



A White Paper about Competency Management Systems

To manage competency in organizations so that you get a good return on your investment you need competency profiles with structures that provide criteria for competency assessment. Minimally this means a three level data hierarchy. The three levels are;

1. competency profile title
2. units of competency for that profile
3. performance criteria or assessment criteria for each unit of competence

A competency is a workplace behavior. It is critically important that the units of competency are accurate descriptions of appropriate WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR. It is critically important that the units of competency are accurate descriptions of appropriate workplace behavior. Performance criteria/assessment criteria will provide the criteria so that if all of them are met it will allow the assessor to sign off on that the competency has been appropriately demonstrated.

Assessment of competency is best done in the workplace. The key point is that competency management is about tracking and assessing WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR.

We lean to the view that competence is ratable. There are those who believe that competency assessment is dichotomous, you are either able to demonstrate competence or you are not. In many instances we have successfully used behaviorally anchored rating scales to make assessments of competence. Typically the rating scales look like this:

0 = unable to demonstrate competence

1 = able to demonstrate competence for short periods of time when accompanied by a competent employee

2 = able to demonstrate competence for a longer period of time when accompanied by a competent employee

3 = able to demonstrate competence to the standard required

4 = able to train others to the required standard for this competence

Workplace assessment is the key to improving operating performance. In dealing with workplace assessment it behooves us to be objective about the assessments. There are five ways that we mitigate subjectivity of assessment.

1.0 We build three level competency structures where the unit of competency accurately describes the required workplace behavior



- 2.0 We establish valid assessment criteria for each unit of competence
- 3.0 We use a behaviorally anchored rating scale to “rate” competence
- 4.0 We train assessors to be objective assessors of competence
- 5.0 We require assessors to provide “evidence” to support their assessment

As we describe the structure and data elements necessary to implement a competency management system that will give a good return on investment it becomes clear that we are dealing with a relatively complex system with a myriad of important data points. It is our contention that you cannot successfully run a competency management system for an organization of any size (more than 20 people) without an automated solution (preferably a relational database).

Any automated solution ideally should have secure log-ins with specific functionality for the key persons in the competency management process. The key persons are

- employee,
- assessor,
- team leader/supervisor,
- manager,
- quality assurance person,
- system administrator.

The system needs the capability to store competency profiles with at least a three level data hierarchy, needs to enable workplace assessment, and support the uploading of evidence and its referenced storage in an employees’ personal electronic portfolio. It must allow the assignment of competency profiles to employees, the assignment of assessors to employees, the assignment of team leaders/supervisors and managers to employees, etc.

The outcomes of a successful implementation of a competency management system are tangible. In addition to improved productivity metrics and reductions of time required to attain competence major organizational change occurs. With a competency management system the organization is now tracking and assessing the workplace competency of every individual employee in the organization in real time. With this information available to them any manager or supervisor can be held to account for the competency of their team. Reports can be run and data accessed at managers meetings which will show how well any team leader is doing in directing the improved competence of their direct reports.

With comprehensive data competency recertification becomes more manageable; well developed competency management systems will record the date time when competency is attained and allow the setting of a recertification period. The relevant employees and managers can be informed of impending decertification and given time to plan to for the necessary recertification activity.

With more sophisticated competency management systems legacy learning materials and/or performance support materials can be linked to units of competence (most units of competence have some component of underpinning knowledge). The materials can be made accessible to employees and



launched or opened by them from within the competency management system. Additionally tests of knowledge can be incorporated the results of which will save as “evidence” within the competency management system.

Additionally, the paradigm for workplace assessment is changing rapidly. A few years ago we saw only documentary evidence of competence being uploaded to e-portfolios. In recent years we have seen an eruption of non documentary evidence being submitted to support the judgment of assessors; typically audio files, photographs or videos. The development, proliferation and increasing sophistication of Smart phones, tablets, and other small portable electronic devices makes it inevitable that this trend will continue. For many people this type of non documentary evidence has better face validity and is easier to capture and store than more traditional paper based evidence.

Competency tracking will bring a definite Return on Investment (ROI) to all businesses. This is a proven fact. However to realize this ROI takes a considered approach and a tracking platform.