

What Is Competency Mapping?

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Competency mapping in HR plays a crucial role in identifying skills gaps in people and departments so that you can make smarter hiring decisions and invest in learning and development initiatives that bridge these gaps.

Statistics show that 80% of employee turnover is down to bad hiring decisions. Competency mapping can significantly reduce the risk of hiring the wrong person. Every role requires a unique set of hard and soft skills and behavioral attributes. But defining these skills is not a simple task. In addition, when hiring someone for a role, most employers are not aware of the full set of skills a candidate has (or lacks). This is where a competency map can benefit organizations and employees.

What is competency mapping?

Competency mapping is an HR strategy that helps to evaluate candidates and employees in a structured, methodical way that is easy to replicate. The goal is to fully understand each individual's and department's knowledge, skills, motives, traits, and social roles, as well as any noticeable gaps within these characteristics.

These may be known or unknown to each individual. This can then be compared to the skills and competencies needed for a particular role to gauge whether they are the right fit and what training may be needed to improve. It's important to note that certain competencies are more difficult to measure and cannot be improved through learning and development. However, the more opportunities provided for growth, the greater the chance of your employees reaching their highest potential.

Competency mapping is typically used by HR professionals and managers in performance management. The competencies of a specific role are mapped against the competencies of the employee undertaking that role.

Employees are given the competencies they will be assessed against to know what is expected of them, where they currently sit, and what they need to do to improve within each competency. Employees can then be assigned tasks that utilize their strengths and given training and mentoring to improve areas of weakness.

Skill matrix and competency mapping: The difference

The terms skill matrix and competency map are often used interchangeably to describe a skills assessment, but some notable differences exist. While both tools help to assess an individual's or team's potential, a skill matrix focuses solely on a person's skills (usually role-specific ones). It uses a simple grid to rate each person on how proficient they are in each skill.

On the other hand, a competency matrix provides more detail, including skills, behaviors, knowledge and attitudes, and evaluates people at a deeper level.

A skill matrix can help assess how equipped a team is to complete a specific project, whereas a competency matrix can help organizations see how an individual's competencies can benefit the workplace and use competency mapping in performance management.

Types of competency mapping frameworks

| Competency mapping frameworks | Description |
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| Lominger Competency Model | The Lominger competency model assesses 67 competencies focusing on leadership and talent management. These include approachability, business acumen, compassion, creativity, and career ambition. What's unique about this model is the questions asked do not have one specific correct answer and are designed to help organizations find employees who will be the right cultural fit. |
| Clifton Strengths | This assessment measures 177 competencies, gives an overview of a person's behavioral preferences and skills, and focuses on strengths. Participants must choose between two self-descriptors to measure each competency. The assessment measures participants' unique talents (natural patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving) and categorizes them into 34 themes. |
| SHL Universal Competency Framework | This framework specifies requirements for optimum performance in a role. It operates on a 3-tier structure including 8 general competency factors, 20 competency dimensions, and 96 competency components, all informed by statistical analysis. |
| The European e-Competence Framework (e-CF) | Contains a reference of 41 competencies applied in an IT work context and uses a common language for competencies, skills, and knowledge applied across Europe. It is used for HR planning and IT strategy and helps improve communication between these departments. |
| ASTD Competency Model | <p>This competency model is a framework used to assess and develop the skills and competencies of HR professionals and was developed by the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD).</p> <p>It comprises three blocks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The foundation level: Concentrates on personal, interpersonal, and managerial skills. 2. The focus level: Introduces Areas of Expertise (AoE) such as coaching, improving employee performance, social learning, career planning, and evaluating. 3. The execution level: Focuses on four professional roles essential for successful project execution. |
| DDI | <p>DDI's competency framework is built on five key elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built on your business strategy • Focused on well-defined competencies based on observable behaviors • Differentiated by level • Operationalized • Timely <p>DDI believes that competencies, as well as other elements, contribute to success in leadership roles which are captured in their Success ProfileSM.</p> |

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| | This includes four key elements: knowledge, experience, competencies, and personal attributes. |
| 9-box grid (note: While the 9-box grid does not directly map competencies, it can be used in conjunction with competency mapping frameworks) | This framework is a three-by-three table that helps you to plot an employee's current potential (on the x-axis) and future potential (on the y-axis) in categories of low, moderate, and high. While the 9-box grid does not directly map competencies, it can be used in conjunction with competency mapping frameworks. |
| Drotter Leadership pipeline model – not a pure competency model but rather a way to think about behaviors at different levels but is often used with competency models | This is not a pure competency model but rather a way to think about behaviors at different levels, often used with competency models. It helps organizations grow their leaders from entry level through to senior managers. The framework helps to identify future leaders, assess their competencies, plan development programs and measure results. The model suggests that leaders move through six key passages: 1. From Managing Self to Managing Others 2. From Managing Others to Managing Managers 3. From Managing Managers to Functional Manager 4. From Functional Manager to Business Manager 5. From Business Manager to Group Manager 6. From Group Manager to Enterprise Manager |
| AIHR HR competency model | The AIHR HR competency model is for T-shaped HR professionals and helps HR stay relevant and prepared for the future. The 5 Core HR Competencies of this model are: 1. Business Acumen 2. Data Literacy 3. Digital Agility 4. People Advocacy 5. Delivers Impact In this framework, a competency is split into multiple dimensions. Each construct consists of different behaviors described in terms of proficiency levels. |

Understanding the competency level scale

The competency level scale is not a competency mapping framework but a component or element within a competency mapping framework. Here is an example of a four-level competency scale.

