

Assess Yourself - The Top Management Competencies

If you are currently successful as a manager, and are looking for a way to get even better, you may find this exercise very useful.

INTRODUCTION

A broad survey of research on managerial effectiveness reveals there are fourteen competencies that most connect to successful management across multiple disciplines and industries. Highly effective managers possess many of these competencies. In order to use this, first review these fourteen competencies, then perform your own self-assessment – this may help you identify some learning opportunities that you have not thought about.

Competency Defined

A competency is a useful and central unit for determining skills that are required for success. It is a measurable characteristic of a person, and includes the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that differentiate performance and are needed for success in one aspect of a job or position. Competencies are used in many important activities from executive coaching, selection interviewing, management training, defining job requirements, to identifying success factors in a given position.

DIRECTIONS

In short, competencies can be learned, so it is helpful to assess where you are now. To help you with this assessment, get a sheet of paper out and select a 5 point scale which you will use to rate yourself. Some find a simple report card scale of A to F helpful because it is simple to use. Others like to select a frequency scale of Almost Never to Almost Always. Find one that is useful for you. Read each of the following competencies with the provided short descriptions and questions. For each competency, respond to the points and then give yourself a rating. *Remember the point here is not to get a “passing” score, but to uncover areas where you can improve.*

ANALYTICAL AND CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

Assess your ability to understand issues and problems and underlying causes, view situations from multiple perspectives, including the other party's point of view. Do you know how to: gather all the relevant information; identify and weigh alternatives; and solve difficult problems with unique solutions? How well can you reframe situations and problems when needed (out of the box thinking)? Do you have working knowledge of the problem solving tools of your profession? Can you ask penetrating questions that provoke deep thinking and probe all fruitful sources for knowledge and answers; see underlying or hidden problems and patterns, especially where others do not? Are you excellent at honest analysis; looking beyond the obvious and going beyond the first answer?

BUILDING EFFECTIVE TEAMS AND TEAMWORK

Do you know how to build an effective team from the ground up? Can you coach an effective team and provide them, collectively and individually, with ideas and feedback on how to work better together? How well do you and your team work effectively with others outside formal lines of authority (e.g., with peers, senior managers, customer teams); Do you take actions that respect the needs and contributions of others; are you willing to accept inputs of others and do you gain consensus when needed? How comfortable are you with interdependencies and distributed power situations? *Note: The culture of the U.S. is imbedded with a history of individualism. Lip service is given to teams, but most people have difficulty subordinating their needs for independence and recognition to a team.*

COACHING AND MENTORING OTHERS

Coaching involves the capacity to engage in non-directive discussions, which will result in useful new insights being gained by others. The coaching role is different from that of being a “manager” or “leader.” Coaching is supportive and non-directive. It requires the ability to engage in honest and constructive, but safe, discussions about behaviors that prevent and/or lead to improved performance. Do you know multiple mechanisms to facilitate this? Do you provide challenging and stretching tasks and assignments to grow people; hold frequent development discussions; are aware of each of your follower's career goals; do you construct development plans and execute them; providing timely feedback? Do you bring the best out of people; are you seen as a people builder?

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

How capable are you with managing conflicts with others in a way that resolves differences and produces positive and durable outcomes? How skillful are you, and comfortable with, engaging in contentious discussions? To what degree do you see and exploit conflict as an opportunity to explore new solutions and build relationships? Are you able to maintain emotional balance in difficult discussions? Can you work to identify mutually satisfactory solutions that can meet the needs of your opponents without falling into win-lose postures? Are you seen as an expert – do others seek your counsel on how to handle their own conflicts?

DELEGATING AND EMPOWERING

Do you clearly and comfortably delegate both routine and important tasks and decisions; broadly share both responsibility and accountability; tend to trust people to perform; let subordinates finish their own work? Do you spend the majority of your time working through others – or are you doing much of the work yourself? You are able to delegate work where those individuals feel responsible and have “problem ownership.” You possess a multi-faceted and flexible approach to giving assignments and projects to others. Your delegation is done in a way that results are reliably produced with minimal risk of individual failure.

HIGH SELF-AWARENESS

The leading cause of failure on the job for senior executives is the lack of self-awareness and insensitivity to others. (*Source: American Management Association*) How well do you know your strengths and when and how to deploy them? How in touch are you with your weaknesses and do you often work to neutralize them in self and others? Do you know your personal limits and work to compensate for them? Are you sensitive to and aware of your impact on others? Do you actively seek feedback on how you are perceived?

