

table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction	xi
Chapter One:	
The Goal of Competency Assessment	1
The Goal of Competency Assessment	2
<i>Organizational Evolution and Employee Alignment.</i>	2
Regulatory Standards	4
<i>Understanding the Intent Behind Competency Related Standards.</i>	5
Providing information	5
Measuring Competency	5
External and Internal Standards	6
Competency Defined	7
<i>Definition of Competency Assessment from JCAHO</i>	11
Competency is a Dynamic Process	13
Chapter Two	
The Essential Elements of Competency Assessment	15
Assessing All Domains of Skill	16
Competency Assessment Is an Ongoing Process	17
<i>Hire.</i>	17
<i>Initial Competencies</i>	17
<i>Ongoing Competencies.</i>	18
<i>Initial Competencies vs. Ongoing Competencies</i>	19
Competency Development	20
<i>Initial Competency Development</i>	21
<i>Ongoing Competency Development</i>	23
<i>Preparing to Complete the Worksheet for Identifying</i> <i>Ongoing Competencies</i>	24

<i>Worksheet for Identifying Ongoing Competencies</i>	25
<i>Prioritization Guidelines</i>	27
The Key to Meaningful Competency Assessment	29
<i>Quality Improvement</i>	29
<i>Components of a Successful Competency Assessment Program</i>	30

Chapter Three

Promoting Accountability Through Competency Assessment	31
Accountability	32
<i>Defining Accountability during the Hiring Process</i>	32
<i>Incorporating Accountability into the Competency Process</i>	32
Documenting Competency Assessment	34
<i>Creating Forms that Promote Accountability</i>	36
<i>Competency Forms: Real Life Example</i>	40

Chapter Four

Competency Assessment Verification Methods	45
Verifying Competency	46
<i>Competency Verification Continuum</i>	47
Adult Learning Concepts	48
<i>Adult Learning Principles</i>	48
Competency Verification Methods	50
<i>Tests/Exams</i>	52
<i>Return Demonstration</i>	61
<i>Evidence of Daily Work</i>	67
<i>Case Studies</i>	69
<i>Exemplars</i>	85
<i>Peer Reviews</i>	95
<i>Self Assessment</i>	106
<i>Discussion/Reflection Groups</i>	111
<i>Presentations</i>	122
<i>Mock Surveys</i>	125
<i>QI Monitors</i>	127
Summary of Competency Verification Methods	130

Chapter Five

Secrets of a Successful Competency Assessment Process	135
Incorporating Competency Assessment in Daily Operations	136

Competency Assessment Focuses on Verification137
Keeping Control of Competency Identification138
Packaging and Communicating Competency Assessment Process140
Who Does Which Competencies?142
Communicating Competencies to the Staff143
Essential Elements of Successful Organizational Operations144
Manager's Response and Follow-up to Competency Assessment Issues . .146
Articulating Competency Expectations146
Establish Consequences146
Defining Consequences147
Holding Managers and Leaders Accountable.148
Tracking and Documenting152
Completion of Competency Assessment152
Location of Competency Documentation155
Aggregating Data Throughout the Year156
Action Plans158
How Do You Create An Action Plan158
Age-Specific, Cultural, Safety and Other Aspects
of Competency Assessment161
*Creative Ways to Track and Document Age-Specific, Cultural,
Safety and Other Aspects of Competency Assessment*163
Novice to Expert Model167

Chapter Six

Competency Assessment and Performance Appraisal 169
Performance Review170
Competency Assessment and Performance Review170
Difference Between Competency Assessment and Performance Review .171
Combining Competency Assessment and Performance Review173
Evaluating Your Overall Employee Evaluation Process177
Four Elements of the Overall Employee Evaluation Process.177

Appendix 183
Further Resources 193
Bibliography 197
Index 199
Appendix 209

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Donna Wright

Introduction

It is easy for us to fall into the common competency assessment traps. We can commit to assessing so many competencies that we begin to drown in them. We can get stuck in the trap of measuring the same competencies year after year. And we can become so focused on assessing competencies for the appeasement of outside groups that we inadvertently overlook the competencies that are most essential for our clients' safety and well being.

This book offers an effective, efficient, and meaningful approach to competency assessment—one that really focuses on why competency assessment is important. We do not assess competency for the sake of outside regulatory agencies like JCAHO, OSHA, and other state and federal agencies. We do competency assessment to assure that we are giving the best possible care to our patients, residents, and other customers—and at the same time shine in our surveys from outside agencies.

This new approach may require us to “stretch” a bit. It may take some courage to not get caught in the old ruts of competency assessment. Competency assessment is not about completing a bunch of competency checklists. If your competency assessment process is loaded with checklists, you are probably measuring many things that focus only on technical skills, and you are likely missing the assessment of critical thinking and interpersonal skills.

Having the courage to look at our processes in a thoughtful, critical manner is essential to the success of competency assessment. Rather than trying to create huge, comprehensive list of skills required for each job and then trying to check them off each year, I suggest we focus on the elements that truly relate to compe-

tency assessment success. Close adherence to the six aspects of meaningful competency assessment listed below, will assure that competency assessment works for us, our employees, and our clients. They are:

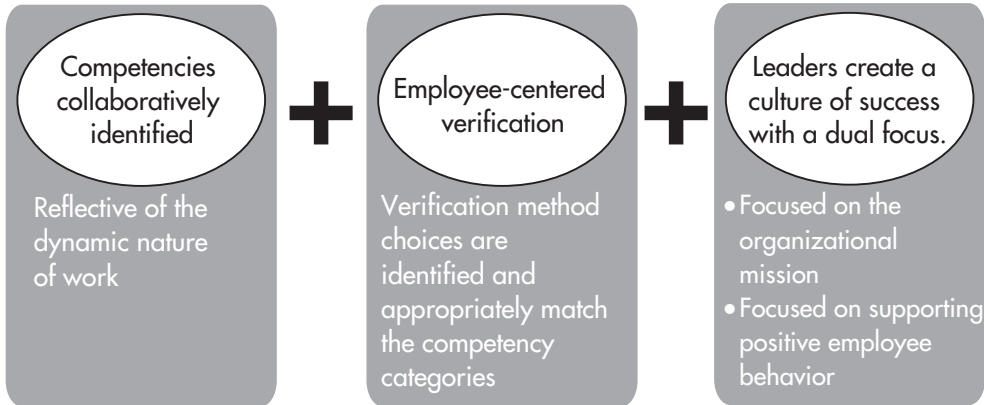
1. Selecting competencies that matter.
2. Selecting the right verification methods for each competency identified.
3. Clarifying accountability of the manager, educator, and employee in the competency process.
4. Utilizing an employee-centered verification process (where the employee has choices from a selection of verification methods).
5. Identifying what is a competency problem and what is not.
6. Promptly and effectively addressing competency deficits and employee problems once they are identified.

Creating a competency process that has all of these six aspects is easier than you might imagine. It just takes a shift in thinking. With the plan put forth in this book, your competencies lists will be smaller and more meaningful. You'll see that you can assess many skills in daily work, and you'll even learn how you can use competency assessment to motivate, recognize, and create accountability in all employees up and down the organizational ladder.

Even leaving out one of the six aspects can greatly impair our ability to move forward with strong, safe, effective health care services. For example, if we put everything in place to assess competency, but never follow through with problematic employees, we will eventually create an environment that sends the message, "Don't bother to comply; they never do anything about it if you don't!" This attitude will quickly spread throughout the team and eventually the organization.

Competency assessment, by its very nature, shapes the environment in which it is used. This environment can become functional or dysfunctional, depending on how the assessment process is implemented and perceived. If your competency assessment process is inefficient, and therefore perceived as an ineffective, redundant waste of time, it will serve to create a more dysfunctional environment. If competency assessment is meaningful, it will be perceived as a tool that helps to ensure efficient, effective care, and will make the environment in which it exists more functional.

Here is Donna Wright’s Competency Assessment Model:



Traditional Competency Assessment vs. Wright’s Competency Assessment Model

Traditional Competency Assessment	Wright’s Outcome-focused/ Accountability-based Approach
<p>Competencies are determined by leaders (managers, educators, etc.). (Often called “core competencies”)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Competency verification is done by only a few methods. The two most commonly selected verification methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checklists (“I observe you doing this.”) • Tests (Often online test packages) 	<p>Competencies are identified through a collaborative effort between managers and staff. (Competencies identified in this approach are based on “prioritized need.”)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Competency verification is done through 11 different categories of verification methods. These methods include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided, reflective practice approaches • Outcome measurements of daily work • Verification methods that can actually develop critical thinking skills
Process-focused Approach	Outcome-focused and Accountability-based Approach

This outcome focused, accountability based approach to competency assessment may sound like *more* work, but it isn't. Rather than more work, it offers a new way to think about competencies and how to assess them. With reflection on your current systems and a few new tools, the shift to this approach to competency assessment may be easier than you think.

The next six chapters will bring the elements of this model to light. In them, we will explore strategies and examples to put these elements into daily work and support overall organizational goals.

You will find a variety of forms and examples throughout the book. We encourage you to use them to get ideas to enhance your competency program. But keep in mind: IT IS NOT ABOUT THE FORMS! The magic of this process lies in the way you go about identifying competencies and carrying out the assessment process. This is your guide to creating a truly successful competency process. It is a guide that will help you reach your goals and create a truly healthy work environment.

chapter one

The Goal of Competency Assessment

- Goal of competency assessment
- Incorporating regulatory standards
- Defining competency

The Goal of Competency Assessment

Organizations engage in competency assessment in order to:

- evaluate individual performance
- evaluate group performance
- meet standards set by a regulatory agency (JCAHO¹, OSHA², etc.)
- address problematic issues within the organization
- enhance or replace performance review

No matter what has led your organization to competency assessment, review the intent behind these motivating factors and define why your organization will support and carry out the process of competency assessment.

The assessments themselves can take many forms and address multiple needs for your organization. It is counterproductive to lock your organization into one or two methods of assessment, such as checklists or observer reviews. This book will help you to see your organization's competency assessment process more clearly, while offering a variety of methods for verifying identified competencies.

Competency assessment is a fluid, ongoing process. It helps identify and evaluate the skills necessary to carry out the job *now*, as well as *in the future*, as the job evolves over time. Competency assessment is only meaningful when it reflects the dynamic nature of the job. This means you will not have one list of competencies or skills identified for a job that you will simply check off over and over each year; instead your competencies will be a collection of skills, abilities, and behaviors that address the changing nature of the job for a given period of time. These competencies will only be used for an identified assessment period.

Competency assessment can help groups focus on the philosophy and mission of an organization. Competency assessment can also direct employee participation in—and understanding of—the identified organizational goals for a given period, as well as help each employee understand and verify his or her personal contributions to achieving your organizational goals.

Organizational Evolution and Employee Alignment

Every organization evolves over time to meet the changing needs and demands of the health care environment. Competency assessment identifies the specific skills required in each job class to make your organizational evolution successful. It is prudent to clarify with all employees that their jobs will evolve over time as

¹ Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations

² Occupational Safety and Health Administration