

JUST WHAT IS A CORE COMPETENCY?

Examples from the Private Sector

Definition: Required skills, knowledge, qualification or capacity: having suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, experience, etc. for some purpose.

Today many organizations find the key to reaching desired outcomes is the ability of the organization and its workforce to maximize its strengths. Core competencies are considered to be strength-attribute bundles. They include the required skill, knowledge, qualification, capacity and experience necessary for some purpose. The term "core competency" was first used in a 1990 article in Harvard Business Review when organizations began identifying, developing and evaluating their core competencies.

Organizational Competencies

Business strategists often refer to well defined organizational and individual core competencies as critical components for organizational success. An organization's identity is reflected in their core competencies and capabilities. These competencies align with core values and priorities in order to fulfill organizational strategies. Organizations demonstrate success through applying a range of core competencies, which effect specific services across the organization.

An organizational core competency is a unique bundle of technical knowledge and skills that is central to the organization's purpose. It spans multiple divisions and different products and services.

Core competencies are the collective learning of the organization; such as how to coordinate diverse services and integrate multiple streams of technologies.

An organizational core competency has three identifying elements:

- It provides a unique business advantage
- It results in perceived value to the customer
- It is difficult for competitors to imitate

Many business strategists regard the identification and use of organizational competencies as the foundation for effective planning and gaining desired outcomes. It requires a substantial amount of time and resources by senior managers to develop and or identify organizational core competencies. Once developed, however, core competencies offer an organization a dramatic opportunity to outperform the competition.

Employee and Leadership Competencies

Core competencies can be individual capabilities. A core competency in this sense is a cluster of related knowledge, behaviors and skills that:

- Affect a major part of one's own job
- Correlate with performance on the job
- Can be measured against standards
- Can be improved via training and development

Recent studies suggest that organizations with specific leadership and employee competencies are able to increase productivity by identifying and hiring employees with those competencies or training current employees to enhance those competencies. As a result, many organizations have begun using competency models to help them identify the essential skills, knowledge and behaviors needed for successful performance in a job and to ensure that human resources systems focus on developing them.

Competencies describe a particular combination of knowledge, skills and behaviors needed to effectively perform a job in an organization and can be used as an organizational tool for selection, training and development, and appraisal.

Competencies are also used in the interview process to identify the candidate that is the best match for the organization and the role. They are commonly used in interview processes to identify not only what a candidate has accomplished but also how those results were accomplished as well. While most organizations do a good job of selecting leaders based on technical job requirements, they could improve their assessment of candidates in behavioral/interpersonal skills.

People aligned with organizational strategies through reflecting the core competencies and capabilities are able to share work habits that emphasize the priorities and performance skills associated with quality, successful work processes and high value participation

Core City Competencies

All City staff will be evaluated on these competencies

- 1) **Communication**: Communicates effectively and appropriately with customers and colleagues, selecting the right tone for the situation and audience. Shows genuine sensitivity to the needs, feelings, and capabilities of other people and interacts with others in a courteous manner. Uses good judgment as to what to communicate and to whom, as well as the best way to get that accomplished. Avoids speaking, writing, or behaving in ways that could be perceived as disrespectful.
- 2) **Customer Focus**: Demonstrates an attitude of dedication and respect towards the City and its' customers. Consistently represents the City in a professional manner. Identifies and respects customer needs and expectations and responds to them in a timely and effective manner. Anticipates and prevents delays or other things that can adversely affect the customer.
- 3) **Dependability**: Proves themselves to be reliable, honest, punctual and well-prepared. Arrives to work ready to contribute, follows through on commitments to others, and establishes a pattern of meeting reasonable deadlines. Takes initiative and accepts responsibility for their work. Consistently produces work that is high-quality, demonstrates attention to detail, and reflects well on the City.
- 4) **Integrity**: Is honest and treats everyone in a manner that demonstrates fairness and consistency. Serves as a positive example of why others should trust the operations of the City. Follows through on commitments and accepts ownership of any mistakes he or she might make. Builds and maintains trust with members of his or her team, as well as with customers outside the team.

Competencies for EMPLOYEES AND LEADS

1. **Technical Skills/Knowledge**: Possesses the knowledge and skill required to successfully perform essential tasks in an efficient and effective manner. Is able to demonstrate and apply skills and knowledge in day-to-day situations. Demonstrates the ability to use appropriate tools (e.g., equipment, software, systems) connected to the essential functions of the job and the ability to learn and adapt to new tools. Displays an appropriate level of concern for safety factors and acts accordingly to mitigate risks.
2. **Teamwork**: Is an effective team player who adds complementary skills and contributes valuable ideas, opinions, and feedback. Respectfully communicates in an open and candid manner. Can be counted upon to fulfill any commitments. Recognizes impact to team, shows willingness to help colleagues and/or cross-trains, when needed. Works effectively with coworkers and carries own share of team workload.
3. **Productivity/Efficiency**: Has successfully combined skills, ability, and effort level to ensure that expectations related to results and productivity are achieved. Ensures that quality does not suffer as the quantity of work increases. Produces work that is consistently accurate, demonstrates attention to detail and reflects well on the organization.
4. **Solving Problems**: Takes a proactive approach to anticipating and preventing problems. Recognizes when problems occur, investigates obstacles, gathers relevant information, generates alternate solutions and arrives at a workable solution, consulting with supervisor as appropriate. Remains composed, focused, and confident when handling sensitive or difficult issues/problems.
5. **Managing Multiple Priorities**: Prioritizes tasks and manages time to ensure that deadlines are met. Remains focused when handling multiple assignments and gives appropriate priorities to various work demands. Manages each stage of a project or assignment to ensure that commitments are met in a timely manner. Readily accepts new responsibilities and assignments and adapts well to changes in procedures. Consults with supervisor, if necessary, to balance competing priorities.

