

# Competency Management

Diner-Conference by Mr. André Durivage, Ph.D.

On February 6, 2008, Mr. André Durivage, professor at the Université du Québec en Outaouais and President of the EPSI firm, presented potential practices for Quebec organizations with regard to competency management. Possessing much experience in the field, Mr. Durivage demonstrated the relevance of this approach, in all functions of HRM.

## Discussion Background

In today's workplace, competency management is an essential tool for the development of current organizations. Organizations that fail to capitalize on competencies have a more modest perennity, as they do not enable their employees to use their full potential and to use it in the workplace. Generally speaking, competency management is based on a clear undertaking: targeting the main functions of the employee's position, identifying the necessary competencies to occupy said function (competency profile), and finally, assessing the competencies of the employee who is occupying this function (competency assessment).

There are two main types of work-related competencies. Firstly, *essential competencies*: employees must possess a minimum level, but additional aptitude or ability does not represent an added value. When it comes to *discriminant competencies*, the more the individuals have this competency, the better they perform at their job. For instance, honesty is a key competency for automobile salespersons, but having more than a threshold level will not improve their performance. However, the ability to negotiate is a discriminant competency for this profession; the better their negotiation abilities, the better their sales will be.

## Competency Management and its Conditions for Success

Which elements will enable the proper functioning of the competency management system? Firstly, competency management must be in line with the organizational strategy. This is achieved by identifying the positions required to meet strategic objectives. Within these positions, one must seek to make groupings per function (e.g. management, customer service, etc.). It is important to have a small number of functions to ensure the proper unfolding of the process. Subsequently, one should identify the responsibilities related to each function, and associate to it the required discriminant and essential competencies.

In order to ensure the success of the management competency system, it is imperative to equip oneself with HRM tools to experience it before it is set into place. Hence, one must ascertain that the recruitment, selection, and training tools are adapted to the new model.

## Create or Acquire a Competency Management System?

There are two ways to set up a competency management system. The first is to create a personalized system for the organization. To this end, Mr. Durivage recommends that one use project management in order to target organizational objectives, and determine the most pressing work groups. One must also select a dedicated and mobilizing project team. Following this, the project team will be able to clarify expectations, establish the action plan and develop the competency model. This endeavour is nonetheless quite energy consuming and often times, little energy remains to actually put the model into place in the company.

It is also possible to acquire profiles that are already on the market. Mr. Durivage presented the advantages and drawbacks of such models as career architect, TRIMA, McBer's model, and finally, Compmetrica's. Opting for a profile that already exists is contingent upon several characteristics: number of competencies in each profile, the presence of behavioural indicators or competencies definitions, performance level, employees' learning difficulties and training options offered.

### HR Tools: How to Use the Competency Management System

There are several advantages to setting up a competency profile for the various HR functions. For *recruitment purposes*, such a system grants everyone with a common language and pre-established recruitment profiles. This allows for the specific identification of the sought-after talent. As one can associate competencies with a battery of valid tools, the process can be more easily planned out and candidate feedback is also facilitated. In terms of *training*, such a system allows one to capitalize on key competencies that need to be developed. In *performance management* and *career-pathing*, one can align competency management with the organizational objectives. In rare instances, *compensation* can be linked to the competency model set up in the organization. Note however that in the speaker's experience, making compensation contingent upon the mastery of the profile competency often proves to be a failure.

### Some Final Recommendations

In conclusion, André Durivage has shown the added value of setting up a competency management system in the workplace. Clearly, the success of this endeavour is tied to the instauration of winning practices that will optimize the process. It is important to note that setting up a competency management system requires an investment, both time-wise and resource-wise. It is sometimes helpful to seek assistance from external resources. One must also identify and create the HR tools for the model, particularly with regard to the key competencies. Finally, once the competency profile is aligned with the strategic needs of the organization, it is necessary that a significant number of managers and employees make the competency profile their own.