CHAPTER 9

The McBer Competency Framework

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By the mid 1980s, some 350 studies of the kind illustrated in the chapters by Russ-Eft & Brennan and Desjardins & Huff had been carried out. These had placed the importance and operational accessibility of a whole range of high-level competencies that had previously eluded all but the most penetrating observers beyond reasonable doubt. At the same time, they called the assumed importance of a range of "motherhood" competencies of the kind dreamed up by committees of the great and the good--largely areas of *knowledge*--into serious question. As far as knowledge was involved, what was needed was unique combinations of up-to-date specialist--and largely tacit--knowledge, not general knowledge.

Unfortunately, the studies which had been carried out varied somewhat in methodology and considerably in the frameworks used to classify and discuss the results.

Building on a framework parts of which had previously been published by Dalziel, Boyatzis, and others, Lyle and Signe Spencer therefore set about trying to develop a common--or agreed-upon--framework of descriptors to use to describe the competencies noted in one study or another, the levels at which they were required or displayed, and to relate the competencies required or displayed to the nature of the work to be undertaken. This framework, together with extensive real-life illustrations of what was meant by the terms, was published in 1993 as *Competence at Work.*

It is important to note that the framework is entirely based on study of the thoughts, feelings, and overt behaviours associated with real actions--or "behavioural incidents." It is not based on the speculation of committee members and bureaucrats. Yet neither is it based solely--or even mainly--on external observation, or "ratings." It includes information from "inside the respondent's head"--information about his or her goals, thoughts, motives, feelings, strivings, and intentions.

The methodology used to elicit this information--*Behavioural Event Interviewing*--is fully described in *Competence at Work.* This is important not merely in its own right--as a contribution to the methodology required to assess competence. It is also vitally important because it demonstrates how radically these assessments differ from both external observers' *ratings* of observed behaviour and from "personality test" measures of what may at times be thought to be the same constructs. The latter are largely based on cumulating information that indicates how strongly people say they are predisposed to undertake one kind of activity as against another. Assessments derived from *Behavioural Event Interviewing* reveal the kinds of activity for which the individual concerned has in the past displayed a strong motivational predisposition to undertake and the *level* of competence displayed whilst performing those kinds of activity.

It is important to underline that what this research has shown is that what distinguishes more from less effective performance in a wide range of jobs has to do with the motivational predisposition to undertake certain kinds of activity and the *spontaneous tendency* to undertake those activities at a certain level of competence. While the ability to behave competently in one or other of these ways may or may not be teachable and learnable, it is the

strength of the individual's spontaneous tendency to display high levels of competence in relation to certain activities in specific situations that determines his or her competence.

Further work by Spencer and his colleagues--as the number of competency studies grew to some 600--refined the competency by level dictionary published in *Competence at Work* and distilled it down to 18 generic competencies plus a number of competencies mainly of value in specific situations. This revised dictionary is available as McBer's *Scaled Competency Dictionary 1996*.

The list of generic competencies discussed in the *Scaled Competency Dictionary 1996* is shown in Table 9.1.

Insert Table 9.1: (FULL PAGE) FROM END OF CHAPTER IN WORD FORMAT
Generic Competencies: Summary
  about here

In order to illustrate how this works, the competency by level framework for two generic competencies--"developing others" and "impact and influence"--are given in Tables 9.2 and 9.3.

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Generic Competence: Developing Others
about here

Insert Table 9.3 FROM END OF CHAPTER IN WORD FORMAT
Generic Competence: Impact and Influence
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It must again be emphasised that this is not a framework for classifying observer's ratings. It is a framework for classifying the information obtained from interviews in which a carefully guided effort has been made to discover the kinds of activity people are strongly motivated to undertake and to elicit the respondent's thoughts and feelings while undertaking those activities.

Further examples from the framework will be introduced in the section of this book that deals with conceptualising competence. Here it is sufficient to note that it is impossible to use this framework without thorough familiarity with (a) the procedures required to elicit the basic data, and (b) the extensive examples of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that do, and do not, fit into the various competence by level categories assembled in *Competence at Work*. It is, in particular, important to note that the descriptions given of the *levels* at which these two competencies may be displayed are summaries. Higher levels of the competencies actually involve (1) a greater breadth or completeness of action, (2) more complex thinking--taking more things, people, data, or causes into account, (3) longer time horizons, and (4) a greater breadth of impact.

By training people--much as one trains a chemist--in the procedures required to elicit the data and what to make of it--it has been possible, as will be shown in a later chapter by McClelland, to achieve inter-worker reliabilities of .9. "Profiles" of the competencies by levels that make for success in different kinds of job are available in *Competence at Work* and other publications listed in McClelland's later chapter.

References

Hay/McBer. (1996). *Scaled Competency Dictionary*. Boston: Hay/McBer.
Spencer, L. M. and Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at Work*. New York: Wiley.

