GUIDE TO THE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

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# INDEX

1.0 PURPOSE

This guide is issued in support of the middle management competency framework for middle managers on salary levels 11 and 12 that was developed by the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). The aim is to assist managers and human resource practitioners to understand and apply the competency framework and the generic competency dictionary. The guide should assist managers and practitioners to assess the required competencies when interviewing new recruits, manage performance as well as identify training needs of existing employees. The integration of competencies in the workplace is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Integration of competencies in the workplace.
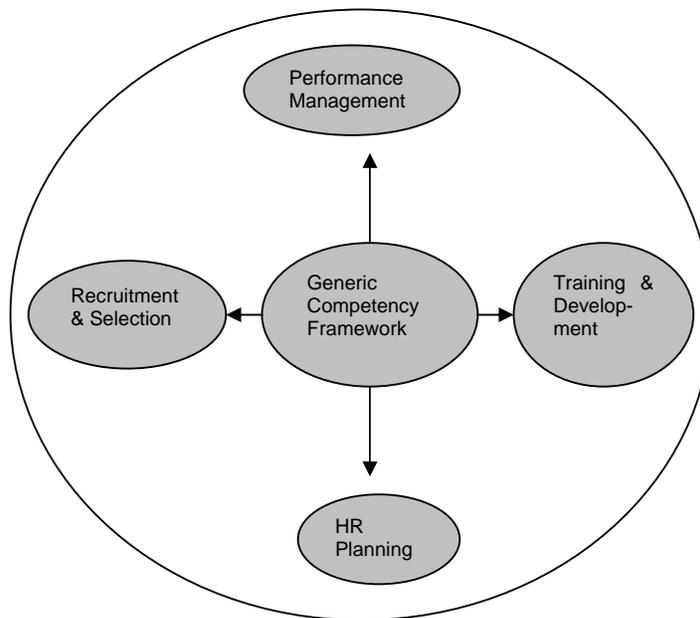
2.0 BACKGROUND

The South African Public Service has undergone major changes since the introduction of the new democratic dispensation in 1994. These changes prompted the Public Service to adopt new approaches in managing its human resources more effectively and to focus on resourcing particular occupational groups.

Competency frameworks are widely used by different organisations to help them identify the essential skills, knowledge and personal characteristics required for successful performance in a job. The Public Service has also made

some progress in this area with the introduction of a generic competency framework for senior managers and now the proposed one for middle managers.
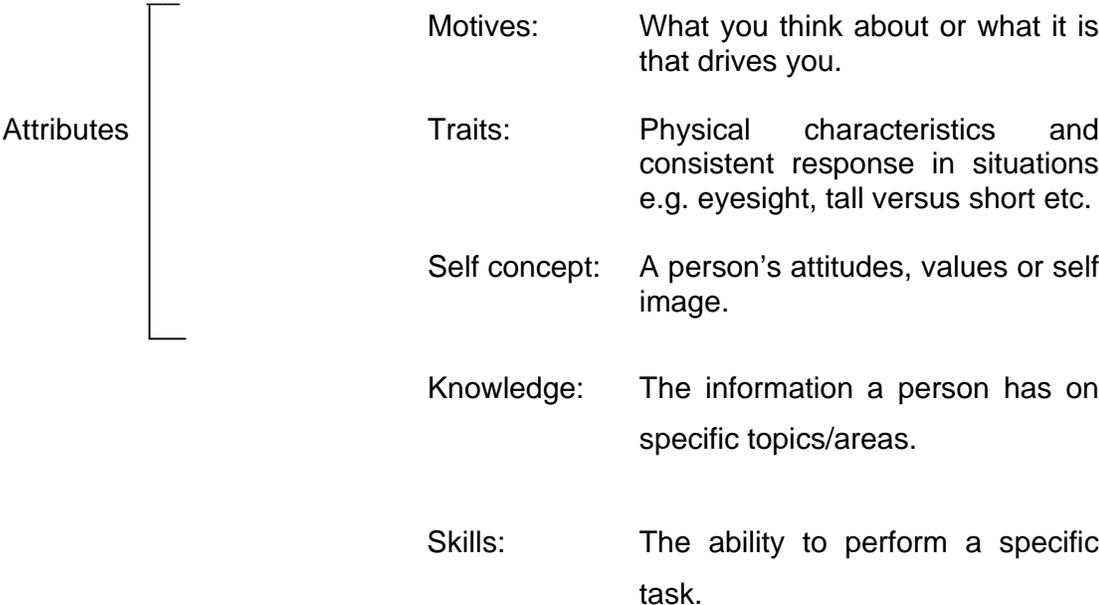
3.0 COMPETENCY PROFILING IN CONTEXT

