INTRINSIC™
TALENT SOLUTIONS

A Three-Tiered Approach to Competency Management

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Competency Management Solution Crafted for IT Department Of National Retail Grocer, Resulting in Clear Career Paths and Enhanced Workforce Planning.

THE CHALLENGE

A nationwide grocer's IT department quickly found that changing technology was impacting their hiring patterns and workforce planning process. With over 2,500 IT employees, it was difficult to determine which employees had specific skills that could be applied to other competency areas. While qualified individuals were available to staff complex projects, there was no way to quickly identify what competencies were available, nor to what to degree they were modeled by existing employees. As a result, projects were frequently staffed with highly-paid consultants, over-running training budgets based on impulsive decisions.

Employees became frustrated with the lack of career paths available to them. These strains surfaced throughout the staffing of several high-visibility and large-scale projects, as management was unable to rely on data to select IT employees for participation. As projects increased in complexity, professional relationships between IT and their internal clients became strained. In conjunction with unmet expectations, competition for top talent within the organization became a point of contention for management vying for the perceived best talent.

Management considered developing customized competencies from scratch. However, they quickly realized that building a database solution to collect and analyze the skills-based information would be both costly and time-consuming. They needed partners who had experience leading large-scale competency efforts and industry knowledge around supporting tools and resources for managing competency data.

THE SOLUTION

To start the project, we identified three pillars that would lead to success. First, engagement with business areas was imperative for garnering support and leveraging subject matter expertise to refine competency definitions. In addition, it was necessary to deploy a consistent competency framework with a common language and writing style for each of the behavioral descriptions. Finally, we needed an online solution to collect and store competencies, while also enabling reporting for enhanced decision-making. These pillars enabled us to:

1. Clearly define capability requirements aligned with business strategy and ongoing talent needs
2. Provide learning plans and competency-based career paths based on job roles and progression goals
3. Include development opportunities for both individual contributors and managerial roles
4. Identify and capitalize on the organization's existing internal capability benchmark, noting where we were and where we wanted to be
5. Use the organization's existing assets and platforms to develop meaningful curriculum
6. Understand and address skill gaps with real-time reporting

Engagement: We engaged management by first understanding their business, skills, and existing assets. These initial consultations defined how top performers were distinguished apart from average performers, with a focus on behavioral competencies. Defining competencies—personal characteristics and behaviors that predict outstanding performance—was a critical first step.

A four-level scale with progressive behavioral indicators allowed employees to quickly assess their competency level. Four to six descriptive sentences articulated the competency using action-based language for each level.

PROGRESSIVE COMPETENCY LEVELS

- Expert
- Extensive Experience
- Working Experience
- Basic Understanding
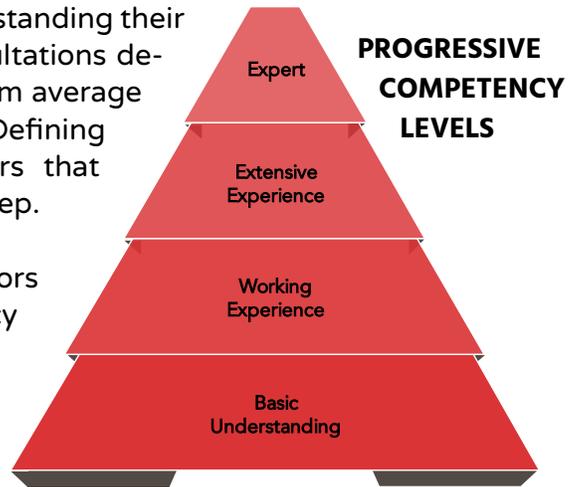
EXAMPLE: CHANGE MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY

DEFINITION: Managing change is about supporting a change initiative that has been mandated within the organization. It involves helping employees understand what the change means to them. People with this competency willingly embrace and champion change.

1. BASIC UNDERSTANDING
- Speaks out for change
- Publicly supports change initiative
- May repeat the change message(s) on a number of occasions to ensure others are clear on the purpose and direction of the change
- Presents change in a positive manner, focusing on impacts and current and future benefits of change links change to work processes

2. WORKING EXPERIENCE
- Provides information and probes for understanding and acceptance of change in others
- Explains how change(s) will affect work processes or structures
- Considers the interests of related external parties
- Reinforces the link to overall objectives
- Makes changes real for individuals
- Explains to employees specifically how the change will affect their roles or positions

4. EXPERT
- Translates organizational change strategies into specific and practical goals, processes, and time frames
- Develops contingency plans for major resistance and/or unforeseen issues in implementing change
- Creates an environment that embraces change
- Deals sensitively with emotional responses
- Anticipates any sources of resistance in the organization and their possible causes
- Clearly communicates the consequences, both positive and negative

3. EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE
- Recognizes others' fears and initial resistance to change and the effects change can have on them, and encourages dialogue among all parties
- Deals sensitively with the emotional responses to change, and carefully manages expectations
- Integrates the change with existing work
- Builds on recent change initiatives to increase enthusiasm and commitment to the change
- Follows through on change initiative
- Takes specific actions to ensure the successful implementation of the change initiative(s)

Business areas decided on the type of skills and level of expertise required for each role, demonstrating career growth that mirrored competency progression.

