

THE COMPETENCIES POCKETBOOK

By Roger Mills

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

"Clear, concise and thought-provoking. Provides a logical step-by-step guide for deciding why and how to use competencies."

June Isherwood, Head of Support Services, Nirex

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Laurel House, Station Approach,
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Tel: +44 (0)1962 735573

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E-mail: sales@pocketbook.co.uk

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INTRODUCTION

WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK



This pocketbook is about competencies: what they are and how to use them profitably for you and your organisation.

You need to read it if:

- You don't know what competencies are but feel you should
- You've heard about competencies and want to know more
- Your organisation plans to use competencies but you are in the dark or anxious
- You want to understand how competencies can help you in your work and career
- Your organisation uses competencies but you're not clear how to use them
- You want to introduce competencies into your organisation and need to know how
- You are launching competencies and want a concise booklet to give out to staff
- Your own competency scheme doesn't work and you need to revive it!
- You see problems in your organisation and think that competencies could help

INTRODUCTION

LISTEN OUT FOR VERBAL CLUES



If, in your organisation, you hear people saying...

'I'm not clear about what's expected from me'

'My manager sets ridiculously high standards compared with the others'

'Yes, we have a company vision and values but they don't really affect me'

'My manager and I saw things differently at my appraisal'

'I can't see a future for me here; I don't feel I fit in'

'My manager criticised me unfairly; gave me really unfair ratings at my appraisal'

'I can't get my manager to talk seriously with me about my development'

'What must I do to get promoted around here?'

...then you might want to read this pocketbook to find out why.

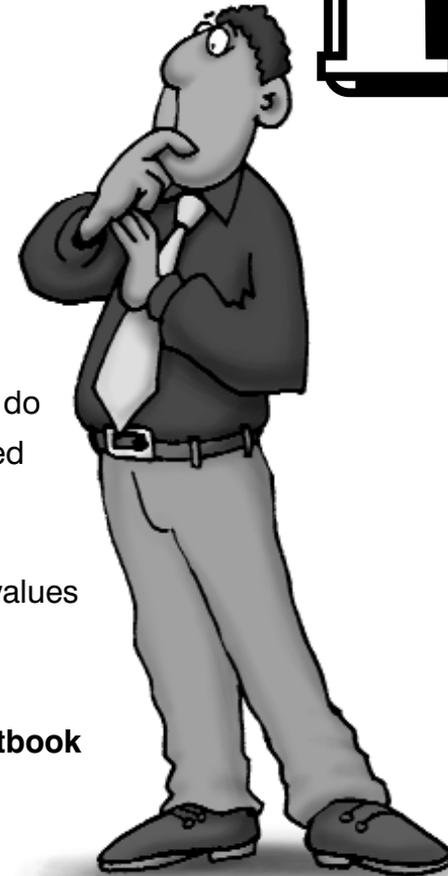
INTRODUCTION

FURTHER INDICATORS

Or, if there are issues such as...

- Can't get the right people
- Can't keep good people – they join but don't stay long
- Managers find appraisals difficult or embarrassing to do
- Training is unfocused or doesn't deliver what's needed
- Managers are inconsistent in the way they treat their people
- People don't buy in to the organisation's vision and values
- People are promoted but don't perform the new job as expected

...then, once again, you might want to read this pocketbook to get some ideas about dealing with them.



INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE COMPETENCIES?



There has been much debate regarding the differences between competence, competency and competent. The Oxford English Dictionary gives (among others) the definitions:

Competent (adj) – having adequate skill, properly qualified, effective.

Competence (and competency) (n) – power, ability, capacity (*to do, for* a task etc).

However, in the 1970s David McClelland¹ and Richard E. Boyatzis² of US management consultants Hay-McBer carried out research that led to a more specific use of the term **competency** that is now widely used in business.

^{1,2} – See Further Reading, page 126

INTRODUCTION

DEFINITION OF (A) *COMPETENCY*



The most common definitions in recent years are:

- An underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation (Spencer³ 1993)
- A characteristic and measurable pattern of behaviours, knowledge and skill that contributes to superior job performance (Dubois⁴ 1993)

Or, more simply put:

A competency describes the behaviour or actions that can be seen when a job is being done well.

^{3,4} – See Further Reading, page 126

INTRODUCTION

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE, SKILL AND COMPETENCY



Knowledge Information that has to be learned and is recalled to carry out a job.
Eg, a person can know how to use a particular piece of computer software – but not necessarily be able to do it.

Skill The application of that knowledge in a practical way to achieve a result.
Eg, continuing the above example, the person may be able to use a keyboard and by doing so apply their knowledge of the software and produce a document.

Competency The application of that skill in a way that results in work done to a **specified standard**. Most importantly, the competency will be defined so that it includes a number of statements describing **how well** the job must be done.
Eg, the person can use their knowledge and skill of the software to produce a letter in the company format, with no mistakes and within a given time.

About the Author

Roger Mills

Roger began his career in science, electronics and engineering but very soon became involved in training and development, starting with skills analysis and training design. Since then he has worked in Strategic HR Development in multi-site UK and global organisations in a variety of industries. Working with people at all levels he has developed and implemented business-driven HR and HRD strategies across functional, industry and geographic boundaries. Over the last 8 years he has designed, developed, implemented and revived competency programmes in a wide range of companies both as the “insider” and as an external consultant. In 1999 he set up his own consultancy since he “preferred doing what he enjoyed in many companies than doing a routine, repetitive job in one”.



Contact

He can be contacted at Glencote Consulting Ltd, 65 Great Lane, Bierton, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP22 5DE or via his web site at www.glencote.com (or by telephone on 01296 394994 or email at info@glencote.com)