DICTIONARY OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

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I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This appendix is intended as a brief reference for search consultants who will have a role in defining key competency requirements for executive candidates. It is organized into the following sections:

- Competencies Defined
- Executive Competencies vs. Other Employee Competencies
- Guidelines for Using the Dictionary
- List of Executive Competencies and Behavioral Indicators

Competencies Defined

The concept of "competencies" has been defined in many ways in the business and professional literature over the past decades. The concept has been linked to any number of skills, knowledge areas, abilities, traits, motives, behaviors, and characteristics. Most managers, and even professionals in the area, are typically confused about the very idea of competencies. When the label is applied to less obvious human characteristics, such as personality traits or motives, the confusion usually deepens. Many people feel that even someone with a Ph.D. in psychology is unable to understand what is being addressed. Given this level of confusion, it is no wonder that so many business leaders are unclear about what "competencies" have to do with their mastering the strategic and operating challenges of their organization.

From the standpoint of practical management, we might best think of competencies as *consistent patterns of behavior that generate desired performance results.* Competencies can thus be seen essentially as "things," much like business processes. In this case, competencies are things that can be clearly identified, measured and deployed to achieve specific outcomes or results. In other words, competencies are observable and manageable "behavior clusters"--groupings of specific behaviors that together create a specific performance result. There is no need to confuse the picture by debating whether competencies reflect "underlying characteristics" such as traits, motives or abilities.

An Example

Let us illustrate the value of the "behavior cluster" concept of competencies by considering a competency example we will label "tenacity." Here are three behaviors that might be said to constitute the behavior cluster for this competency:

- The employee works hard, even beyond ordinary business hours, to get the job done and achieve the desired result.

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- The employee pursues work objectives even in the face of challenging obstacles and finds ways to overcome them.

- The employee keeps focusing on his or her objectives over a long period of time, even if the outcome is uncertain.

For a technical competency such as computer program development, a relevant cluster of behaviors might include:

- Writes code for program subroutines in a quick and effective manner.

- Establishes overall structure of a software program that ties together a large number of functional requirements through the efficient use of common elements.

- Develops the specifications and development plan for a computer program based on extensive interviews with users about required output and interface characteristics.

It is important to note that these competency behaviors, whether they are functional or technical, are essential to achieving cost-effective results and improving organization performance, readily observable and measurable in actual employee performance, and amenable to practical improvement and development.

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Executive Competencies vs. Other Employee Competencies

Executives share with lower level managers an emphasis on getting things done through others rather than through one's own effort alone. Executives also share with lower level employees certain competency requirements related to goal-oriented, focused, motivated achievement of work results. The key element that distinguishes executive competencies from other employee competencies is the typically broader, more complex nature of the work role.

Executive competencies, like other employee competencies, can be simply defined as *consistent patterns of behavior that generate desired performance results . . . for a specific leadership role.* It is useful to organize executive competencies into a few key clusters:

- Functional and Technical Know-How
- Thinking and Planning
- Broad Leadership
- Managing Direct Reports
- Setting Standards and Getting Results
- Managing Self

The list of executive competencies, provided below as a reference resource, is organized according to these clusters.

Guidelines for Using the Dictionary

The list of competencies and behavioral indicators provided below was derived from various research initiatives completed over the past several years with individual organizations and across several organizations at one time. The behavioral indicators provided for each competency reflect actual behavior seen in superior performers working in specific organizational situations and roles. However, these behavioral indicators are stated in general terms and would need to be adapted and made specific to the requirements of an executive search.

As you can see, there are many more competencies listed below than one would want to list in the specification for a particular executive search. We strongly recommend the use of only 6-8 of the most salient executive competencies for this purpose. The reasons for this are as follows:

- The client will quickly lose interest in this added value if the list gets longer
- Repeated research shows that more than 6-8 competencies used for the purposes of selection adds no further value for predicting performance
- A short list of competencies forces you to focus your attention on the "needed to win" areas

As stated and illustrated previously in this guide book, your selection of the 6-8 competencies that are most critical to a given executive search should be guided by "decision rules" that tie them directly to the most important challenges and role elements of the job. Restating, these decision rules take the following form:

> "If this . . . then that . . ."