Browning et al (1996) define competency profiling as the process of identifying the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and judgement required for effective performance in a particular occupation or profession. They contended that the competency profile of an occupation or profession should be an accurate reflection of current practice.

The Public Service Regulations (2001) define competence as the blend of knowledge, skills, behaviour and aptitude that a person can apply in the work environment, which indicates a person's ability to meet the requirements of a specific post.

Although there are a number of different definitions, the underlying characteristic of the various definitions is that competency is part of a person's personality and enables you to predict that person's behaviour in the job.

Competency characteristics can be divided into the following five categories:

Attributes	Motives:	What you think about or what it is that drives you.
	Traits:	Physical characteristics and consistent response in situations e.g. eyesight, tall versus short etc.
	Self concept:	A person's attitudes, values or self image.
	Knowledge:	The information a person has on specific topics/areas.
	Skills:	The ability to perform a specific task.

Knowledge and skill tend to be visible and can be determined fairly easily by means of interviews, practical demonstrations etc. Self-concept, traits, motives or attributes are deeper and more central to personality.

In a more complex job, competencies are more important in predicting superior performance. Furthermore it can also be argued that in higher level positions people need a certain amount of intelligence to reach these positions and what will distinguish them is motivation, interpersonal skills, etc.

4.0 RATIONALE FOR APPLYING COMPETENCY PROFILING IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Section 11(2)(b) of the Public Service Act, 1994 requires that in the making of any appointment or the filling of any post in the public service, the evaluation of persons shall be based on training, skills, competence, knowledge and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve a public service broadly representative of the South African people, including representation according to race, gender and disability.

The main purpose of the development of core competencies for managers, supervisors and employees of the Public Service is to establish a common competency framework against which human resource management activities, including training and development, can be aligned, devised and implemented. It can be argued that all public service managers, supervisors and employees, regardless of their subject areas, have a consistent series of responsibilities. Identifying and defining core, departmental and job-specific, competencies establishes a standard that can be consistently applied across the Public Service or across a given department or functional group. Corporate core competencies can be augmented by departmental and job-specific competencies that support the achievement of departmental business goals.

The notion of competencies supports selection, recruitment and other areas of human resources management. Competency profiles synthesize knowledge, skills, attributes and values and express performance requirements in behavioural terms. As a tool, they help an employee and manager to focus on and clarify individual learning needs and develop appropriate approaches for

meeting them, such as self-study, special assignments, coaching and formal courses. The competency profiles provide a standard that can be used to work toward continuous improvement. Competencies should be reviewed on a regular basis, to ensure that they remain relevant. Competencies could gainfully be utilised as follows:

- Managers can use competencies for human resource planning and management including recruitment and selection, performance management, training and development as well as succession planning.

- Employees could use competencies to assist them in planning and managing their own careers, as well as providing guidance for self-assessment and development.

- Educators or trainers could use competencies to determine learning outcomes, develop curricula and measure certification in a given subject programme.

The review of competency profiles helps managers and employees to continually re-assess the skills and knowledge needed for effective performance. They are building blocks which must be assembled and used in a variety of combinations and in a variety of circumstances to determine the skill sets needed within a given function or field of expertise.

Therefore, competency profiles could be used at work to:
- establish a common competency framework to which human resource management activities, including training and development can be aligned;
- identify organisational, job family and job specific competencies with a view to establishing a standard that can be applied consistently across the Public Service;
- assist a manager and employee to focus on, and clarify individual training needs; and
- provide a standard that can be used to work towards continuous improvement.

