
Understanding Competencies: The Key to Defining Success



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Competency Basics

Defining Success: What is it good for?

Have you ever been an employee or had an employee ask you “Am I doing a good job?” The manager may say something like, “I need you to be a better team player and communicate more.” What does this mean exactly? Too often, employees and their managers do not have a clear sense of what success looks like for a given role. If I ask you what does being a good communicator mean to you, you might say, “talking more in meetings” and if I ask someone else, they might say, “I need to think before I speak.” Somewhere along the line the message gets lost. There are four reasons for why it is important to take the time to define successful performance.

Competency models describe the collection of critical competencies required for successful performance in a given job. **Competencies** refer to a cluster of related knowledge, skills, abilities, or other characteristics defined in terms of the observable behaviors needed for success.

Reason 1 – Universal Translator and Common Language

Describing jobs in a measurable and observable way helps everyone to have a clear picture of what success looks like. It’s like on Star Trek when the enterprise meets a new group of aliens for the first time, they always seem to know what the aliens are saying. That’s because they have a universal translator. Organizations need a universal translator for describing successful performance for a job and across the entire organization. It could be competencies, or occupational standards, or other frameworks that describe work.

Reason 2 – Clear Expectations

Defining the requirements for successful performance helps employee to develop a clear sense of what is expected. Employees do not have to wonder what they need to know and what they should be doing on the job.



Reason 3 – Engagement

By defining it, you can measure it. Employees can identify their strengths and developmental needs in terms of their current role. Often, employees who do not feel like they have access to opportunities for learning and development may lack motivation or may decide to leave your organization. By defining the requirements for their role, employees can identify learning opportunities they would like to pursue to cultivate their skillset. They can even see if they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success for other roles across the organization that they would like to transition into. This helps you to engage and retain your best people.

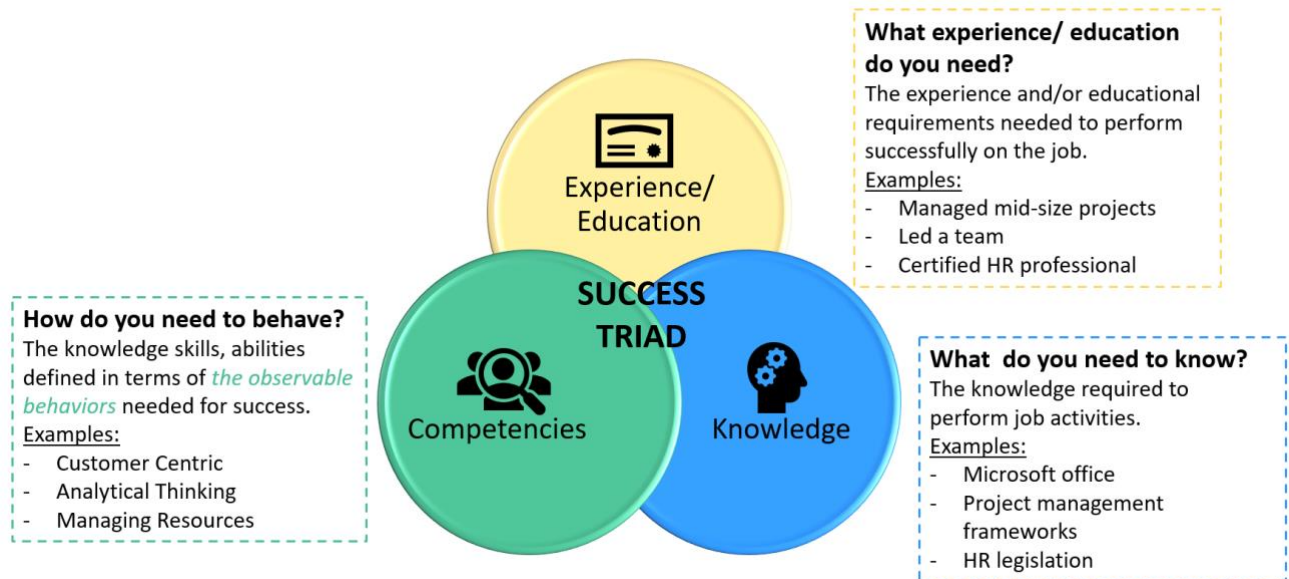
Reason 4 – Objective Decisions

Recruitment, hiring, placement, and promotion decisions are made much more objective when you take the time to define the requirements in a systematic way. Employees are hired, assessed, developed, and promoted based upon objective criteria rather than subjective preferences or unrelated factors such as seniority. This helps the truly qualified individuals rise to the top and allows others to become qualified if they are willing to take advantage of available development opportunities.

How to Define Success

The Success Triad

At Perennial Talent, we recognize the importance of defining the whole person in terms of successful performance. The Success Triad identifies the three dimensions needed to drive success in a job: Experience and/or Education, Knowledge, and Competencies. This model focusses on more than just the competencies allowing employees and managers to define and develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of successful performance for a job and link these requirements to their talent management strategy.