In terms of information about the specific executive challenges and role, these decision rules take the form. For example,

> "If the new executive must create a new business strategy . . . then he/she must strongly demonstrate the competency of 'strategic thinking' . . ."

The key to having the right situation-specific decision rules for identifying the most salient executive competencies is your prioritization of the key elements in your summary of the "Specific Executive Challenges and Role" component of your organization assessment. Since the list of specific challenges and role aspects can be quite long, for any given executive job, it is very important to prioritize them and focus only on those you can comfortably say are "needed to win" by the successful candidate. These requirements are best determined by answers to the question:

> "What are the most important problems or challenges that must be addressed successfully by the new executive . . . the ones that have not been met in the past and, therefore, constitute the key 'reason' for this search?"

Once you have decided on the 6-8 most important competencies for this executive search, you will then want to tailor 3-4 behavioral indicators for each competency which satisfy the following:

- Relate to the basic definition of each competency
- Capture the language of the client and the industry
- Reflect specific things that need to be done in *this* situation

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To tailor the behavioral indicators in this manner, you will need to:

- Put aside the behavioral indicators provided below in the list of executive competencies, using them only as a reference point for the kinds of behaviors you will want to include
- Write your own behavioral indicators in a language that reflects specifically what needs to be done in *this* situation by *this* executive

The degree to which you can do this is the same degree to which your executive selection competencies will be perceived by the client as adding unique value to the search.

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EXECUTIVE COMPETENCIES and BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

Six Competency Clusters

I. Know-How
1. Business Understanding
2. Financial Savvy
3. Functional Know-How
4. Industry Knowledge

II. Thinking and Planning
1. Strategic Thinking
2. Conceptual Thinking
3. Analytical Thinking
4. Creativity
5. Curiosity and Information Seeking

III. Broad Leadership
1. Leadership Motivation
2. Strategic Influence
3. Organizational Diagnosis
4. Organizational Influence
5. Stakeholder Relationship Building
6. Change Leadership
7. Vision Communication
8. Persuasive Communication
9. Listening and Understanding
10. Community Leadership

IV. Managing Direct Reports
1. Team Leadership
2. Developing Others
3. Strategic Staffing
4. Delegation

V. Setting Standards and Getting Results
1. Achievement Orientation
2. Initiative/Tenacity
3. Efficiency Orientation
4. Operational Management

VI. Managing Self
1. Flexibility
2. Mature Confidence
3. Integrity
4. Decisiveness
5. Energy and Stamina

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I. FUNCTIONAL & TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW

1. Business Savvy

Understands a broad array of business functions; how they interrelate to drive growth and profit

- Understands Broadly the Causes of Business Success: Has a broad grasp of the fundamental determinants of an organization's business success
- Adapts Business Understanding to the Organization: Effectively adapts broader business understanding to improve the practices and processes of the organization
- Ensures Business Savvy of Others: Seeks solidly grounded financial and business savvy among employees of the organization
- Monitors and Manages for Financial Results: Ensures that the organization actively monitors and manages financial performance in both up and down business conditions
- Ensures a Strategic Focus on Financial Success: Makes the drivers of financial success fundamental building blocks for the organization's key goals and business strategy

2. Financial Savvy

Understands and manages the financial dynamics of the organization

- Understands key financial issues
- Prioritizes financial commitments, establishing a plan and contingencies
- Monitors financial status at all times
- Challenges the staff's financial conclusions and recommendations
- Balances new ideas against financial discipline
- Acknowledges the organization can't be all things to all people
- Holds key staff accountable for cost control
- Anticipates external issues impacting funding and financial management

3. Functional Know-How

Possesses seasoned, hands-on, successful experience managing the key business functions required for the job

- (List areas of functional know-how required--e.g., product development, distribution, retail store operations, portfolio management, etc.)