Employees performed self-assessments of their own competencies against the requirements of their role. Self-assessments revealed the gaps preventing employees from progressing to the next proficiency level and managers used this information to initiate professional development discussions.

Framework & Database: The team needed a solution that was manageable, sustainable and scalable. Leveraging the ITG Competency Frameworks (now known as the IBM Kenexa Talent Frameworks) and InfoBasis' Skills Manager[1] competency management and assessment software, we were able to initiate competency management using a proven framework that was already embedded into an intuitive system. This enabled us to accelerate the process of implementing best practices and dramatically increasing awareness of the workforce's skills and abilities. Linking the framework to a robust database was imperative in order to access real-time data that informed professional development conversations and decisions.

Andy Andrews, a leading competency management consultant who worked on the project at the time noted this project as ...

> "A great example of best practices that fully utilizes the capabilities of the IBM Kenexa IT competency frameworks and state-of-the-art competency management technology."
>
> **- Andy Andrews**
> Co-Founder of Lexonis

THE RESULTS

The thoughtful consultancy, clear framework and visual database resulted in giving the organization insight to which employees had desirable competencies, and to what degree. This not only helped employees to better understand which roles best suited their skills, it also enabled the organization to invest in training in an informed manner.

In addition to maintaining their competitive edge, the competency management efforts led to:

- **Clearly defined and realistic career paths, indicated by required behaviors needed for growth**
- **Enhanced strategic workforce planning by identifying the right skills to fill gaps**
- **Improved collaboration between managers and functions through a shared language**
- **Scalable application to other business functions within the organization**

Today, the organization is able to proactively plan for talent and training investments, which enhances the agility of their business and results in better outcomes for their clients.

TO LEARN MORE, Visit IntrinsicTalent.com

[1] Now known as IBM Kenexa Skills Manager

MEET INTRINSIC TALENT SOLUTIONS

INTRINSIC Talent Solutions LLC is a Portland-based consultancy focused on Succession Management, as well as Leadership, Talent, and Competency Development. We empower organizations from within by providing the knowledge, experience, and expertise to solve your pressing talent challenges.

DUNCAN BRAND, MBA, MA, BSc.

Duncan Brand is the Managing Principal for INTRINSIC Talent Solutions. Duncan was born and raised in the United Kingdom and then spent five years living and working in Central Europe before moving to the United States. His career has centered on the development of leaders, managers, and employees in Senior Director roles for companies such as Cisco Systems, Aerojet Rocketdyne, Hewlett-Packard, Safeway, California ISO, and the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, with a proven record of success in facilitating performance improvement through talent development initiatives, driving leadership and management projects with budgets up to $10M. Duncan holds a Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems from California State University Sacramento, a Master of Business Administration from Golden Gate University, and a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership from Gonzaga University.

MARVELL ALLEN, MA, BA

Marvell Allen is the Senior Talent Consultant at INTRINSIC Talent Solutions with a solid record of leading strategic training initiatives, leadership development, and coaching efforts to resolve complex business issues. With expertise in delivering executive, management, and staff development programs to support organizational objectives, Marvell has a demonstrated track record as a training leader in dynamic organizations. By strategically partnering with senior executives and cross-functional teams, she successfully utilizes effective collaborative consulting and influencing skills to focus on business imperatives. Marvell's clients have included the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Twitter, LinkedIn, Genentech, Contra Costa County, Union Bank, Goodwill Industries, UC Berkeley, SanDisk, Institute on Aging, UC San Francisco, and Marriott International. Marvell is also currently a Lecturer for UC Davis, and was previously an Adjunct Faculty member at California State University East Bay. Her academic credentials include a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of California Berkeley, a Master of Arts in Political & Economic Assessment Pacific Basin (International Business), and Certified Leadership, StrengthsFinder, and Career Management Coaching credentials.

ANDY ANDREWS

Andy Andrews is a co-founder and the managing director at Lexonis (Lexonis.com) -- a leading provider of the IBM Kenexa Talent Frameworks and Lexonis competency management and assessment software. Andy has been working in the world of competencies for the past 20 years. He also has a long legacy in learning and development, from training consultant to senior learning and development manager at Microsoft. As well as managing the business, Andy actively engages in many of Lexonis consulting projects and presents at conferences and webinars.