Level 1: Basic/Foundational

At the basic level of competency, the employee is expected to have limited knowledge, skills, and experience. They will likely be able to carry out simple tasks but may need extensive or frequent instructions and will apply the competency in limited situations.

Example

An HR professional at this stage:

- Has limited understanding of the strategic HR objectives
- Has limited understanding of compliance and regulations
- May struggle to understand or utilize data
- Doesn't set KPIs, has limited understanding of the organization's primary processes and business goals
- Rarely contributes to strategy discussion and decision-making
- Has limited understanding of how technology might impact their role and the future of work, has limited digital capabilities.

Level 2: Intermediate/Developing

At the intermediate level of competence, the employee will have the knowledge, skills, and experience required to complete standard tasks confidently without supervision. However, they are likely to seek advice and/or help before carrying out more complex tasks. The focus here is developing on-the-job experience and applying or enhancing knowledge and skills.

Example

An HR professional at this stage is developing their understanding of:

- Strategic HR objectives
- Compliance and regulations
- Data and analytics, and technology.

They feel somewhat comfortable contributing to discussions, giving small presentations and setting KPIs. Focuses mostly on their own role, is regarded by colleagues as credible, acquires new knowledge and skills, occasionally promotes diversity and fosters inclusion.

Level 3: Advanced/Proficient

At the advanced level of competence, employees will have the knowledge, skills and experience to take the initiative, carry out complex tasks consistently, and train other team members. Generally, they will require little to no guidance and consistently apply the competency in question.

Example

An HR professional at this stage:

- Has an advanced understanding of strategic HR objectives
- Is confident in setting metrics
- Analyzes data and identifies key trends
- Uses HR software and tools

- Makes decisions and is training less-experienced members of the team.

These people are viewed by supervisors and managers as credible and are frequently looking for ways to progress in their careers.

Level 4: Expert/Mastery

The final level of the competency scale is when you become an expert or master of that competency. You will be widely regarded as an authority for your skills, knowledge and experience and be a key resource for advising others. You will apply this competency with expertise, even in complex situations.

Example

An HR professional at this stage frequently:

- Leverages data analysis
- Sets KPIs in line with strategic business objectives
- Shows stakeholders how HR contributes to business strategy
- Drives the adoption of people analytics and the use of data
- Continuously looks to identify sources of competitive advantage
- Aligns HR activities, policies, and strategies to (help the business) serve the end customer in better ways
- Contributes to strategy discussions and decision-making
- Spots opportunities to leverage technology and has a deep understanding of technological trends
- Actively promotes the desired culture through their actions
- HR specializations and business partnering activities.

The Competency Mapping Process: 7 Steps



The competency mapping process: How to do competency mapping

Here are some key steps for HR to develop a competency map.

1. Conduct a job analysis

A job analysis is usually done by asking employees to complete a position information questionnaire (PIQ) or using this questionnaire to conduct one-to-one interviews. This helps HR professionals analyze existing employees' skills and highlight how employees relate to their roles. Supervisor evaluations and reviewing employee work history can help to give an unbiased perspective of performance.

2. Identify core competencies

The data from the job analysis can be analyzed to identify the core competencies required for each role in the organization. This should include knowledge, skills, behaviors, motives, and ambitions. You can match each of these to the daily responsibilities of each role.

3. Define proficiency levels

As we explored earlier, each competency should have a scale that helps you assess how competent someone is within each competency. It's common to have three to five proficiency levels, e.g., basic, intermediate, advanced, and expert. What knowledge, skills, behaviors, and experience are required at each of these levels for each competency?

