



Defining HR Success

9 Critical Competencies for HR Professionals

Alexander Alonso, Debra J. Cohen, James N. Kurtessis and Kari R. Strobel
SHRM © 2015
208 pages

Rating

8 8 Applicability
7 Innovation
7 Style

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Take-Aways

- The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) Competency Model lists nine competencies HR professionals need.
- A “competency” is “knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics” (KSAO).
- The first competency is technical HR knowledge, including “talent acquisition and retention,” “employee engagement” and “employee relations.”
- Learning and development are also part of this competency.
- The other eight competencies are “behavioral.” They include “ethical practice, leadership and navigation, communications,” and “relationship management.”
- They also cover “consultation, critical evaluation, business acumen,” and “global and cultural effectiveness.”
- Business acumen helps HR officials demonstrate how HR connects to and supports corporate goals.
- HR practitioners must be able to guide and advise employees, colleagues and superiors.
- HR’s core concern is how well organizations treat their employees.
- Sound HR practices increase profitability, productivity and employee loyalty.

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How HR management can have a significant impact on organizations and employees, and 2) What key competencies HR professionals must master to succeed in their careers.

Recommendation

To function effectively, HR practitioners must master nine “key competencies”: the core of the field’s technical knowledge, plus eight “behavioral competencies.” These competencies connect HR’s dual roles in what organizations seek to achieve and in how their employees contribute. The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) explains what these competencies encompass and how HR professionals can develop them even as they spend most of their working time helping others. The authors, all SHRM experts, use wooden language at times, but perhaps that is because this presentation is intended to serve as a manual. Its content, while fundamental, provides clear definitions of HR practice and theory. It will help you consider HR’s function in contributing to an organization’s results from viewpoints of both the company itself and the individual employee. *getAbstract* recommends this overview to business students and professors, HR professionals, those who aspire to the field and executives who oversee HR practitioners.

Summary

“The model in its entirety speaks to how you as an HR professional provide and demonstrate the greatest value to your organization.”

“When HR professionals demonstrate these behaviors, they begin to think and act like business owners, focusing on cutting waste and not just costs and indirectly helping to create a culture of accountability within the organization.”

Human Resources (HR)

How organizations hire, educate, motivate and fire their employees in human resources (HR) significantly affects their business and culture. Some corporations treat HR as vital to achieving strategic goals. Other companies regard HR as something that they must have, but they do little to enable HR to help meet their business goals or to serve their “compliance” requirements.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) works to assist HR professionals in achieving excellence. To support and educate them, it created the “SHRM Competency Model,” which defines the attributes a successful HR professional needs. This model can guide HR professionals at all stages of their careers, from entry-level to the most senior positions. These human resource competencies tangibly influence a company’s performance, for instance, in employee performance and retention and in profitability. These competencies also affect companies in less-concrete ways, like boosting employee morale or enhancing public reputation.

Framing Competencies

A SHRM “competency” consists of the “knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics” (KSAO) that support personal and corporate performance. This model lists a set of connected competencies HR personnel need to carry out particular jobs in specific areas.

Competencies connect what organizations seek to achieve with how their employees act. To understand competencies, examine the performance of your business from the point of view of the organization itself and from the perspective of the individuals within it. Solid HR work aligns employee productivity with corporate goals. For example, people seek work they find compelling and satisfying, so matching staff members with the right jobs

“SHRM defines a competency as a collection of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAs) that contribute to individual and organizational performance.”

“Competencies are the fulcrum of high-performing organizations.”

“Competency models rest on the assumption that a broad set of job-related competencies can be used to understand and assess employee performance across a variety of jobs and organizations.”

“Think strategically about whether you have the right mix of benefits to achieve your goals of attraction or retention of employees.”

produces positive intangible and tangible outcomes. Increased productivity is a concrete result at the individual level. Boosting workforce performance is an organizational result that makes a firm more cost-efficient. To help your HR team feel proud of its work – and to encourage better future performance – communicate with the full organization about the successes of HR’s initiatives.

Nine Key Competencies

The SHRM Competency Model can help organizations define the abilities a successful HR professional needs to have. This model should guide HR professionals at all stages of their careers, from the most junior to the most senior positions. The model outlines nine competencies: it begins with an initial set of technical skills under the label “HR Expertise” and then it lists eight “behavioral competencies.”

HR Expertise

The first competency – core knowledge about human resources and HR practices – is technical. Since HR practitioners must handle a variety of responsibilities, this competency encompasses the know-how they have to master to practice at HR’s highest, most effective levels.

HR expertise consists of the knowledge professionals use to perform the HR functions that assist their companies in reaching their business objectives. HR also undertakes implementation of new organizational programs. HR expertise includes these major activity areas:

- **“Talent acquisition and retention”** – HR locates, recruits and hires new employees, and encourages current employees to stay with the organization.
- **“Employee engagement”** – Well-designed HR management practices can increase employee loyalty, productivity and profitability.
- **“Learning and development”** – HR creates, initiates and manages programs to improve employee skills, competence and readiness for promotion and succession.
- **“Employee relations”** – HR has to recognize as well as effectively cope with employee relationship issues at all kinds of levels, from routine hiring and firing to more difficult matters.

Behavioral Competences

The other eight HR competencies are behavioral. They are:

1. “Ethical Practice”

The core of HR management is the concern about how well organizations treat their most important resource: their people. Ethical practice consists of the adoption and application of ethical values in everything an organization does. Since HR departments are a resource for a variety of organizational activities, they can help promote a positive culture that honors ethical behavior.

