while aligned with the results – win as many games as possible and keep the fans happy.

The individual competencies, also referred to as performance competencies, are specific, measurable, and are defined in behavioral terms. By assigning individual competencies to the *Dream Team* players, management demonstrates their commitment to helping the individuals become the best possible team players in the league.

The core competencies are what make one baseball *team* better than another. The core competencies, along with the mission, vision, values, and culture, set the tone of the *team*.

Why is it essential for organizations to address competencies? Once established, competencies provide a stable foundation for the building of a fully incorporated performance management system. Competencies also help recognize differing performance levels, making it easier to assess job performance.

So, how is your vision coming along? Are you ready to align individual and team behavior with your organization's vision and strategy in order to achieve business success? Are you ready to make your *Field of Dreams* a reality? It may seem like a daunting task, but with the advice and guidance of a human resource professional, the effort you put into identifying competencies could be the start of a great season with a winning team.

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“Telling a baseball player that he struck out will not come as a surprise to him. What the player needs to know, and what a good appraiser-counselor will be able to tell him, is exactly what he must do to at least get on first base and possibly hit a home run.”

~Gary Latham and Kenneth Wexley  
Quoted in The Complete Guide to Performance Appraisal

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## Measuring Success!

### *How to Distinguish Between a Competency and a Skill*

Frequently management will refer to competencies when they actually mean skills. How can we tell the difference? Steven Moulton of the Society for Human Resource Management described the differences between various competencies. The following is a simplified explanation of his descriptions:

Core Competencies – are technical expertise that distinguishes an organization from everyone else. According to Moulton, core competencies “are the technologies, strategies, methodologies or processes that create a competitive advantage for an organization. They are not resources to be managed or recorded like money, buildings, or equipment. Rather, these need to be allocated and cultivated. Core competencies describe *what* the organization does best.

Organizational Competencies – describe how an organization expects the employees to “get the job done” and fulfill the mission of the organization. These organizational competencies are fundamental in determining how the organization plans to operate. Organizational competencies describe *how* the organization expects *the what* to be accomplished. Examples of organizational competencies include:

- Decision Making
- Customer Service
- Team Work
- Leadership
- Relationship building

Skills – Abilities that are applied to accomplishing a specific task or function. Skills describe *what* an individual is to do. Examples:

- Driving a fork lift
- Operating a computer
- Designing a web site

## Did You Know?

- 49% of the current workforce consists of baby boomers that are looking forward to retirement in the next 8 to 10 years.
- 23% of the current workforce consists of Gen-Xers – the generation following the post-World War II baby boom, from the early 1960s to the late 1970s.
- 58% of employees surveyed felt that poor management is the leading factor negatively impacting employee productivity at work.

Source: Weatherly, Leslie A. (2005). *Competency-Based Performance Management* SHRM Online.

### Sources and Recommended Reading:

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- Latham, Gary P. & Wexley, Kenneth N. (1981). Increasing Productivity through Performance Appraisal. Addison Wesley Longman Publishing Company.
- Moulton, Steven (2003). *Competency Development, Integration and Application* SHRM Online.
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