5.0 THE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

A set of middle management competencies has been identified for salary levels 11 and 12. The Middle Management Competency Dictionary comprises two separate sub-dictionaries, namely:

- middle management feeder competencies; and
- middle management generic competencies

The competencies are generic in nature and apply to all occupations on salary levels 11 and 12, which contain management/supervisory type tasks. Although a large number of the occupations on salary levels 11 and 12 comprise positions of "technical specialist", they also have supervisory and managerial tasks inherent to their job content.

The Middle Management Competency Dictionary caters for those occupations for which the primary focus is that of management and those positions with partial management activities as part of their job content. It presents generic managerial competencies that are common to all the occupations and professions on salary levels 11 and 12.

The feeder competencies are those competencies that all employees entering the middle management ranks must possess or be able to demonstrate. If several of these are at the advanced level before entry into the middle management ranks, the performance on the generic competencies will be greatly enhanced. Thus, feeder competencies form the foundation steps required to successfully display the generic competencies. The generic competencies are those competencies that are required by middle managers in most of their duties and activities throughout the Public Service. They do not include the specific occupation or professional competencies.

5.1 BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE MMCF

The Middle Management Competency Framework (MMCF) consists of:

- A competency dictionary, in which the competencies are described according to a specific competency model.
- A classification of competencies according to types. This classification provides for feeder and generic competencies.

- Competencies for the primary roles of middle management duties associated with salary levels 11 and 12.
- A proficiency scale for each competency classified into the following three main types:
  - Basic (Foundation)
  - Competent (Accomplished)
  - Advanced (Mastery)

5.2 THE COMPETENCY DICTIONARY

The generic and feeder competencies are defined in the following format:

- **Competency title:** A short description used for the competency, such as, Problem Solving, Communication, Diversity Management, etc.
- **Competency definition:** Conveys the exact meaning of the competency as indicated by the definition. Several different competency systems may have the same competency title. However, the exact meaning of the competency is usually unique to each organisation.
- **Keywords:** Identify the scope and focus of the competency in a type of short hand. These keywords can also be thought of as sub-competencies or training focus areas.
- **Behavioural indicators:** What the person shows when s/he displays the competency. It is a behaviour, action or psychomotor response that an observer can see or expect to see. The major objective of having behavioural indicators is that they make the competency come "alive" in the context of how the job is performed.
- **Proficiency levels:** Describe the outputs and outcomes produced according to a proficiency scale that provides for behaviours on the job in terms of a range of designated proficiency indicators, such as, quality, speed, cost and appearance, etc. all within certain work and organisational constraints (e.g. equipment resource, job aids). The following three types of proficiency have been established:
  - *Basic*

    The proficiency level required to successfully perform at the level of "new entrant" or a person who can only handle the competency in its "basic format" and requires regular supervision and direction. The

purpose of training and development is to move the proficiency level from that of "basic" to at least "competent" for all middle managers.

- *Competent*

This proficiency level indicates that the person can perform the competency at the minimum required level, i.e. be able to display the competency at the required level, without supervision. This is the standard that any performance improvement programme and training or coaching effort seeks to achieve.

- *Advanced*

This proficiency level indicates that the person has fully mastered the competency, works without supervision, is capable of instructing others on the competency and is capable of solving or applying the competency to a wide range of new or different situations.

5.3 DISPLAYING PROFICIENCY

In most cases when evaluating a proficiency level either the viewpoint of the job incumbent via a "Self Rating Profile" or that of the immediate superior via a "Management Rating" is relied on. The MMCF, however, requires a competency to be **displayed,** thus, the proficiency level achieved is based on **demonstrated** capabilities and job competence.

Furthermore, a single achievement of the competency at the requisite level is not always sufficient, since the following criteria must also be met:

- Proficiency levels in competencies must be demonstrated.
- Progression of proficiencies and competencies is based on competencies that have been successfully demonstrated, even if a person or that person's superior feels that the person possesses the capability to achieve a proficiency level in that competency. If it has not been successfully demonstrated, then the person or the superior cannot claim to possess proficiency in that competency.
- The proficiency in a competency must have a quality of **sustainability** linked to it.
- Prior exposure to the competency can be used to claim proficiency at a specific level of the competency, but evidence needs to be produced to support this claim. Nevertheless, what is important is an evaluation

of the current level of proficiency. Competency in one organisation is not always directly transferable to another organisation or department as the competency might have been defined differently by the two organisations.