4. Industry Knowledge

Possesses seasoned, hands-on knowledge of the industry required in the job

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- (Describe key points of industry knowledge required--e.g., growth mutual fund management, women's apparel specialty retailing, life insurance, managed care, cable TV operations, etc.)

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II. THINKING AND PLANNING

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1. Strategic Thinking

Maintains a broadly-based, long-term perspective on the business

- Looks Beyond the Present Approach: Challenges current practices and ways of thinking about the business and encourages innovation
- Conceptualizes Key Trends: Discerns and conceptualizes key trends and issues among diverse, often ambiguous events within and outside the company
- Has a Clear Organizational Vision: Has a clear vision or picture of what the organization needs to become in the future
- Develops a Strategy: Effectively leads the development of a strategy for achieving key goals and an organizational vision--how to get there from here
- Re-evaluates Strategic Vision: Treats the strategic plan as an evolving process--periodically re-evaluates current business concepts and strategies

2. Conceptual Thinking

Develops and uses key concepts to distill important business issues and guide actions

- Sees and defines connections between diverse ideas, issues and events--identifies key trends and opportunities inside and outside the organization
- Discovers new ways of thinking about and approaching key business issues and challenges
- Gets to the heart of the matter--quick to grasp and distill problems and issues
- Uses advanced ideas and guiding concepts to solve practical problems

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3. Analytical Thinking

Thinks and plans logically, making sure issues are thoroughly evaluated

- Ensures that business and project plans outline a series of well-integrated steps and cost/benefit considerations to accomplish a result, even when the challenge is complex
- Probes problems and issues in depth, seeking subtle but important causes and considerations
- Systematically breaks complex problems, tasks or projects into manageable, logically related components
- Examines multiple pros and cons and carefully investigates the implications of alternative courses of action

4. Creativity

Thinks creatively and encourages innovation throughout the organization

- Sets a tone promoting creativity and innovation
- Discourages narrow-minded, parochial thinking
- Challenges existing ways or biases
- Explores positive change and accepts the risk
- Sees opportunities from perceived patterns and trends inside and outside the organization
- Imagines alternatives and sees scenarios in planning and goal setting

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5. Curiosity and Information Seeking

Constantly initiates and broadly ensures relevant information gathering

- Draws Information Extensively From Others: Actively seeks information from others and asks probing questions to uncover the root of a problem or situation
- Ensures Effective Information System: Ensures that systems and processes are developed to effectively organize and provide available business information
- Personally Investigates: Personally goes "on site" to talk to people, gather information first-hand and diagnose a problem
- Actively Explores Options: Pursues "what if" thinking with a broad range of issues, actively explores "pros" and "cons" of options
- Scans External Environment: Actively scans the external environment for relevant information and developments

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III. BROAD LEADERSHIP

1. Leadership Motivation

Consistently leads and accomplishes things primarily through others

- Demonstrates a primary, intense concern about leading and motivating others
- Clearly enjoys and is energized by the process of leading and getting things done through others
- To get things done, he/she invariably thinks about who else can contribute to or do tasks and how they can be motivated to do so
- Rarely pursues tasks or goals without a plan to influence others

2. Strategic Influence

Influences others inside and outside the organization in a planful, well informed way

- Plans and uses several coordinated steps to influence others in various situations (e.g., meets 1:1 "behind the scenes", prepares data carefully, uses experts or third parties to influence)
- Understands and constructively uses a broad network of influence and decision making relationships within the organization (e.g., alliances, rivalries)
- Effectively uses informal information gathering (e.g., phone calls, chats, walking around) to keep abreast of the business, organization and outside world
- Understands and addresses the interaction between the organization's culture and multiple players in the external world

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3. Organizational Diagnosis

Quickly and accurately understands the real culture, strengths and weaknesses of the organization

