

### 2.1 Overview

Wikipedia defines competencies as “characteristics which drive outstanding performance in a given job, role or function”. Similarly, the US Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) says, “Competencies help individuals and organizations improve performance and deliver results.”

The aim of a competency framework is to give you a clear view of the types of things team members should be doing to be strong performers in their roles. It can also guide personal development planning by helping to identify where there are gaps in skills, knowledge or experience. And it can provide a robust and objective structure for recruitment.

According to research by London-based firm IRS, competencies are most often used in:

- Performance management/appraisal.
- Personal-development planning.
- Management training and development.
- Job descriptions.
- Role specifications.
- Management selection.

#### **A competency framework for internal communicators**

Our research suggests there are 12 generic competencies that drive high performance in the internal communication profession.

The extent to which people display these competencies will vary according to their individual roles, organizations and team structure. You don't necessarily need to possess all 12 competencies to be a strong performer. The amount of time, in relative terms, spent using each competency to perform a role to a high standard will also vary from person to person. So will the level at which you need to operate.

To reflect this, we've developed a flexible competency framework that can be used to build a customised competency map for any individual role. It allows you to choose:

- Which of the 12 competencies are relevant to a particular job.
- Within each competency, which level (basic, intermediate or advanced) is appropriate for the job. For example, two roles may need a communication planning competency. One role may involve developing simple plans for small, straightforward projects. The other may involve putting together complex plans for high risk change projects affecting thousands of people worldwide.
- How much time, in relative terms, a practitioner should be spending using each competency to perform their role to a high standard. For example, an internal communication director may need advanced writing skills, but probably won't spend much time using them compared to someone in the team who is permanently focused on delivery.

Later, we'll explain how to put together a customized map and use the competencies for personal-development planning. For now, we'll start by setting out the competencies.

#### **Business and managerial competencies**

The 12 competencies specifically cover the internal communication skills, knowledge and experience needed to be strong performers. Of course, there'll be more generic business and

managerial competencies that are needed to perform well in certain jobs, such as team leadership or time management.

We haven't attempted to research or define these more general competencies. There are already more generalist definitions available, and you may well find that your organization already has its own generic business and managerial competency framework.

## 2.2 A summary of the framework

The framework contains 12 generic competencies. But you or your team members don't necessarily need to display all 12 competencies to be a strong performer.

The most important question to ask is "what does the business need?" Choose only the competencies that are relevant to a specific role, in the context of your team structure and your business priorities. Or, if you're looking ahead to a future career move, choose the competencies you'll need for the type of role you're aspiring to.

### Definitions

Each competency has an overall definition. These are:

COMPETENCY	DEFINITION
Building effective relationships	Developing and maintaining relationships that inspire trust and respect. Building a network and being able to influence others to make things happen
Business focus	Having a clear understanding of the business issues and using communication to help solve organizational problems and achieve organizational objectives
Consulting and coaching	Recommending appropriate solutions to customers; helping others to make informed decisions; building people's communication competence
Craft (writing and design)	Using and developing the right mix of practical communication abilities (e.g. writing and design management) to hold the confidence of peers and colleagues
Cross-functional awareness	Understanding the different contributions from other disciplines and working with colleagues from across the organization to achieve better results
Developing other communicators	Helping other communicators build their communication competence and develop their careers
Innovation and creativity	Looking for new ways of working, exploring best practice and delivering original and imaginative approaches to communication problems
Listening	Conducting research and managing mechanisms for gathering feedback and employee reaction
Making it happen	Turning plans into successfully implemented actions
Planning	Planning communication programs and operations, evaluating results
Specialist	Having specific subject-matter expertise in a specialist area
Vision and standards	Defining or applying a consistent approach to communication and maintaining professional and ethical standards

### Levels

Each competency has three levels:

Level 1: Basic

Level 2: Intermediate

Level 3: Advanced

In each case, we describe the behaviors you would typically expect to see from somebody operating at this level.

The aim is not necessarily to be “advanced” in every competency. Choose the level you need to operate at to be a strong performer in your role. Or, if you’re looking further ahead to your next career move, choose the level you’ll need for the type of role you’re aspiring to.

There’s also an “ineffective behaviors” section for each competency. As the description suggests, these are the types of behavior practitioners told us they see from less effective performers.

### Putting it all together

Later, we’ll explain how to use the competency framework to think about what type of communicator you want to be and to plan your development.

For now, when you look at the 12 competencies, bear in mind that they are designed to describe the behaviors you need to use from day to day to achieve a high level of performance in your job.

While the temptation might be to think you should be working at an advanced level in all 12 competencies, you don’t necessarily need to be. In fact, you very probably don’t need to be. Think about the competencies you actually need, and the level you need to use them at, to be a strong performer in your current role. Or, if you’re thinking ahead to a future career move, think about the competencies and levels you’ll need for your next job.

One final word of warning – take care not to discard competencies such as craft (writing and design), just because you feel you’re working in a senior role. People told us consistently throughout our research that senior practitioners must be strong in these types of fundamental skills, even if they spend less of their time using them from day to day.

#### **IN THE FULL REPORT...**

Get your copy of the full report for a detailed explanation of the 12 competencies, including the behaviors you’d expect to see of people operating at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. Plus, how to apply this to your own job and use the framework to develop your team

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