

Frequently Asked Questions on Competencies

1. What are Competencies?

Competencies are measures of job performance that combines a person's skills, knowledge and most importantly behaviours that **enable him/her** to perform assigned tasks and roles.

It is also usually defined as the combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable individuals or groups of individuals to perform work to defined standards.

Unlike skills or knowledge, which exists only in its own right, competencies, are wider in scope. It reflects individual ability to perform on the job, taking into cognisance their knowledge, skills and behaviours

For e.g. a Mechanic will require the necessary technical skills to repair engines to the desired standards specified by the relevant recognised institution or bodies like the National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS) or an organisation. In addition, the mechanic must demonstrate desired behavioural traits like communication, initiative and a safety orientation that will enable him/her to perform the tasks successfully.

2. When is a person said to be Competent?

A person is said to be **Competent** when he or she is **assessed** by a trained assessor and is found to have demonstrated the Required Competencies (Behavioural, Role & Functional) at an acceptable level set by the industry or an organisation.

A Competency Dictionary and Competency Anchors guide the Assessor, in his/her assessment of individual employee's competencies.

Individual employees may also present **evidence** to support their level of competency. Evidence may be in the form of past experiences or relevant tests undertaken by the employee that is recognised by the Assessors.

3. What are Competency Dictionaries and Competency Anchors?

A **Competency Dictionary** is a document that lists competencies for each trade or job and describes the level of performance expected for each competency. It is organised based on Competency Clusters, Units of Competency, Elements of Competency and the Performance Criteria,

which describes the performance to which individuals must demonstrate to be assessed as Competent.

A **Competency Anchor** describes the Level of Competency a person has demonstrated or assessed. Typically there are 6 Competency levels namely;

Level 1: Awareness

A person assessed as having basic awareness of the competency.

Level 2: Basic Skill

A person assessed as having basic skill in the competency and **always requires supervision** in order to perform to desired standards.

Level 3: Skilled

A person assessed as skilled in the competency, but requires **occasional supervision**.

Level 4: Advance Skilled

A person assessed as **exceeding the skilled level** and **does not require any supervision** to carry out the task.

Level 5: Mastery

A person assessed as **competent** with the ability to **supervise** and **train** others in the competency.

Level 6: Industry Expert

A person who is acknowledged as an expert in the competency by specific industry or professional association. For e.g. An experienced individual who sits in the advisory board of the Institute of Engineers advising on matters related to mechanical engineering may be considered as an expert in the competency related to mechanical engineering.

4. **What is a Competency Cluster?**

A Competency Cluster is a list of competencies organised in broad groups to facilitate reference. In each of the clusters there may be Units of Competency & Elements of Competency.

Example

Competency Clusters: Communications, Initiative

5. What are Units of Competency and Elements of Competency?

A **Unit of Competency** is a subsidiary of the Competency Cluster while **Element of Competency** is the subsidiary of the Unit of Competency that further describes or emphasise the Unit of Competency.

Example

Competency Cluster : Communication

Unit of Competency : Report Writing

Elements of Competency : Produce Reports
: Evaluate Reports
: Write Reports

6. What is Competency-Based HRM?

Competency-based Human Resource Management (HRM) is a path to which many organisations have embarked on to enhance the processes in managing human resources. It involves a transition from the traditional way of managing human resources based on what people have (e.g. qualifications) to what people can do (performance).

In Competency-based HRM, all related processes like Staffing & Selection, Training and Development, Succession Planning, Performance Management, Career Progression and Rewards are based on competencies. In essence, Competencies are central to all the human resource management processes.

7. How is the Competency Assessment different from the Performance Appraisal?

Performance appraisal focuses on your output or results in a performance period against a set target, goals or objectives.

Competency Assessment, on the other hand, focuses on what you can do against a set performance criteria or defined standards. What you can do (Competency Assessment) does not necessarily translate into output or

results. Therefore, the Performance Appraisal will still be used to assess your output.