- Walks Around: Personally and regularly gets out into the organization to see and hear what is going on to get a clear, personal view of issues, problems or opportunities
- Understands Employee Morale: Accurately perceives the concerns and feelings of employees in key areas that affect their motivation and morale
- Understands Values and Culture: Understands the underlying value system and traditions deeply embedded in the organization
- Understands Organizational Performance: Accurately assesses key factors that determine organizational performance within and across organizational units with an eye toward needed changes in roles, structures, processes, etc.
- Requires Organizational Self-Assessment: Requires a continuous process of organizational self-assessment to define where a group is today versus where it needs to be in the future

4. Organizational Influence

Plans and effectively carries out a broad process to influence people across the organization toward specific values, objectives and standards

- Communicates Own Agenda to Others: Spends the time necessary to ensure that others fully understand one's intent, values and objectives--goes back to an audience repeatedly, as necessary
- Asks for Others' Support: Puts forward own ideas assertively and directly asks others for their commitment or support
- Links Own Ideas to Others' Perspective: Sells own ideas by tying them into the values, needs, aspirations and goals of others
- Involves Others Who Will Be Affected By a Decision: Solicits the involvement of other people who will be affected by a decision, initiative or program to build their sense of ownership
- Implements a Multi-step Plan to Gain Support: Thinks through, times and implements a multi-step plan for gaining support and ownership from others

5. Stakeholder Relationship Building

Champions the interests of all stakeholders, in a balanced manner--employees, shareholders, customers and the community

- Participates in Stakeholder Groups: Ensures that he or she is a key participant in groups and networks that are capable of impacting the organization's success
- Personally Promotes Stakeholder Interests: Explicitly seeks to understand and support the goals and interests of key stakeholders, while linking them to the goals of the organization

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- Resolves Conflicts Among Stakeholders: Takes effective action to reconcile conflicts and promote mutual benefits among key stakeholder groups
- Influences Stakeholders Strategically: Develops and implements a strategy to influence external stakeholder groups that may be important to the organization's success (e.g., key customers, suppliers, associations, regulators, the community)
- Ensures Effective Organizational Response to Stakeholders: Ensures that the organization understands and is responsive to the needs and concerns of key stakeholder groups

6. Change Leadership

Charts a course for broad organizational change and effectively enlists others in it

- Initiates Action to Change Status Quo: Demonstrates an unwillingness to settle for the status quo and initiates actions to improve organizational performance
- Sets a Personal Example of Change: Leads by example, demonstrating in own behavior the changes expected in how employees perform throughout the organization
- Dramatizes the Need for Change: Dramatically calls attention to a crisis to heighten awareness of a need for organizational change

- Enlists Others as Champions of Change: Effectively enlists others as champions of the organizational change agenda he or she is pursuing
- Links Together Multiple Change Initiatives: Leads multiple change initiatives in structure, systems, people, etc. and ensures their alignment with key change goals

7. Vision Communication

Dramatically and effectively communicates an overall vision of the enterprise to employees at all levels

- Makes the Vision Tangible: Translates a vision of the organization's future into practical, concrete specifics
- Vividly Communicates the Vision: Uses vivid metaphors or images to communicate where the organization must head and what it must do to realize the vision
- Ensures Employee Understanding of the Vision: Orchestrates interactive exchanges with employee audiences to ensure that they accurately understand the vision of the organization's future
- Dramatically Demonstrates the Vision: Takes dramatic, symbolic actions to inspire and energize others around a vision of the organization's future
- Consistently Links Decisions to the Vision: Consistently communicates to employees the linkage between actions or decisions and a vision of the organization's future

8. Persuasive Communication

Presents own ideas to others in a manner that achieves, clarity, buy-in and commitment

