



What is a leadership competency and how do I create a competency model?

A competency is a skill, ability, or knowledge set that can be taught or developed. All competencies have “indicators” that allow them to be observed and measured. A leadership competency model is a group of competencies linked to leadership excellence in a specific organization. A leadership competency model supports the organization’s vision and strategy by providing a framework by which the organization can select, develop, and evaluate leaders. The LeaderNation system guides users through the creation of a customized competency model and supports leadership development efforts using this model.

There are several ways of creating an organizational leadership competency model. One method is conducting interviews with the leaders of your organization to understand what specific skills, abilities, and knowledge sets are important for success. The interview data should then be analyzed to identify the critical leadership success factors, and ultimately organized into a leadership competency model.

A second method for creating leadership competencies for an organization is to convene a meeting of leaders and discuss the climate, culture, and strategy of the organization. With those considerations in mind, competencies are then created to support the organization’s aspirations.

A third method is to select a set from a list of known leadership competencies related to organizational success. In addition to reflecting on your experience, reviewing industry best practices and research publications can guide this selection. LeaderNation leadership development solutions provide access to a library of leadership competencies from which any number can be chosen to create your organizational competency model.

Regardless of which of the above methods is used to create a competency model, LeaderNation can help. Our tools can be used by internal human resources personnel or in conjunction with leadership development consultants. If you would like assistance in creating your model, LeaderNation has a network of independent certified consultants that can assist you.

Ultimately, a competency model should become a way of talking about leadership in your organization. Employees are given a common language and framework to discuss and guide their personal leadership development as well as leadership in the organization in general.

Ideally, the competency model will influence the way leaders are selected, trained, and evaluated in the organization, so as to set standards and to highlight desired leader behaviors.

What are the three steps to creating a competency model?

1. Create lists of behaviors to determine what good leadership looks like in your organization.

This can be done in one of three ways as mentioned above: interviews, strategic planning sessions, or selecting behaviors from competencies known to be important.

2. Use the following guidelines to group common behaviors and name them. These will be your leadership competencies.

- Competency names should be as specific as possible.
- They should also be a noun (e.g., delegation) or a gerund (e.g., listening).
- Names should be easily understood, so avoid jargon and ambiguous words with more than one meaning.
- Use adjectives to clarify ambiguous nouns (e.g., disciplined management).

3. Finally, define the competencies.

Competency definitions, as with competency names, should be unambiguous and specific. Use complete sentences when writing definitions, and avoid jargon and abbreviations. Also, a competency should be observable. Your competency definition should specify the “what” and the “why.” For example, a definition of active listening should include the what: “Communicating and clarifying understanding, and eliciting information using both active and passive behaviors,” and the why: “In order to engage others, make people feel heard, and gather information.” Using these parts, active listening would then be defined as “Communicating and clarifying understanding, and eliciting information using both active and passive behaviors, in order to engage others, make people feel heard, and gather information.” If you find the competency you have created is not observable through leader behaviors, it is likely that you have created a meta-competency – a larger pattern of behavior made up of a set of related competencies.

Once you have created a competency model for your organization, the next step is to think about systems you can put in place to ensure organizational leaders are supporting the organization’s mission, vision, and strategy through effective use of these competencies. Four levers to use are selection, assessment, rewards and recognition, and leadership development. The LeaderNation system provides you an essential tool to support these activities: 360 feedback. For more information see the PDF titled, “360 Feedback Fundamentals” or visit www.leadernation.com.