

Innovation: The Success Model

The competency model is dead (if it ever truly was alive). Help managers understand how to win in your company using the simple, practical and aspirational Success Model.

Few human resource practices have promised as much and delivered as little as the competency model.

This well-intended effort to identify the capabilities that drive individual success has become a complex and unusable example of how HR “just doesn’t get it.”

Managers don’t want the smothering “help” of a 10 competency, 50-behavior model. They just want to know how to succeed.

What Went Wrong?

Popularized in the 90s by consultants, academics and a flood of new books, competencies soon became the remedy for every organizational illness. Not sure how to determine pay? Competencies! Need to develop more leaders? Competencies! More accurately predict performance? Well, you get the picture.

In the ensuing rush to create competency models, designers often forgot to ask themselves two critical questions: Does what we’re doing add value to the business, and, how can we ensure implementation?

As a result, today’s competency model is an all-encompassing, multi-layered monstrosity whose complexity far outweighs its value. Yet, despite its heft, it still doesn’t tell managers exactly how to succeed.

Creating a Success Model

It’s possible to define success for managers in a crisp and compelling way. We do this using a Success Model – a few short statements that describe the outcomes that differentiate successful leaders.

The Success Model adds value by

focusing on outcomes, not the behaviors that precede them. It’s easy to implement because managers instantly understand its brief, engaging and aspirational statements.

Three things differentiate a Success Model from the traditional list of competencies:

Focuses on Outcomes: Managers want outcomes, not competencies. A Success Model describes the outcomes that define high potential, not the underlying behaviors.

For example, consider three competency model staples: Strategic Thinking, Relationship Building and

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Customer Focus. Those competencies sound important but how should a leader apply them?

A Success Model statement describes the outcome that the company values, e.g. *Creates broad client relationships based on a deep knowledge of their business.* That outcome may be a combination of those three competencies, but now the leader knows exactly what to do to win.

Includes Only the Vital Few: Managers want focus. In three to five succinct statements, a Success Model describes what will differentiate tomorrow’s stars. Each statement cleanly expresses one concept. It’s not a string of competen-

cies tied together with conjunctions.

This tight focus makes the Success Model easy to explain and simple to use to assess potential.

Sounds Like Your Company: Managers want success described “their way.” Your managers may say that their best performers “Create programs that humble others while staying humble themselves” or “Grow teams that deliver legendary projects.” They likely don’t speak in competencies and they wish you wouldn’t either.

A Success Model statement should both reflect your company’s vernacular and be specific enough to apply when assessing or developing leaders.

Success Model Implementation

It’s easy to integrate the Success Model into core talent processes.

First, communicate it broadly to your current and future leaders. They’ll be thrilled that the rules for success are now clear.

Second, identify the experiences in your company that will build strength in each of Success Model areas. Use this to guide leaders’ development plans.

Finally, use it to evaluate potential in talent review discussions and as your behavioral measure in performance management. You’ll get far more helpful information by evaluating desired outcomes than you will by pondering theoretical competencies.

For more information about
Success Models, contact us at
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