MANAGING TIME, SELF AND PERSONAL STRESS

The ability to organize yourself, carefully plan your time and work, and follow the plans you set. You treat time as a valuable resource and expend it on the activities that yield the greatest results. You do this in a way where you can maintain a healthy work life balance. You engage in conscious actions to alleviate stress. You rarely suffer from end of the week burnout. You set wise priorities and establish a course of action for yourself and others to accomplish your most important goals. You tackle “first problems first” and deploy milestones and other time management practices to ensure that you get everything important completed. Other people’s personal planning systems often break down under change and pressures – yours do not. This competency has to do with considerable personal discipline and operating in an orderly and planned way. How well do you handle multiple tasks? How well do you handle interruptions? Do you give yourself adequate thought time to engage in longer term thinking?

MOTIVATING OTHERS

Do you have the ability to create intrinsic motivation in others, including in differently motivated types of individuals, as well as with peer functions; can you assess each person’s “hot buttons” and use these to get the best out of them; do you push planning and decision making down; make others feel empowered; invite input from each person and share ownership and visibility; make each employee feel their work is important; are you someone people like working for and with?

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Assess your ability to establish and manage a coherent system that focuses employees on results and maximizes performance. Do you have a well thought out set of practices that are deployed to ensure that the individual behaviors are synched to the whole? Can you focus employees on critical tasks and turn this into an integrated effort? Are performance deficiencies identified in a timely way and corrected? Is there a performance management system in practice that you can clearly describe? Note that this is not a fancy phrase for a traditional performance appraisal system. Performance management means assembling all the ingredients of high performance - meaningful goals, measurements, appropriate

incentives, and timely feedback. Do you know how to set up your own system, or have you just worked with one given by others?

PERSONAL POWER AND INFLUENCE

Assess your ability to use appropriate interpersonal styles and communication methods to gain the acceptance and ownership of an idea, plan, activity, or vision from others. To what extent do you create a positive and credible impression on those to be influenced? How often? There are several approaches you can take to pursue this competency. What is your attitude toward the importance of influencing others? Do you feel this is an important part of their success? What is the source of this – your salesmanship, your ability to build relationships, or is it based on the strength of your personality? Examine why do others do what you ask them to do – is it because they respect you and your expertise?

RESILIENT

In an increasingly fast moving world, how well are you able to quickly adjust to disappointment and/or major setbacks? To what degree do you have a high threshold and resistance to discouragement along with the capability to bounce back from major setbacks? Can you quickly learn from setbacks and deploy this knowledge to a revised or new plan? Do you persevere in difficult circumstances and maintain your position or plan of action until the desired objective is achieved? However, this competency is not stubbornness - you can also recognize when this can no longer be reasonably attained and change.

RECRUITING AND STAFFING

You have a “nose for talent”; you hire the best people available from inside or out; are not afraid of selecting strong people; have a track record for assembling talented staffs. You know how to match talent to the requirements, and how to find and assemble diverse backgrounds into a strong team. You have a disciplined and organized approach for finding and identifying the right people for the situation. You have strong interviewing skills – you know behavioral interviewing. You are able to uncover the unqualified early, and honestly can say you do not have a record of “Mishires.” (*Defined as a person who looks good on paper, has the right experience and credentials, but cannot, for various reasons, do the full range of the job. Usually uncovered within 30 days of the hire*)

USING POWERFUL QUESTIONS AND LISTENING

The ability to ask penetrating questions is an underrated skill. Are you really skillful asking questions that provoke deep thinking and that provide revealing information? You view and use questions as much more than an information collection exercise. Your questions help you and others problem-solve, uncover truths, gain needed information, predict future

behavior, coach and guide thinking, as well as many other applications. With this, you practice attentive and active listening; have the patience to help people out; can accurately restate the opinions of others even when you disagree. Much of good listening is not only the skills, but also willingness to constantly work hard at it.

VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS

This competency is not about being a great speaker – it's about being an effective communicator. Assess your ability to clearly express ideas verbally in a way that they are clear and understood by others. Are you fully capable of giving compelling and engaging presentations? Do you know how to tailor your efforts to your audience? Do you know how to clearly and concisely express your ideas and thoughts to others? To what degree do you understand communication as a two way process? How do you provide for and obtain feedback to ensure that your message was understood?

SUMMARIZE YOUR LEARNING AND DEFINE NEXT STEPS

You will need to synthesize what you have gotten from this exercise. Write down what you have learned or realized about yourself. Describe your strengths as well as your areas where you feel you need to improve. Build a short list of specific skills and behaviors where you feel you need to get better. Think about your resources – what mentors, coaches, experts, courses, or books could you turn to for new ideas? Consult with some managers in your organization who you think are experts – ask them what they do. Consider getting a professional coach. Set some short term goals and get going!

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