In essence, there are distinct differences in the two assessments.

One is to measure your **ability** to carry out assigned tasks (**Competency Assessment**) against desired standards or criteria while the other is to measure your **output or results** (**Performance Appraisal or Assessment**) against the target set within a specified period.

8. What are the different types of Competency Models used?

There are principally two Competency Systems in used today throughout the world. One is propagated by behavioural scientists or more popularly known as the Hay Mcber Model. It is mostly used by the Americans or American based corporations or institutions. Proponents of this model believe that behaviours are the driving force behind an individual's ability to perform and therefore, behavioural assessment or measurement becomes an important indicator in employee selection, development and rewards.

The other proponents of the Competency System are the ones developed principally in Australia, United Kingdom and Canada. These countries, through their respective organisations like Dacum (Canada) The Management Charter Institute (UK) and organisations like the Vocational & Educational Training, Institution of Engineers and the Australian Qualifications Framework in Australia believe that there are other factors, besides behaviours that are equally important determining factors to an individual's ability to perform. These are translated into Functional Competencies and Role Competencies.

In countries such as Malaysia, the interest in Competencies was spearheaded by the government through the National Vocational Training Council which adopted the DACUM Model for its Competency Based training. There are Competency-based technical training programmes in specific trades like Scaffolding. The Human Resources Ministry has taken a step further by announcing the development of Managerial Competencies to facilitate the certification of Competent Managers.

8. What is the difference between a Behavioural Competency and a Role Competency?

Behavioural Competencies are a collection of the desired and observable motives, traits and behaviours of individuals when carrying out assigned tasks. It personifies an individual action or reaction in response to the

environment. For e.g. the competency, Customer Responsiveness will necessitate an individual to demonstrate or act based on a number of behaviours such as: -

- Ask questions to clarify customer requirements
- Respond to customers with an appropriate level of urgency
- Build confidence in customers that their needs are given the highest priority.

Role Competencies on the other hand, typically personifies an individual role within a job function. It is a function of the person's career level in an organisation. For example, a Head of Division, a Departmental Manager or a Team Leader. In carrying out these roles, individuals will require a set of supervising or managing competencies that are relevant to the job. For e.g. Managing Information and Managing Activities are two important Role Competencies for a Manager.

9. Who conducts the Competency Assessment?

Assessors will comprise of employees from the supervisory level and above. They will assess the competencies of their immediate subordinates. To facilitate these assessments the Assessors are trained in the relevant assessment methodology.

14. How frequent should the assessment be conducted?

Ideally, the assessment should be conducted every half-yearly. This is to allow the employees to develop and apply their acquired competencies either through classroom or on-the-job training.

15. What is the basis of assessment?

The assessment is based on the required competencies of the respective job and the required competency level, as reflected in the Competency Dictionary. Your Assessor will have with him/her a Competency Assessment Form, which will contain all the required competencies and the competency level.

Your Assessor will observe you doing your daily tasks and relate what you have **done** or **demonstrated** to the performance criteria in the Competency Assessment Form. His/her assessment of your demonstration of the competency is called Current Competency Level (CCL) and this will be matched against the Required Competency Level (RCL) to determine your level of competence. If there is a gap (where the CCL is lower than the RCL), your Assessor will recommend you to

undergo one of the development programmes to address the competency gap.

16. How is the Required Competency Level determined?

Behavioral Competencies are rated based on an international benchmark, particularly from the Dacum-AMOD Competency Model and the Management Charter Initiatives, UK.

The Functional Competencies will be determined by your Head of Department and validated by the divisional head. Alternatively, there may be industry standards governing this process.

Typically, the RCL will have an ascending trend, i.e. the higher job level the higher would be the RCL. However, this principle will not be unilateral. Some competencies will have a lower RCL at the higher job level than at a lower job level. These are basically competencies, which are very trade, or hands-on related like engine repair. For e.g. a Head of Department may not necessarily require a level of Mastery in engine repairs, as the job is often carried out by his/her subordinates. He/she may require level two competency, as he/she would require basic knowledge in the competency. However, the said departmental head will require a level of mastery in the role competency Managing Activities, as compared to the job of the Foremen who may only require a level two competency for Managing Activities.