6.0 ROLES AND ASSOCIATED COMPETENCIES

Three primary middle management roles were identified. All comprise various mixes of technical and managerial work content and competencies. Similarly, the generic middle management competencies identified apply to these roles in varying degrees, due to unique requirements of certain posts. The following primary middle management role profiles were identified:

- "Professional/Production specialist", with supervisory management duties;
- Managers of production units; and
- Managers of regional offices or institutes.

7.0 IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Dictionaries by themselves are not human resource systems. While they are fundamental to the development of competence on the job and the improvement of skill levels and productivity, they have to be adapted and integrated into the current human resource system. Successful implementation of competence based human resource systems hinges on full co-operation between the various role-players. To succeed with the implementation, human resource components would need full support from management.

The human resource components would need to translate the model into usable tools and formats for application in departmental human resource systems and practices. Behavioural examples should be aligned to the unique requirements of specific jobs. The main areas of competency translation activities that should be focussed on are discussed in the paragraphs below.

7.1 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The most immediate benefit to be gained from the MMCF Dictionary is in the area of training. With very little additional work, current-training courses could be converted to focus on selective competencies using most of the current training material available. In the meanwhile, a

training programme could be developed to match all the competencies, both feeder and generic competencies identified for the middle managers.

The following competencies could be prioritised for immediate attention:

- Organisational Communication Effectiveness
- Problem Analysis
- Self-Management
- Budgeting and Financial Management
- Customer Focus and Responsiveness
- Developing Others
- Planning and Organising
- Problem Solving and Decision-Making
- Project Management
- Team Leadership

By adapting the current training courses offered to focus on techniques and skills that are directly applicable to the behavioural indicators provided in the competency dictionary for these competencies, an immediate link to the MMCF Dictionary can be achieved.

Competence units, aligned to the behavioural indicators of each competency, also need to be developed to ensure that training and any competency or proficiency tests used in training to measure what skill levels have been developed are direct expressions of the specific elements of each middle management competency. Proficiency Tests/Criterion Tests can also be developed for each unit of competence in order to measure the proficiency level obtained on each competency by participants.

7.2   SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

Guided interview blanks (i.e. interview guides), based upon targeted selection principles, can be developed to assist selectors and interviewers with the appropriate questions to ask during the interview in order to identify the particular behaviours required and associated with each competency.   Interviewing as a selection device is widely used in the

Public Service, and any efforts aimed at improving this process could have a significant impact.

7.3 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The proficiency levels identified in the dictionary are of a generic nature and do not refer to any specific performance standards for each position. These proficiency levels are also not aligned to annual work plans. The behavioural indicators appearing in the competency dictionary describing each competency can serve in the intermediate stage as the performance standard for each position. These will have to be modified in the longer term to turn them into specific performance standards and align them with the departmental performance management and development system.

7.4 COMPETENCY BASED HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING

Human resource planning is a process of reviewing human resource requirements to ensure that the required number of employees with the required skills is available when they are needed. A competency model provides answers on what skills, knowledge and characteristics are required to do the job, as well as to what behaviours have the most direct impact on performance and success in the job. The generic competencies required from middle managers have been defined in the MMCF. Furthermore, the feeder competencies provide information on the competencies that should be developed before entering middle management. Therefore, the MMCF can also contribute towards implementing competency-based succession planning in a department. Typically the following four elements are required to implement a competency-based succession planning system:

- **Competency models for key jobs and roles:** They may be used as a basis to assess and identify high potential employees. They can also be used to help ensure that you are hiring people who have the potential to fill more senior positions in the future.
- **Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of a candidate:** A succession planning system should communicate to a candidate what he or she must do to effectively contribute to the goals of the

organisation. It should provide information on career possibilities and development requirements. In the MMCF the link between the feeder, generic and SMS competencies has been established and it can be used as a basis for the development of employees.

- **Developing the competencies:** Once the development gaps and the career prospects of an employee have been identified, the relevant competencies can be developed and opportunities should be provided to enable the candidate to gain the experience and knowledge required to fill more senior roles.

