

# Competency-based Talent Management: Creating a Unique Talent Brand

## ASSESS SYSTEMS

Successful companies go through painstaking efforts to develop and market a specific brand to draw loyal customers. When you think of brands such as Volvo and Starbucks, specific brand images likely come to your mind of safety and convenient quality. Companies are now finding that brand differentiation is more than a unique product line and the ability to effectively market that product line—the brand difference is their people.

So, how do organizations create talent brands? First, define clearly what sets your most successful people apart in how they achieve business objectives and then replicate and reinforce that brand in each of your talent management practices. Competency modeling is a convenient process that enables organizations to establish their unique people brand by defining and socializing performance expectations—capturing and communicating the aspects of a job that uniquely define success. An organization can use these targets to select and develop the talent to best suit their business needs.

### The Role of Competency Models in Talent Management

#### Competency Models Act as the Foundation for an Integrated Process

Competency modeling establishes a common performance language and set of behavioral expectations (competencies) that help integrate talent processes, such as selection systems, leadership development programs, and performance management. When applied and utilized consistently, competency-based talent management systems enable organizations to create a unique and compelling brand through people. “Competencies are the framework that link many of the HR processes together,” said Carol Jenkins, VP of Consulting Services at Assess Systems, “competencies define success in tangible and meaningful concepts to help organizations conceptualize what is most important and what people should focus on.”

#### Competencies Serve a Practical Purpose

While an important foundation for talent processes, “competencies should be a starting place and should be quick, efficient and speak to the company,” said Sarah Glass, VP of Consulting Services at Assess Systems. “If an operational front-line leader reads it, they should know exactly what you’re talking about. Competencies should convey the concepts that are needed for success in straightforward language so that everyone is on the same page.” When competencies are developed with the involvement of key stakeholders and practical considerations of the end user (hiring manager, HR manager, etc.); and implemented through training and certification, the likelihood of adoption and consistent utilization dramatically increase. Through consistent utilization of competency-based talent systems, organizations reap maximum benefits and return on investment from:

- lower turnover rates due to better selection
- higher internal promotable rates through strong leader development
- stronger bench strength through performance-based succession planning

#### Competencies Support the Business Needs

Competencies also reflect the objectives and goals of the organiza-

tion. With a client in the public sector, Glass described, “We developed a core leadership model that went across all roles and then layered on competencies for leadership positions. The goal was to create competencies that aligned with their core objectives (e.g., Constituency Focus, Fiscal Responsibility, and Adaptability). We then incorporated these into how they developed emerging leaders and created a task force to create competencies from all different departments to reflect their common objectives.” The alignment of competencies with objectives ensured leadership development was linked to the business in a meaningful way.

### Competencies Focus Selection and Development Practices

Aligning the processes for hiring and developing talent with the unique skills, behaviors and attributes identified through competency modeling enables organizations to select and groom their unique brand ambassadors.

For an international manufacturing organization, Assess Systems created a competency-based selection and development process that included a web-based system to measure personality and ability factors that can help or hinder a candidate’s ability to display the desired competencies. This assessment was integrated into a complete selection process for the organization, including structured competency-based interviews. Within a week, the model was developed and communicated throughout the organization, and model-specific assessment tools were immediately available to employ new people and reorient current jobholders.

Personality assessment tools and 360 degree surveys can help provide employees with a better understanding of their own strengths and gaps as they relate to the competencies needed for success. Using these tools provides current and future jobholders with feedback on how their innate characteristics may influence their job performance under the new model. This feedback is then enriched with extensive development resources, a web-based, on-demand 360 feedback system and a development planning resource website. Leaders who solicit feedback and learn how others perceive them can effectively fine tune their approach to be more aligned with the brand.

### Final Considerations

When effectively integrated into talent processes, competencies make the job of hiring leaders and talent managers easier, not harder. Glass says, “competencies shouldn’t be bogged down in academic language or be word-smithed to death so that they end up not making sense.” In other words, keep it simple.

When considering competency models as a talent brand definer, it is important to evaluate the change readiness of the organization. Competency modeling is a change management process requiring thorough evaluation and effective communication before, during and upon implementation. When well executed, competency models can define and elevate an organization’s talent brand. ■