Defining the key Experience/Education, Knowledge, and Competencies required for successful performance for a job allows you to find, select, engage, grow, and keep your best people!



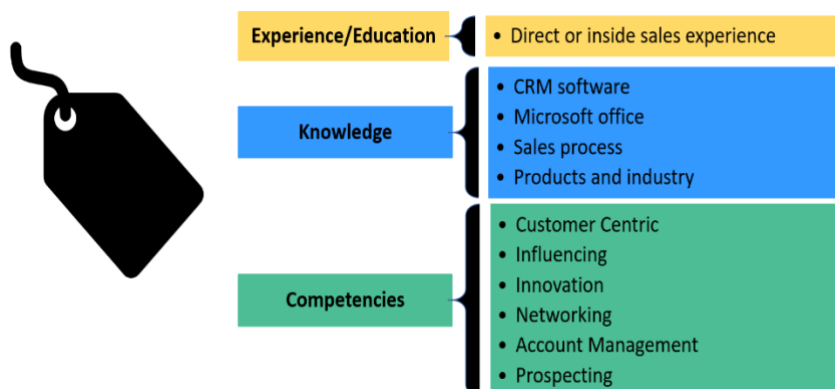
The Success Triad in Action

The Success Triad can be used to define successful performance for all roles across the entire organization.



Relying on a sports example, we can define success for a golfer in terms of the experience/education, knowledge, and competencies needed to play like a pro. They would need experience using the various types of clubs from a driver to a putter. Past

experience playing a round of golf would also be critical to success. In terms of the required knowledge, a golfer would need to know the rules of the game and the key terms, such as bogey or birdie. They would also need competencies or behaviors such as resilience and strategic thinking so that if they hit their ball in a sand trap, they can find their way out.



Applying the model to a more work-related example, a Sales Representative would need to have experience in direct sales. They would need to know how to use customer relationship software and Microsoft Office. They would

need to understand the sales process and cycle and the products and/or services that they are selling. They would also need to demonstrate key behaviors, such as placing the needs of the customer first (Customer Centric) and influencing skills, to gain acceptance for their sales proposal.

Competency Categories

Cognitive, Business, Individual, Technical, and Social (C-BITS)

Perennial Talent's dictionary of industry leading competencies makes it easy for you to describe successful performance in a consistent, defensible, observable, and measurable way.

Our competencies are organized into five categories, making it easier to identify and select the most critical competencies for a given job. The **Cognitive**, **Business**, **Individual**, and **Social** competencies can be considered “soft-skills” or transferable behaviors that apply to a variety of jobs across the entire organization. In contrast, the **Technical** competencies are narrower in their focus and focus on those behaviors related to the application of technical or functional knowledge to a specific job or collection of jobs.

Cognitive		Business			
Processing and evaluating information to generate solutions.		Applying organizational specific knowledge and procedures to drive organizational results.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Analytical ThinkingProblem SolvingInnovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Planning and OrganizingStrategic Thinking (L)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Business AcumenCustomer CentricFinancial Acumen (L)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Managing Change (L)Managing resources (L)		
*Individual		Technical			
Applying personal skills and abilities to achieve results.		Applying technical or functional knowledge, skills and abilities needed to perform a job.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Attention to DetailAdaptabilityContinuous LearningInitiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Integrity and ProfessionalismResilienceSelf-Awareness (L)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Specific to the job			
Social					
Building and nurturing interpersonal relationships with others.					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">CollaborationCommunicationDeveloping Others (L)		<ul style="list-style-type: none">InfluencingNetworking			

*As Individual Competencies are more driven by personality, they can be harder to develop.
(L) Tend to apply to those in a leadership role.

Structure of a Competency

Competencies provide a common language that help to define what a person must be able to know and do to be successful. They describe observable behaviors and should answer the question, “how do I know it when I see it”?

The best competencies are those that describe successful performance using multiple stages. Multi-stage competencies allow you to describe what successful performance looks like at various stages of learning, from someone still learning the skill or ability to someone with vast expertise in the skill or ability. By using multi-stage competencies, you can use the same competency to describe many different jobs across your organization. This allows an employee and their manager to understand what they may need to work on if they wish to not only be successful in their current role but also any other role that they may wish to move into.