2. “Leadership and Navigation”

This competency consists of an HR professional’s work in guiding “organizational initiatives.” This may include gaining support from other stakeholders. The need an HR professional has to deal with navigation and higher-up executives depends on his or her seniority. Entry-level HR positions don’t require all of these skills, but senior positions demand stronger competencies. Senior HR professionals must show that they embrace the organization’s culture and must accomplish their tasks within its constraints. They need

the ability to help guide the firm through difficult times and to encourage people to work together smoothly to achieve mutual goals.

HR professionals require “business acumen...to participate and help the organization be competitive.”

3. “Communication”

HR practitioners must heed the complaints of employees, work with all human aspects of the organization and develop strategies for communicating the challenges the business faces. When HR executives convey their practices and policies clearly, they also help the workforce value HR’s contribution. Sound HR boosts employee morale and improves corporate performance. A command of HR communication skills enables other personal competencies, such as Relationship Management and Leadership and Navigation. Advanced communication skills enable senior executives to spell out their strategies so their colleagues understand. HR officers often evaluate the public communication abilities of senior executives and help them improve.

“Leadership and navigation is defined as the ability to direct and contribute to initiatives and processes within the organization.”

4. “Relationship Management”

Relationship management consists of handling the way people relate to one another. It includes the ability to offer service and to assist the organization. HR professionals must maintain healthy workplace relationships as they interact with a variety of people in a range of jobs and roles. HR practitioners who excel at relationship management win the trust of those around them. They treat other people with respect and dignity and enable people to speak frankly with them. Good HR practices foster employees’ harmonious relationships with their superiors, which helps staffers perform better and enhances their career prospects. Employees who work in harmony feel more positive about their work, and they function more effectively in cooperation with their colleagues. Healthy, productive workplace relationships boost employee loyalty, avoid and defuse conflict, and promote individual and organizational growth.

“Communication is the foundation on which relationships are built and maintained.”

5. “Consultation”

HR practitioners often play an advisory role to the entire organization. Their work focuses on constructing and executing HR management (HRM) practices that support their organization’s pursuit of its goals. Effective HR practitioners design systems that help companies function more efficiently, retain key employees and achieve wider success.

HR assists in the selection and training of new employees. It helps evaluate staff members’ performance and serves as a link between the organization and its employees. Skilled HR professionals must know more than just HR practices. They must develop the interpersonal skills to guide people at every step in their careers and at every level of their organizations.

“Critical evaluation is...the ability to interpret information with which to make business decisions and recommendations.”

6. “Critical Evaluation”

A survey of chief HR officers shows that they see critical evaluation skills as second only to business acumen as the most important competency for HR professionals. Critical evaluation is the ability to make sense of data. HR professionals who have strong skills in critical evaluation can convert complex information into practical counsel. Critical evaluation skills help HR professionals make better decisions and advise executives on what their organization should do.

HR can boost the positive impact of its programs by evaluating how they perform in terms of solid, relevant data. For instance, “human capital metrics” can explain how much time it takes and how much money it costs to add a new employee. Executives come to value HR professionals who can provide detailed, clear information in these and related areas.

“HR professionals can help their organizations address challenges related to HR, such as staffing needs, training and development needs, employee performance issues, and employee relations matters.”

“Employees who have better interpersonal relationships with their co-workers and supervisors may also perceive the organization as more supportive.”

“HR practitioners can have a major impact on business outcomes through their understanding of the relationships between HR functions, metrics and business operations.”

7. “Business Acumen”

Outstanding HR professionals know what makes their businesses, their systems, their strategies and their industries tick. This is critical for their careers. HR professionals can join project teams to work alongside their colleagues from finance and marketing if they have strategic knowledge of “business administration, finance, marketing and operations.” Such know-how enables them, for example, to study their companies’ balance sheets for insights into how HR can help enhance profitability. For instance, such professionals could link HR metrics with key measures of business performance. HR practitioners with acumen understand the connection between HR and crucial business functions. They have insight into the environments in which their firms operate.

8. “Global and Cultural Effectiveness”

HR practitioners must manage employees from a variety of backgrounds. Global and cultural effectiveness requires being able to consider many different perspectives. HR practitioners need to lead “diversity initiatives.” They must keep abreast with the laws and regulations that govern hiring as they abet the creation and maintenance of a diverse workforce.

HR practitioners with cultural effectiveness skills believe in a set of fundamental values. At the same time, they can maintain the flexibility to deal with whatever conditions they encounter. They accept how others see things, while remaining grounded in their own values. They are humble, and they understand that they gain from accepting advice as well as from giving it.

Assessing Your HR Skills and Career Progression

To plan your HR career, construct a “career path.” Examine the different strengths you will need at various stages of your professional growth. Several of these crucial competencies require constant updating. HR professionals must define their roles, plan where they want to go as they upgrade their skills, learn continually and develop strategies for reaching their goals. Examine where you stand with each SHRM competency. A proper evaluation will show you what skills you need to enhance. Rate yourself. Assess your personal attributes, including those others might not see. Seek an informal skills assessment from your colleagues or superiors.

The SHRM competency model also offers a more casual evaluation. Identify the competencies you feel unsure about, and consult with others about them. Consider which personal strengths the model links with various “proficiency levels.” Your colleagues can provide valuable insights about your work. If you desire a more formal assessment, consult your superiors about who can provide one. SHRM’s competencies define valuable expertise that HR practitioners should aspire to attain. However, no one can master all of these competencies. Practitioners will excel in some areas but not in others at different times in their careers. A crucial truth of HR performance and practice is that everyone has his or her own strengths.

About the Authors

At the Society for Human Resource Management, **Alexander Alonso** is vice president for research, **Debra J. Cohen** is senior vice president of knowledge development, **James N. Kurtessis** is the manager of validation research for certification programs and **Kari R. Strobel** is director of HR competencies.