Competencies for MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

1. **Building Team Environment**: Creates and encourages a team environment by articulating common goals, communicating how individual roles contribute to team success, providing clear direction and sufficient resources and training, and removing or reducing obstacles to team success. Responds timely to needs of the team and provides supportive action that result in a high level of morale and motivation among team members. Treats everyone in a manner that demonstrates fairness and consistency.
2. **Technical Credibility**: Has achieved credibility by staying current with technical and professional standards and procedures. Can describe the rationale for standards and procedures and serves as a positive role model when it comes to following them. Is an effective team player who adds complementary skills and contributes valuable ideas, opinions, and feedback to management and colleagues.
3. **Managing Employee Performance**: Takes action to ensure that employees fully understand their roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations. Provides ongoing feedback and support as employees strive to achieve expectations. Continually assesses and clearly communicates progress on work goals and objectives. Takes timely disciplinary actions that are consistent, well-documented and defensible. Allows employees to express concerns and is willing and able to facilitate a process that helps resolve conflicts.
4. **Solving Problems**: Takes a proactive approach to anticipating and preventing problems. Defines problems, investigates obstacles, gathers relevant information, generates and analyzes alternate solutions and arrives at a workable and timely solution. When necessary, elevates the problem and recommended solution to their supervisor. Handles sensitive or difficult issues with confidence and does not hesitate to make difficult, high quality decisions.
5. **Project Management**: Manages each stage of a project or program, ensuring that expectations related to productivity are achieved and that commitments are met in a timely manner. Clearly defines roles and responsibilities, determines necessary resources, and delegates appropriately. Ensures that quality does not suffer as the quantity of work increases. Produces work that reflects well on the organization. Adheres to budgets, communicates budget concerns, and tracks expenses.

Competencies for DEPUTIES AND DIRECTORS

1. **Leadership**: Articulates a clear vision that generates enthusiasm or commitment for others to follow. Models positive and appropriate behaviors and inspires and influences others to undertake challenging tasks and projects. Proactively assesses the need for change and allocates available resources to facilitate the change. Takes actions that resolve conflicts in a timely manner. Provides employees with resources and tools to perform delegated work effectively and gives them enough authority to carry out these assignments.
2. **Organizational Awareness**: Establishes a clear and realistic sense of direction by clarifying the divisions' goals, as well as how employee roles and responsibilities contribute to them. Ensures that departmental and division goals match those of the larger organization. Keeps informed about market conditions and political factors that may impact the goals and interests of the organization.
3. **Project/Program Management**: Clearly defines roles and responsibilities, determines necessary resources, delegates appropriately, and monitors project/program performance through appropriate systems and procedures. Ensures that commitments are met in a timely manner. Creates and adheres to budgets, communicates budget concerns, tracks expenses, and makes budget adjustments when necessary.
4. **Team Development**: Manages employees and workload/workflow in a way that results in high levels of morale, motivation, and productivity among team members. Raises the motivation level of the team and proactively addresses issues that might lower morale if not handled in a timely and effective manner. Communicates how common and individual goals contribute to team success. Consistently holds individuals on the team accountable for meeting objectives and removes or reduces obstacles to team success. Encourages the growth and maximum performance of their employees by ensuring that self, managers, and supervisors are delegating and coaching appropriately. Encourages communication and relationship building within and across departments.

Competencies for ADMINISTRATORS AND CAO

1. **Vision**: Articulates the goals and vision of the organization and department, ensuring both are aligned and well-understood internally and externally. Analyzes departmental strengths and weaknesses and then combines these with knowledge of the industry, market, and organization to develop long-term strategy. Allocates resources, allows for contingencies and ensures that short-term and long-term plans fit with the larger needs of the organization.
2. **Facilitates and Influences**: Supports internal and external programs and projects in a manner that demonstrates commitment to staff. Influences decisions by examining costs and potential benefits and by providing realistic risk-assessments. Proactively assesses the need for change and allocates appropriate resources to facilitate the change. Models positive and appropriate behaviors and inspires others to undertake challenging tasks and projects. Uses good judgment about when to share information as well as who should be informed. Promotes new and innovative approaches that will improve efficiency and/or effectiveness.
3. **Building Organizational Commitment**: Demonstrates commitment, loyalty and appreciation for the organization and employees. Builds and maintains trust through open, honest, and respectful communications and by following through on all commitments. Effectively communicates how employees' roles and responsibilities fit into the goals of the department and the City. Encourages employees to report problems or concerns and addresses complaints and problems quickly and effectively. Handles sensitive or difficult issues with confidence and does not hesitate to make difficult, high quality decisions. Provides support and guidance to managers when corrective/disciplinary actions must be taken and ensures timely resolution occurs.
4. **Delivering Results**: Achieves results within established timelines. Provides ongoing feedback to employees and holds employees accountable for meeting deadlines and objectives. Communicates new policies and procedures with employees and supports them with adequate and timely resources to ensure that implementation can be achieved. Oversees and effectively manages department budgets and operations in line with organizational objectives.