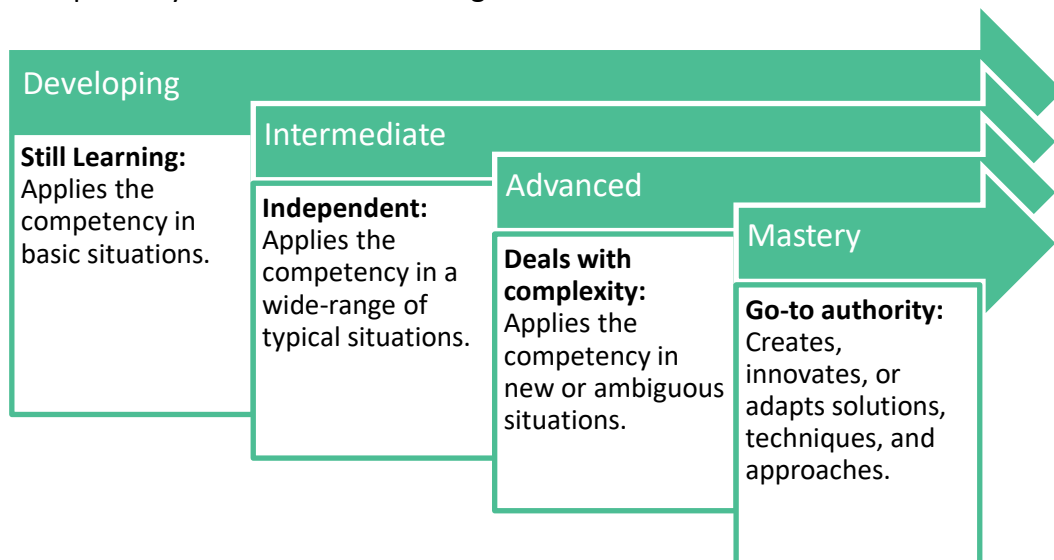
1. Name		2. Definition			
Continuous Learning: Shows a commitment to learning and developing knowledge, skills and abilities.					
Key Areas	Stages				4. Stages
	Developing	Intermediate	Advanced	Mastery	
Reflects on capabilities	Identifies own strengths and areas in need of development.	Gathers feedback from others regularly to clarify learning needs.	Analyses successes and failures on a continuous basis to identify areas to improve.	Measures current skills and knowledge against requirements needed to meet long-term goals.	
3. Key Areas					
Sets learning goals	Creates challenging and realistic learning goals.	Monitors progress towards meeting learning goals, updating approach as required.	Sets challenging long-term goals that are outside of area of expertise.	Provides guidance to others on how to set realistic and challenging goals.	
Identifies learning opportunities	Identifies own learning style and preferences for learning.	Identifies a variety of learning activities needed to enhance capabilities.	Seeks out challenging and unfamiliar learning opportunities.	Pursues development activities needed to meet future and emerging industry trends.	
Applies learning	Stays up to date on new trends or best practices relevant to own area.	Tries new ways of doing things, adjusting approach based on lessons learned.	5. Example Behaviors Shares knowledge and resources with others to facilitate continuous improvement.	Seeks new tools and techniques to facilitate continuous learning.	

Each competency should have a:

1. **Name** – describe what the competency is called.
2. **Definition** – describe what the competency means and provide an overview of the expected behaviors.
3. **Key Areas** – describe the general themes or key actions associated with success for the competency.
 - ✓ **Tip:** Focus on the key or critical (“must haves”) themes to ensure that the competency is easy to use. Between 3 and 5 key areas per competency is ideal.
4. **Stages** – describe the different stages of learning and development for the competency. These stages range from someone still developing and learning the competency to someone who has mastered it.
 - ✓ **Tip:** Four stages are ideal. Use an accumulative model, which means that you do not need to repeat example behaviors as you move from one stage to the next. If someone can demonstrate the example behaviors at the advanced stage, then they are able to already demonstrate the behaviors listed under the Intermediate and Developing stages. The behaviors listed under each stage also become more complex as you move from one stage to another.

THE BENEFITS OF OUR COMPETENCIES

- We provide guidelines for when certain competencies are more relevant to use.
- We provide ratings for how easy/hard it is to develop the competency.
- Key areas that call out critical themes associated with each competency make it easier to customize our competencies (i.e., add/remove themes) to fit your needs.



5. **Example Behaviors** – define the key observable behaviors that someone needs to demonstrate.
 - ✓ **Tip:** They should begin with one verb and be observable. One to two example behaviors per Key Area is ideal.

Competency Profile

Competency Profiles describe the critical competencies and the stage of the competency needed for successful performance for a role.

It is important to focus on the “must have” when defining a competency profile as opposed to the “nice to have.” It’s impossible to identify all the requirements for a job, so it is often most useful to focus on the most critical behaviors needed for successful performance. Less is more. We recommend using no more than 6-8 competencies to describe a job. This way, there are enough competencies to describe the job accurately, but not too many to make HR applications impractical (imagine hiring based on 15 key competencies!).

HR Specialist		HR Manager	
Competency	Stage	Competency	Stage
Customer Centric	Int.	Customer Centric	Adv.
Communication	Adv.	Communication	Adv.
Problem Solving	Int.	Strategic Thinking	Int.
Planning and Organizing	Int.	Managing Resources	Int.
Collaboration	Int.	Developing Others	Int.
HR Management	Int.	HR Management	Int.

Customer Centric - Puts the customer first and continually strives for customer service excellence for all internal and external customers.

Advanced - Deals with complexity: Applies the competency in new or ambiguous situations.

- Recommends processes for identifying and addressing customer needs.
- Resolves complex or ambiguous customer requests and issues.
- Tailors products and/or services to deliver solutions that meet customer expectations
- Proposes improvements to customer service based on customer feedback.

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