- Communicates Clearly: Articulates ideas clearly and fluently
- Simplifies Complex Issues: Simplifies and effectively communicates complex issues--talks with others, not down to them
- Adapts Message to Others: Adapts choice of language and the presentation of ideas to fit audience needs and perspective
- Effectively Speaks to Diverse Groups: Presents to groups with energy, enthusiasm and clarity
- Inspires Groups: Develops and delivers presentations to diverse groups in a manner that energizes and inspires the audience

9. Listening and Understanding

Listens to others and understands their motivation, strengths and concerns:

- Listens: Listens actively and demonstrates sensitivity to others, encouraging them to discuss concerns, interests, needs, and even difficult issues
- Creates Communication Opportunities: Proactively creates opportunities for open, two-way communication with others
- Accurately Senses Immediate Reactions: Is immediately aware of how others are reacting to own behavior or the situation, even when not openly stated

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- Develops In-Depth Insight About Others: Sees beyond surface behavior or style and understands less obvious qualities, potential or issues
- Anticipates Future Behavior: Accurately anticipates how others will react to people, situations, decisions and actions

10. Community Leadership

Effectively represents the organization to the public and develops relationships in the community

- Functions effectively as the key spokesperson for organization and its stakeholders
- Promotes a positive image for the organization within the community
- Goes on the offensive and influences the public agenda
- Participates on boards and in community groups in a leadership role
- Spends time in the community making contact with key people
- Communicates and demonstrates personal commitment to the community

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IV. MANAGING DIRECT REPORTS

1. Team Leadership

Effectively gets direct reports to work together effectively toward common goals

- Informs People: Shares information and ensures that team members are kept up-to-date on matters related to group needs, issues or programs
- Selects Complementary Team Members: Purposefully assembles a team by selecting complementary abilities and styles for more effective team performance
- Establishes Team Direction and Accountability: Establishes team accountability for a common mission, purpose and set of goals
- Resolves Team Conflicts: Intervenes, as necessary, to identify and resolve conflict among team members in a manner that reinforces teamwork values and a focus on common goals
- Consciously Builds Team Spirit and Identity: Provides recognition, fair treatment, feedback and opportunities for interaction and celebration aimed at enhancing group identity and esprit de corps

2. Developing Others

Actively develops employees toward independent responsibility and decision making

- Makes "Stretch" Assignments: Arranges specific assignments or projects to challenge direct reports and stretch their abilities
- Gives Constructive Criticism and Feedback: Challenges direct reports to critically evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses, offering objective feedback and recognizing changes achieved
- Builds Self Confidence: Consciously works to build self confidence of direct reports by giving recognition, removing unnecessary blame and encouraging a strong self-image
- Pushes Down Decision Making: Empowers direct reports by withdrawing from decision-making or implementation as early as possible--is willing to take the risk of relying on others and live with the consequences
- Coaches and Mentors: Develops a personal coaching and mentoring relationship with direct reports aimed at developing independence, serving as a problem solving resource, guide and role model as needed

3. Strategic Staffing

Selects and positions key people in his/her organization who are superior performers

- Selects Good People: Generally judges job requirements accurately and selects employees who meet them

- Is Objective and Systematic: Consistently relies on objective, systematic evidence of job/person fit when selecting employees--e.g., past performance, assessment data, in-depth interviewing
- Positions Employees Strategically: Recruits or selects people for key assignments that are aimed at initiating or accelerating organizational change
- Changes Job Roles: Redefines or creates new jobs or roles within the organization to focus employees on critical needs
- Ensures Succession Planning: Ensures the use of a strategy-focused, future-oriented succession planning system to anticipate and supply leadership talent needs

4. Delegation

Gives direct reports authority without abdicating ultimate responsibility

- Makes expectations and accountabilities clear to staff
- Gives staff independence, support and authority
- Encourages calculated risk-taking and accepts mistakes that may result
- Sets deadlines and ensures they are met
- Periodically evaluates progress toward major goals

V. Setting Standards and Getting Results

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1. Achievement Orientation

Constantly raises the bar and presses the organization toward higher level of achievement

