PART 1

Competency isn’t a Four-Letter Word

1. ESTABLISHING COMPETENCIES
2. IDENTIFYING TOP TALENT
3. DEVELOPING TOP TALENT

The Simple Guide to Succession Planning
Succession planning—the process of identifying, selecting, and managing talent for leadership—is critical to achieving your agency’s long-term goals. It’s really a no brainer: finding and developing leaders ensures you’re always prepared for expected and unexpected talent vacancies with a diverse talent pool of ready successors.

Plus, smart succession planning gives you a competitive advantage, as it takes you beyond simple replacement planning—a gamble of talent and resources—to creating individuals qualified and ready to lead your agency into the future.
Knowing succession planning is important and actually planning for succession are two entirely different matters.
This may seem like a behemoth task at first glance, a pipe dream that requires too many resources to make it a reality. So what can smart agencies do to get started?

Start with competencies

While the word often elicits dramatic sighs from leadership teams and managers, there’s more to competencies than meets the eye. Competencies are integral to real succession management. Competencies, in their true and glorious form, can help you establish goals, create expectations, identify high-performing talent, and develop a framework for what it truly means to be a leader. It’s simple: when it comes down to it, how can you plan for people to grow into positions if you don’t know what those positions require?
Why integrate competencies into your succession planning?
Establishing, observing, measuring, and developing competencies helps your agency go beyond the mere act of replacing staff members. Replacement is expensive in the long run; placing the wrong candidates in the wrong positions decreases efficiency and effectiveness. Relying on competencies to find and train the right people improves talent pools—and by extension, your ability to be most effective in your community.
Rather than searching for a needle in a haystack, you can quickly determine who is leadership material—and who isn’t. If you’re using a talent management system, you can take it one step further and integrate your competencies with your recruiting, learning, and performance management initiatives for better management of the entire employee life-cycle.
It’s easier to build existing human capital than it is to search for new people at every sign of a vacancy. Your existing people already know your organization well. Competency building can cut down on the overall cost of hiring and promoting by engaging the employees you have, those already committed to and enculturated in your organization.
Build a road map for reluctant or hidden leadership candidates

Not everybody self identifies as a leader. But by building and tracking competencies, you can find and promote even those hidden candidates, those whose stellar performance would go largely unnoticed without an easy, consistent way to bring them to the forefront.
With competencies tied into your succession planning, employees know exactly what they need to do and when to do it to improve performance and gain new opportunities. This transparency can help mitigate internal complaints and even the potential for discrimination lawsuits.
The process of developing competencies is also the process of defining and refining your organization. Organizations that have clearly defined competencies not only fare better at succession planning, but they’re more integrated and transparent when it comes to their purpose and goals.
Getting Started: Four Steps to Identifying Competencies

Conduct a position analysis. Consider asking those already in the position to fill out a questionnaire detailing their top responsibilities and what skills and behaviors those responsibilities require. This can also be achieved through behavioral interviews or group discussions.

Create a competency-based job description. From the questionnaire results, create a competency-based job description.

Decide what constitutes high performance and average performance for each competency. If possible, use real-life examples to see what each level of performance looks like. For example, Employee A is a stellar performer. How does Employee A fulfill their job responsibilities? What are the results?

Integrate each competency into your performance management system. Using a performance management system—or even better, an integrated talent management system—lets you integrate competencies into every aspect of the employee life-cycle. This is critical when it comes to tracking development, doing reviews, and identifying leaders.
Cornerstone OnDemand is a leader in cloud-based applications for talent management. The company’s solutions help agencies recruit, train, manage and engage their employees, empowering their people and increasing workforce productivity. Based in Santa Monica, California, the company’s solutions are used by over 1,800 clients worldwide, spanning more than 15.5 million users across 191 countries and 42 languages.

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