



Competencies, Part II

By Gina Wilson, Human Resources Assistant

“Our incomes are like our shoes; if too small, they gall and pinch us; but if too large, they cause us to stumble and to trip.” *John Locke*

Perhaps you disagree with John Locke. After all, how many people complain they earn too much money? But surely you can relate to ill-fitting shoes. If they compress your toes and make your feet ache, it is impossible to concentrate on the task at hand. When you find a good fitting pair of shoes, you find yourself frequently reaching for them because they are high-quality, dependable shoes and you can go about your day without giving a second thought to your comfort.

Like a good pair of shoes, a person should be a good fit in their position within an organization. If the position is misaligned with the employee, the employee will find it difficult to function and the manager will be distracted by a constant need to micromanage. Neither can concentrate on corporate goals and the task at hand.

The previous Measured Success! reviewed how core competencies provide a stable foundation for the building of a fully incorporated performance management system. Part II of the series becomes more specific and presents the importance of aligning individual competencies with an employee's position. Like buying a good pair of shoes, it's the fit that counts. And how is that accomplished? Assuming the organization has already determined the essential functions of the position, the next critical step is to establish individual competencies based on the position.

Once done, fill the position accordingly, manage these positions, and then allow room for growth and development.

What exactly are individual competencies? Individual competencies are defined as the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that drive successful job performance. Individual competencies are the drivers of success; they are the indicators for an individual to successfully perform the essential functions of a given position. Why is it important to establish individual competencies based on positions *before* hiring? When individual competencies are drafted before the hiring process begins and reviewed during the interview process, the efficiency of the actual interview process is increased because it provides a thorough picture of the job requirements beforehand.

The most important and appealing outcome of following this formula is it increases the likelihood of hiring people who will be a good fit and succeed in the job. Furthermore, the process helps to minimize the investment of time and money in hiring people who may not align with the organization's values. And finally, determining individual competencies before hiring someone can help the organization narrow down and distinguish between skills that are trainable and those that may be a little bit more difficult to develop – those that really must be evident before hiring.

When individual competencies are drafted *before* hiring, the organization is forced to define exactly what they are looking for. Each position will likely have unique individual competencies so it may take some careful consideration to draft

a list. To help understand how an individual competency fits into the essential functions of a job, let's examine the position of an electrical engineer. Some (there are obviously many more) of the essential functions of an electrical engineer may include:

1. Perform electronic and electrical component, circuit, and board design.
2. Maintain documentation and evaluate progress of project.
3. Develop and implement test plans for prototypes
4. Communicate with clients and vendors
5. Attend meetings.

Some of the individual competencies – remember, they are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that drive successful job performance – of an electrical engineer may include, but are not limited to:

1. B.S. in Electrical Engineering
2. Interpret drawings, specs, and codes
3. Knowledge of contract administration
4. Knowledge of EEO, safety, and labor standards to ensure compliance

However, this hypothetical electrical engineer – the one with the above listed the essential functions – specifically deals with clients and vendors, so the list of individual competencies would also include:

5. Need to possess excellent verbal and written communication skills in order to effectively deal with clients.

Now, if this electrical engineer was hired to be working in a team-based environment, an additional individual competency would include:

6. Must possess strong team orientation skills

As you can see, a great deal of consideration is given before assigning individual competencies. In this case, an engineer is not *just an engineer*. The question must be asked, *what specific competencies are unique to this particular job for this particular engineer?*

Now the organization knows exactly what is needed to get the job done. Additionally, once the job is posted, a prospective candidate can easily determine if they possess the skills needed to perform the job by measuring their skills against the individual competencies posted in the job listing. The interview is streamlined too

because time is not wasted by interviewing candidates that do not possess the individual competencies needed for the job.

The entire process of creating a document for the individual competencies of a given job can be quite time consuming oftentimes resulting in a lengthy document, but the positive outcome of hiring the right person for the job makes the time invested beforehand well worth the effort. If you find the task too daunting to undertake in-house, consider contacting a human resources consulting firm such as HR Consultants, Inc.. No one likes to wear shoes that pinch and no one wants to spend time either in a position or managing a position that doesn't fit. All of this preparation is critical to recruit, motivate, and retain a quality workforce. Do the prep work before hand and everyone will benefit.

"I wanted to have a career in sports when I was young, but I had to give up the idea. I'm only six feet tall, so I couldn't play basketball. I'm only 190 pounds, so I couldn't play football, and I have 20/20 vision, so I couldn't be a referee."

Jay Leno

Measuring Success!

How to Coach and Encourage Development

In 10 Clowns Don't Make a Circus Schragis and Frishman state, "Most companies spend a fraction of the time and effort to orient new employees than they do to recruit them." Don't make that mistake. Coaching employees should begin right away. To hire a new employee and leave them alone to figure out how to be successful is a disservice to the new hire and to the organization.

At Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, employees are trained and coached in how to deliver "Walt Disney World's brand of Quality Service" by attending Disney University and their well-respected Traditions Orientation

Program where it is said, “We don’t put people in Disney. We put Disney in people.” Disney puts an enormous effort into training and mentoring employees and the payoff is evident to anyone who has ever experienced Disney *magic*.

Training and mentoring is a step in the right direction because it can provide noteworthy benefits for both the company and the employee. According to Lillian Eby, an authority on corporate mentoring and an associate professor of psychology at the University of Georgia, “A key benefit of mentoring is retention. Turnover costs can be staggering. That’s one reason why organizations include mentoring programs as part of their business objectives.”

Some guidelines for creating a successful mentoring program may include:

1. There must be management support for the mentoring program.
2. Formal programs must be monitored and include training and clear expectations.
3. The mentor and the mentored employee or protégé must *fit* in relation to work styles and personalities.
4. Mentor programs are more likely to succeed with incentives.

Regardless of the complexity or simplicity of the mentoring program, the benefits to both employee and the organization are positive. Mentoring can be an effective tool in initiating a new employee into an organization by helping them find success and satisfaction in their jobs.

Did You Know?

In The Mentoring of Employees: Is Your Organization Taking Advantage of This Professional Tool?, D. O’Reilly states:

- 35% of employees who do not receive regular mentoring plan to seek employment within a year
- 16% of employees with good mentors plan to leave their companies

Source: Lockwood, N. R. (2004). *The Value of Mentoring*. SHRM Online.

Sources and Recommended Reading:

- Brooks, A. C. (2007). *I Love My Work*. Online at American.com September/October
- Schragis, S. & Frishman, R. (2006). 10 Clowns Don’t Make a Circus. Adams Media. Massachusetts.
- Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2006). *Corporate Mentoring Programs on the Upswing*. www.newswise.com
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