1.	**Achievement Orientation (ACH)** Core: Does the person think about meeting and surpassing goals and taking calculated risks for measured gains?
2.	**Analytical Thinking (AT)** Core: Does the person understand cause-and-effect chains and relationships?
3.	**Conceptual Thinking (CI)** Core: Does the person match patterns? Assemble many pieces into a coherent whole? Create new ways to look at things?
4.	**Customer Service Orientation (CSO)** Core: Does the person act on behalf of the person being served?
5.	**Developing Others (DEV)** Core: Does the person work to develop the long-term characteristics (not just skills) of others?
6.	**Directiveness (DIR)** Core: Does the person set firm standards for behavior and hold people accountable to them?
7.	**Flexibility (FLX)** Core: Can the person change gears or drop the expected task when circumstances demand it?
8.	**Impact and Influence (IMP)** Core: Does the person use deliberate influence strategies or tactics?
9.	**Information Seeking (INF)** Core: Does the person go beyond the obvious and seek out information?
10.	**Initiative (INT)** Core: Does the person think ahead of the present to act on future needs and opportunities?
11.	**Integrity (ING)** Core: Does the person act in line with beliefs and values even when it is difficult to do so?
12.	**Interpersonal Understanding (IU)** Core: Is the person aware of what others are feeling and thinking, but not saying?
13.	**Organizational Awareness (OA)** Core: Is the person sensitive to the realities of organizational politics and structure?
14.	**Organizational Commitment (OC)** Core: Does the person choose to act in accordance with authority, organizational standards, needs, and goals?
15.	**Relationship Building (RB)** Core: Does the person take effort to build a personal relationship?
16.	**Self-Confidence (SCF)** Core: Does the person take on risky tasks or conflicts with those in power over that person?
17.	**Team Leadership (TL)** Core: Does the person lead groups of people to work effectively together?
18.	**Teamwork and Cooperation (TW)** Core: Does the person act to facilitate the operation of a team of which he or she is a part?

Table 9.2
Summary of Scoring System for
Generic Competencies: Developing Others (DEV)
From McBer's *Scaled Competency Dictionary 1996*
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Developing Others: Involves a genuine intent to foster the long-term learning or development of others with an appropriate level of need analysis and other thought or effort. Its focus is on the developmental intent and effect rather than on a formal role of training.	
Core: Does the person work to develop the long-term characteristics (not just skills) of others?	
Scoring Notes: The underlying intent to foster others' development must be clear. This is especially important for the lower levels of DEV which may otherwise be confused with lower levels of Directiveness (DIR). The *developmental intent* is the distinction between the two competencies.	

Level	This Person:
1.	**Expresses Positive Expectations of Person**: Makes positive comments regarding others' developmental future: current and expected future abilities and/or potential to learn even in "difficult" cases. Believes others want to and can learn or improve their performance.
2.	**Gives How-To Directions**: Gives detailed instructions and/or on-the-job demonstrations, tells how to do the task, makes specific, helpful suggestions.
3.	**Gives Reasons, Other Support**: Gives directions or demonstrations with reasons or rationale as a training strategy. Gives practical support or assistance to make job easier for subordinate (i.e., volunteers additional resources, tools, information, expert advice, etc.). Asks questions, gives tests, or uses other methods to verify that others have understood explanation or directions.
4.	**Gives Feedback to Encourage**: Gives specific positive or mixed feedback for developmental purposes. Reassures others after a setback. Gives negative feedback in behavioral rather than personal terms, *and* expresses positive expectations for future performance or gives individualized suggestions for improvement.
5.	**Does Longer-Term Coaching or Training**: Arranges appropriate and helpful assignments, formal training, or other experiences for the purpose of fostering a person's learning and development. Has people work out answers to problems themselves so they really know how, rather than simply giving them the answer. This does not include formal training done simply to meet corporate requirements. May include identifying a training or developmental need and establishing new programs or materials to meet it.

Impact and Influence: Implies an intention to persuade, convince, influence, or impress others, in order to get them to go along with or to support the speaker's agenda. It is based on the desire to have a specific impact or effect on others where the person has his or her *own agenda,* a specific type of impression to make, or a course of action that he or she wants the others to adopt.

Core: Does the person use deliberate influence strategies or tactics?

Scoring Notes: Levels 2 and 3 refer to uncustomized or relatively unsophisticated means of persuasion. That is, the same argument or point could be made to any other person in the same general situation. Levels 4 through 6 are customized or personalized to the individuals or situations at hand, and imply some Organizational Awareness (OA) and/or Interpersonal Understanding (IU). Either or both of these are often scored as well, with sufficient evidence. If a person uses a number of customized efforts for the same purpose (e.g., relating to the same subplot of a story), score all those actions as 5 or 6. Do not score those actions separately.

Level	This Person:
1.	**States Intention but Takes No Specific Action:** Intends to have a specific effect or impact; expresses concern with reputation, status, appearance, etc., but does not take any specific actions.
2.	**Takes a Single Action to Persuade**: Uses direct persuasion in a discussion or presentation (e.g., appeals to reason, data, others' self-interest; uses concrete examples, visual aids, demonstrations, etc.). Makes no apparent attempt to adapt presentation to the interest and level of the audience.
3.	**Takes Multiple Actions to Persuade:** Takes two or more steps to persuade without trying to adapt specifically to level or interest of an audience. Includes careful preparation of data for presentation OR making two or more different arguments or points in a presentation or a discussion.
4.	**Calculates the Impact of One's Actions or Words**: Adapts a presentation or discussion to appeal to the interest and level of others. Anticipates the effect of an action or other detail on people's image of the speaker. OR takes a well-thought-out dramatic or unusual action in order to have a specific impact. Anticipates and prepares for others' reactions.
5.	**Uses Indirect Influence**: Uses chains of indirect influence: "Get A to show B so B will tell C such-and-such." OR takes two steps to influence, with each step adapted to the specific audience. Uses experts or other third parties to influence.
6.	**Uses Complex Influence Strategies**: Assembles political coalitions, builds "behind-the-scenes" support for ideas, gives or withholds information to have specific effects, uses "group process skills" to lead or direct a group.