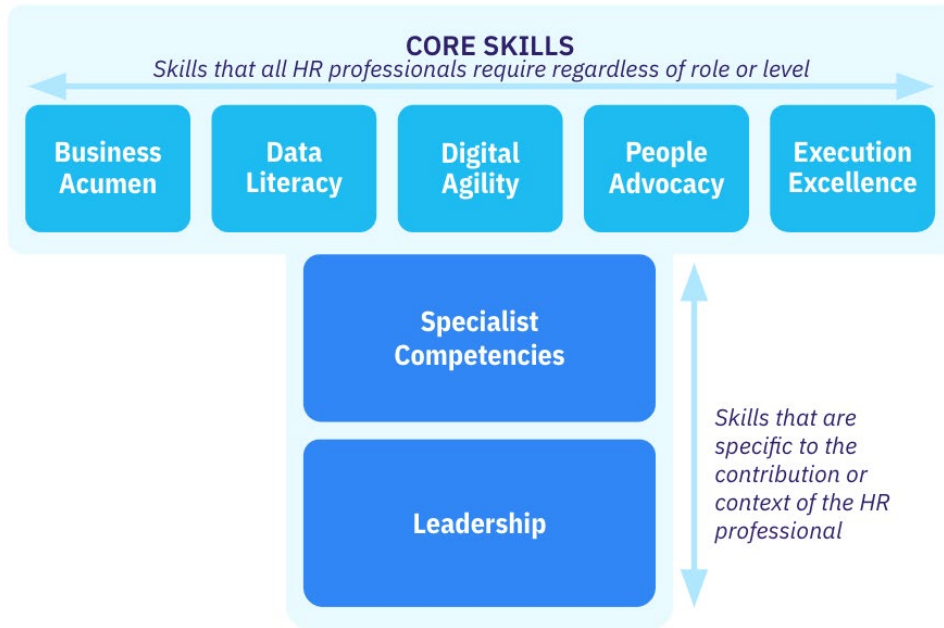
4. Validate the competencies

The next step in the competency mapping process is to validate the identified competencies by seeking input and feedback from subject matter experts, managers, and employees in the respective roles.

5. Organize the competency framework

The competencies required for a specific role or function come together to form a competency model. This model provides a tangible framework for performance management, skill gap analysis, and development and provides a template for what the ideal organization and professional will look like.

An example of this is the AIHR competency model for HR professionals. Each competency is split into several dimensions that consist of different behaviors and are described in proficiency levels.



One of the competencies is data literacy. This is split into two dimensions:

1. Data-driven
2. Analytics translation

Each of these dimensions has related behaviors.

Data-driven behaviors include the ability to:

1. Read data
2. Apply data
3. Create data
4. Leverage data

Each of these behaviors is then described and scored on three proficiency levels:

1. Elementary
2. Intermediate
3. Expert

6. Document the competency descriptions

Write clear and concise descriptions for each competency. Include behavioral indicators or examples that illustrate the expected performance for each competency at different proficiency levels. This helps individuals understand what each competency entails.

7. Integrate into HR processes

The final step of the competency mapping process is to embed the competency map into various HR processes.

This means incorporating competencies into job descriptions and performance evaluations, assigning metrics to measure each competency, or deciding on additional resources or training needed for specific employees or departments so they can perform better in their roles.

Competency mapping examples

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| <p>Example 1</p> <p>Competency: Data-driven</p> <p>Behavior: Reading data</p> | <p>1. Elementary performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occasionally uses data mostly ad-hoc by using scorecards and accessing dashboards. <p>2. Intermediate performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly leverages descriptive data analysis to set targets and answer questions. Regularly leverages scorecards to measure HR efficiencies and outcomes. <p>3. Expert performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequently leverages descriptive data analysis to set targets, answer questions, guide daily operations, and provide context. Frequently leverages scorecards to measure HR efficiencies, outcomes and the impact of HR on the business. |
| <p>Example 2</p> <p>Competency: Business Acumen</p> <p>Behavior: Context Interpretation</p> | <p>1. Elementary performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited understanding of the organization’s primary processes and its place in the industry value chain. <p>2. Intermediate performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can explain the organization’s primary processes, its place in the industry value chain, and how it adds value to customers. Has an intermediate understanding of management theories (i.e., resource-based view, transaction cost economics). <p>3. Expert performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can effortlessly explain the organization’s primary process. Can effortlessly explain the organization’s position in the whole industry value chain; knows the roles of its partners (e.g., suppliers, vendors, distributors) and what differentiates them. Continuously looks to identify sources of competitive advantage within their specialization and promotes them through their business partnering activities. Can apply common management theories to examine the organization and organization challenges (i.e., resource-based view, transaction cost economic, resource dependency theory, strategic management theory, organizational learning, institutional theory). |
| <p>Example 3</p> <p>Competency: Digital integration</p> | <p>1. Elementary performance</p> <p>Has limited understanding of the most frequently used software applications in their daily work.</p> <p>2. Intermediate performance</p> <p>Has an intermediate understanding of different technological tools and</p> |

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| Behavior: Technological Awareness | applies them in their daily work. 3. Expert performance Has a deep understanding of different technological tools and applications; quickly learns how to use new tools. |
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Key takeaway

Competency mapping can help HR teams and hiring managers make better hiring decisions, reduce employee turnover, and improve employee performance and cultural fit. These all contribute to meeting the organization's long-term goals.

It can also help you identify skills gaps in your teams and give you a fuller picture of an employee's skills and traits. This will help employees understand what is expected of them, their current performance, and what they need to do to progress.

Source: <https://www.aihr.com/blog/competency-mapping/>