

## Censeo's Approach to Competency Modeling

A competency model describes the knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAOs) required for success in a job or job family. It distinguishes performance in an organization – it's what outstanding performers do more often, in more situations, and with better results than average performers. Censeo has in-depth knowledge and expertise in helping companies develop and apply competencies. We also have a library of existing models, competencies and behavioral descriptors – for many jobs in many industries – that can be used to start the process of developing tailored models for clients with unique needs.

### Value of Competency Models

Competency models are often the foundation for a variety of human resource systems such as recruiting and selection, assessment, training, performance management, compensation and succession planning. These systems are more accurate and effective when they are based on a solid understanding of the KSAOs important to high performance. The systems are also more effective if they fit together and share a common competency language. A problem many companies face, however, is that their HR systems operate independently and aren't well integrated; they don't "talk to each other." Two trends are occurring that make the situation even more challenging:

- Jobs are changing rapidly in many organizations, and in some cases the *roles* employees play are more relevant than the particular jobs they may hold at a given point in time.
- Soft skills and personal attributes are becoming increasingly important in a knowledge-based economy. Traditional job descriptions and job analysis techniques no longer meet the business need.

Unlike traditional job analysis, which focuses on understanding the current situation without considering personal attributes, competency modeling is more future-oriented (e.g., what trends are emerging that will impact skill requirements tomorrow?) and inclusive of a variety of attributes (such as personality) that can drive job success.

### Developing Competency Models

Censeo's approach is to streamline the development process by capitalizing on information already available while taking all the necessary steps to ensure that the models are valid. Our process also helps clients develop models that vertically align their HR systems with business strategies, and that integrate their HR systems horizontally. Figure 1 below shows these relationships.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Competency Model Relationships**



The specific approach for developing a competency model varies depending on the purpose of the model, but the basic steps are as follows:

1. **Clarify the purpose of the model** – How will the model be used? What jobs will be targeted? The answers to these questions have implications on the number and type of competencies and the level of specificity needed.

2. **Leverage existing information** – We use information from work that has already been done – job descriptions, past models, training programs, assessment tools, company vision and strategy, etc.
3. **Gather additional data** – Censeo gathers supplemental data from a variety of sources and through an assortment of methods to ensure that the competency model is on target for its intended purpose. Typically we conduct strategy interviews with senior leaders, job observations and interviews with relevant groups, and focus groups when applicable. Throughout this stage, we always gather information in the most efficient way possible.
4. **Develop a draft** – We develop a draft of the model with the appropriate number of competencies and behaviors, as well as the appropriate level of specificity for its intended purpose. We also follow best practice principles in developing the model to ensure its utility and effectiveness. These principles include:
  - Writing behaviors that are clear and concise
  - Ensuring that behaviors are observable and, therefore, measurable
5. **Reality test and finalize** – We review the model with senior leaders and incumbents and make revisions as needed. We also consider the extent to which collecting quantitative data is necessary to substantiate validity and/or prioritize competencies.
  - Including the appropriate number of behaviors in a competency
  - Ensuring that competencies and behaviors do not overlap and are not redundant

### ***Censeo's Consulting Philosophy***

As with all of our consulting engagements, Censeo employs a balanced approach – we are thorough in understanding client needs and developing appropriate solutions, but flexible in how the process is implemented. With regard to competency modeling, our role can solely involve providing expert counsel on developing competency models. This sometimes involves giving a client our model for a particular assessment need and providing best practice advice on how to use it. In this case, the tasks are performed by client resources. On the other hand, we can take the lead role and conduct all the steps necessary in developing a valid model. Regardless of the role we play, we always ensure that our advice and counsel or project deliverable is on target, high quality and value added.

*Censeo Corporation is a human resource consulting firm offering consulting services and Internet-based assessment products. The company's mission is to help clients maximize their investment in human capital by collecting and then strategically using accurate and valid information about competencies and work preferences. For more information, visit [www.censeocorp.com](http://www.censeocorp.com), e-mail [info-request@censeocorp.com](mailto:info-request@censeocorp.com) or call 407.645.1600 x150.*