- **Alignment with all HRM systems:** Succession planning is heavily dependent on the quality of input from other HRM systems. Succession planning cannot succeed unless the selection, training and development and performance appraisal systems all work effectively. The use of competency models across all HRM systems will lay the foundation to succeed with competency based human resource management.

8.0 IMPLEMENTING COMPETENCY BASED SELECTION AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Many organisations have found it easier to use competency models for recruitment and selection rather than applying them for appraisal and succession planning. To implement a competency-based selection system, based on the MMCF, a department will have to develop-

- a set of interview questions based on the competencies;
- interviewers to assess whether candidates have the required competencies; and
- forms to record the assessment results in a uniform manner.

8.1 INTERVIEWING

Once the competencies for effective performance have been identified, an interviewer must determine whether a candidate possesses them or is able to develop them. Questions must be designed to encourage candidates to talk about their current and past experiences. It is quite possible that a single question may address several competencies

simultaneously. By using well-constructed questions, it is also possible to learn about personal characteristics and aptitudes.

Generally an interview aims to-

- obtain enough information about the candidate in a professional and fair manner to determine whether s/he is suitable for employment in the relevant position; and
- provide sufficient information to the candidate about the department to enable the candidate to decide whether or not to accept the post, if offered.

Various employers use behavioural questions during interviews to establish how a candidate would think and act in certain situations and whether the candidate would demonstrate the skills and qualities he/she is interested in. Behavioural questions usually begin with a statement like "Tell us about…" or "Describe a situation where…". In answering these questions it is expected from the candidates to address the following:

- **Situation:** When and where was it required;
- **Task:** What exactly is it that was required from the candidate;
- **Action:** What exactly was done and what was the sequence in which it was done; and
- **Results:** What the final result was.

The following approach can be considered when conducting the interview:

- Start with questions relating to specific circumstances of the position such as willingness to travel, etc.
- Ask questions relating to the knowledge requirements of the position.
- Then ask questions relating to the managerial competencies defined in the generic dictionary.
- Avoid asking closed questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no". Begin the questions with words such as "did", "are", and "will".
- Do not ask leading questions.
- Avoid asking theoretical type questions which will lead to text book type of answers.

- Ask open-ended competency type questions. For example, describe a situation in your current position where you had to take on a leadership role and indicate how it differed from your management role.

In preparing for the interview, the job description should be examined and a set of competency based interview questions should be prepared which are directly linked to the requirements of the position. (See Annex A for sample questions based on the generic competencies.) During the interview the interviewer must probe for specifics and interpret the responses in terms of the competencies. The following predictive principles can assist the interviewer to assess whether the candidate has the competency or can develop it:

- Past behaviour predicts future behaviour, i.e. if a competency has been used it is likely that it will be used again.
- People are consistent and if they use a competency in one situation they will probably also use it in another.
- It is easier to predict failure than success. Here it should also be noted that failure could be caused by deficiency in a single competency.

Therefore, interviewers should be on the lookout for deficiencies and not just competencies that fit the job. They should not only focus on the factors that will contribute towards success, but they should also determine which factors may hinder the candidate's success.

8.2 COMPETENCY BASED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Many appraisal systems emphasise measuring what has been accomplished and very little attention is given to how it was achieved. Competency based appraisal provides specific behaviour examples against which performance can be evaluated. Therefore, it provides for the opportunity to measure both what was achieved and how it was achieved. Behaviour examples can either be expressed by means of definitions of competencies that include observable characteristics or by providing behaviour examples that illustrate a range of effectiveness in demonstrating the competencies.

In the process of integrating competencies with a performance management system, firstly the job purpose and main objectives need to be confirmed. Following from here, the competencies required to ensure successful accomplishment of those objectives can be identified. Once this has been identified the expected standard of performance can be linked to the required competencies. Therefore, the performance standard provides a benchmark against which work performance can be evaluated. **The performance standard defines how well a function or a task must be performed to meet the expected requirements.** During the formulation of the standards, the supervisor and employee should discuss and describe those **behaviours and results** that will be the minimum acceptable performance by utilising the behavioural indicators as contained in the MMCF. On completion of the performance standards it should then be agreed that it will be expected from the employee to display those behaviours during the assessment cycle and that it will form part of the next performance assessment. In the table below it is illustrated how some of the MMCF competencies can be linked to project management. It should be noted that it merely serves as an example and it does not provide a complete list of competencies associated with project management.