- Establishes High Standards: Establishes high service, quality and efficiency standards
- Consistently Evaluates Costs vs. Benefits: Consistently evaluates product, process or system changes in terms of costs vs. benefits
- Tracks Performance Benchmarks: Measures and tracks key business results and processes against best competitors and assesses improvement and success in these terms
- Promotes Superior Performance: Promotes superior performance against "stretch goals"--is unwilling to settle for past or current levels of performance and works to exceed external benchmarks
- Is Entrepreneurial: Seeks innovation, new business opportunities and calculated risk-taking to improve total organization performance

2. Initiative/Tenacity

Anticipates and deals with issues proactively, decisively, and persistently

- Is proactive in anticipating and preparing for opportunities or potential problems in the future
- Takes numerous, sustained actions over time in the face of obstacles to reach key goals

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- Acts decisively to address immediate opportunities and problems

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3. Efficiency Orientation

Gets the most out of limited resources while achieving quality results

- Makes sure that monitoring processes are established to measure efficiency and keep costs in line
- Encourages the use of processes, technology and communication that will improve efficiency
- Consistently communicates the need for cost control, efficiency and productivity in staffing and work processes

4. Operational Management

Continually stays focused on business operations in order to maximize ongoing performance

- Establishes measurable goals and milestones for the organization
- Continually evaluates organizational performance against standards and objectives
- Ensures development and monitoring of appropriate systems & controls
- Ensures there is an appropriate issues management process in place
- Establishes contingency plans
- Sets time frames and priorities
- Considers operational systems impact of decisions

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VI. MANAGING SELF

1. Flexibility

Responds to change and others' ideas comfortably

- Readily adapts practices or structure to the changing needs of the organization
- Is receptive to new ideas, challenges own ideas, and is willing to change
- Recognizes the validity of others' viewpoints and alternative ways to do things
- Revises plans based on external feedback as appropriate
- Is open to "bad news"
- Tolerates chaos well and makes sense of it
- Able to yield on smaller issues in pursuit of longer term goals

2. Mature Confidence

Approaches others assertively, responsibly and supportively

- Shows Balanced Conviction: Demonstrates a balanced, realistic, rational sense of conviction about own values, ideas and goals
- Constructively Challenges Others: Assertively and constructively challenges ideas and addresses issues with others even when conflict is likely
- Gives Others Credit: Thoughtfully inhibits communication of own ideas and reactions in order to support others or give credit
- Critiques Own Behavior: Readily critiques own behavior, accepting mistakes and looking for ways to improve one's future approach
- Willingly Faces Risks and Opposition: Approaches risky challenges and powerful opposition with confidence and firm direction

3. Integrity

Demonstrates honesty and strong values through consistent action

- Communicates a clear set of core of values to his/her organization
- Is Consistently Honest: Is consistently honest and constructively candid with others
- Acts Ethically: Acts in a manner that is consistent with the law and clear ethical standards that are broadly respected within the culture
- Follows Through Reliably: Consistently follows through on personal and corporate commitments

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- Takes Personal Responsibility: Takes responsibility for own actions and the overall behavior or his/her organization
- Acts In Good Faith Toward Others: Acts in good faith--avoids taking advantage of others' mistakes or oversights

4. Decisiveness

Makes decisions effectively and maintains a firm sense of direction

- Remains focused on the most important issues and priorities
- Makes clear, rational, timely decisions and acts with conviction
- Is comfortable and decisive in exercising formal authority
- Firmly maintains an important stand on issues in the face of opposition
- Knows which decision making process is appropriate
- Is able to say no and decide when to stop something
- Demonstrates judgment about when to be flexible vs. firm

5. Energy and Stamina

Focuses a high level of energy on the business and manages stress effectively

- Works long hours as necessary
- Bounces back after reversals
- Transmits energy to others
- Persists with goals over long periods of time
- Balances work with play
- Takes time for self to renew energy
- Forges ahead creatively despite obstacles