20. I have been appointed as an assessor. What is my role?

As an Assessor, you have a very important role. Your subordinates' fate more or less depends on you, so to speak. Though assessing may sound simple, your ability to be objective and fair during the assessment is very critical. You must focus only on the person's ability to do the job based on the competencies and the performance criteria specified in the competency assessment form. Your assessment should not be influenced by your personal relationship with the incumbent. Therefore it is very important that you understand the competency system and the assessment methodology.

21. What must I prepare for an assessment as an assessee/assessor?

As a person being assessed, you must prepare an evidence list (whenever possible) so as to provide your assessors with some factual information on your level of competency. For e.g. a log book certified by an independent party stating that you have successfully performed a tasks to the desired standards is a good evidence for the Assessor.

As an Assessor, you must ensure that you fully understand the job competency requirements of the position you are assessing. You must also be competent in the assessment methodology. As a Supervisor, it is part of your job requirements to assess the competency of your subordinates. Deliberate avoidance to be an Assessor may be construed as a dereliction of your duty.

25. How is competency linked to Employee's development?

Reconciliation between the Required Competency Level and your Current competency Level will determine whether there are gaps to be addressed. The gaps will allow you to focus on the training and development programmes necessary. There is no longer a need for you to wonder what training is necessary. You could also decide whether you want to move your employees to higher level competencies.

26. How is competency linked to performance measurement?

Competencies are enablers, i.e. the knowledge, skills and attributes to enable you to carry out your job duties and responsibilities. By default, a competent person will normally be able to produce the desired results in job execution. However, there may be some instances where a competent individual may not produce the desired results on the job. There may be other factors that are influencing his on-the-job performance. This must be investigated so that remedial actions are taken to remove the impediment to performance.

Performance is defined as a series of activities that produce desired results. For example, a Welder's task is to join two metal plates together. He is said to have performed, when he carries out the task within the specified time, cost and quality. Therefore the measure of his performance is based on him/her welding the two joints in a timely and cost-effective manner that meets the specified quality standards. The Welder will require the necessary competence (e.g. competent in using arch welding equipment) to carry out the welding of the two joints.

27. How was the competency for each job identified?

The competencies are derived primarily from a task analysis or job analysis. This involves identifying the critical tasks of the job together with the jobholder and the immediate superior. It is important that only the critical tasks are considered, as these are the ones that enable the jobholder to perform. The critical tasks are then recorded as competency requirements. In addition, the Performance Criteria which the jobholder

must satisfy are described. The Performance Criteria are the standards to which the jobholder must demonstrate when carrying out the tasks. For e.g. a Welder when joining two metal sheets together must ensure that the workplace is safe for him to carry out the task. He/she must also ensure that the weld that he/she produces meets the quality standards and that he/she welds within the specified time frame.

The identified competencies, the Performance Criteria and the Required Competency Level are then validated by the Head of Department to ensure that it reflects the current competency requirement of the jobholder and standards set by the Company on the Performance Criteria.

31. What are the processes involved in the developing Competency?

Principally there are 11 key processes. These are: -

1. Analyze Purpose of Department
2. Identify Jobs
3. Conduct Job Task Analysis
4. Interview Incumbents
5. Assign Competencies
6. Determine RCL
7. Validate Competencies & RCL
8. Assess Individual Competencies
9. Validate Assessment
10. Establish Competency Gap
11. Identify Training Programmes

32. How will Competency based HRM benefit the company in terms of training?

Training and development will be more focused, as it will address specific gaps in competencies. It will no longer be based on qualitative justifications. Though in the initial period, training expenditure may increase, depending on the number of competency gaps, in the long term, the return on training expenditure may be justifiable when competency gaps are addressed and employees perform to expectations.