Table 1: Linking competencies and performance standards

Performance Standard	Associated competencies	Typical Behaviours
Initiate project **X** by not later than 1 April 2004 and manage the project in accordance with departmental guidelines, whilst ensuring completion of all deliverables within budget and obtaining sign-off by the project steering committee not	• Impact & influence	• Render persuasive arguments to gain support from others. • Presents himself/herself in a manner that encourages others to listen. • Is confident in own beliefs and opinions.

Performance Standard	Associated competencies	Typical Behaviours
later than 31 November 2004.	• Developing others	• Identifies and effectively communicates work and performance expectations to employees. • Assesses performance and determines appropriate development for the individual. • Delegates authority and responsibility appropriately.
	• Project management	• Defines the scope and objectives of the project. • Plans the project. • Manages a project team. • Measures progress and monitors performance and results. • Manages the financial performance of the project. • Manages and effects contractual changes and re-negotiates project terms of

Performance Standard	Associated competencies	Typical Behaviours
		reference in a legally appropriate form. • Manages the risks identified and incorporates specific activities to overcome or reduce risks.

8.3 COMPETENCY BASED TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The training of public service employees should contribute towards establishing an efficient and representative public service. Therefore, training should support work performance and career development. Training should be driven by needs and link strategically to broader human resource management practices and programmes. When managers procure training services, they should ensure that the courses would indeed address the identified skills needs of their employees/department. This means that managers should study the content of the proposed course in order to verify the relevance of the topics covered. The course outline should be compared to the competency framework. Managers must verify that there are clear and direct links between the promised outcomes of the course and the behavioural indicators of the competencies as defined in the MMCF. The MMCF can also be used to guide training and development of supervisors on lower levels as the feeder competencies provide information on the competencies that should be developed before entering middle management.

9.0 CONCLUSION

Since it is generally easier to use competency models for recruitment and selection rather than applying them to appraisal and succession planning, departments are advised to, as a first step, build the necessary capacity to utilise the framework during recruitment and selection. The next step to consider can be to align performance management and development of middle managers and other supervisors to the MMCF and to ensure that training provided to

middle managers and other supervisors contributes meaningfully towards developing both the feeder and the generic competencies as defined in the MMCF.

GENERIC COMPETENCY	INTERVIEWING QUESTION
Applied strategic thinking This competency requires the conversion of strategic imperatives and policies into service delivery programmes.	• Describe how you identified a service or product based on a strategic plan of your work-unit or organisation. • Explain how you determined the resources required and how you developed an appropriate work plan.
Applying technology This competency requires choosing and utilising appropriate technologies in the workplace to contribute towards achieving the goals and objectives.	• Describe how you had to evaluate technological innovations for their application in the workplace. • Describe how you integrated technology and information systems with workplace activities to resolve problems.
Budgeting and financial management This competency requires the planning and managing of the work-unit's budget to achieve the unit's objectives effectively and efficiently.	• Explain how you developed a budget and how you managed it during the financial year/duration of the project.
Communication and information management This competency requires the collection, analysis and translation of data and information in order to provide and communicate information for decision-making, reporting, storing and planning.	• Describe how you sourced data and evaluated it for effectiveness. • Describe how you installed and/or maintained document management, storage and retrieval systems.
Continuous improvement This competency aims at improving the quality and cost efficiency of services and products delivered.	• Describe a situation where you recommended improvements or redesign processes. • Explain how you identified improvement needs. • Describe how you developed an implementation strategy/plan and implemented it/obtained approval for implementation.

GENERIC COMPETENCY	INTERVIEWING QUESTION
<u>Customer focus and responsiveness</u> This competency requires achieving excellence in delivering the planned customer service outcomes and to ensure the highest level of customer care and satisfaction.	• Describe a situation where you identified and implemented changes in the workplace to improve service delivery. • Explain how you developed an improvement process for reviewing products and services.
<u>Developing others</u> This competency requires to develop and coach those reporting to you and to improve their skills, knowledge and performance levels.	• Describe a situation where you had to identify performance-related problems with employees. • Explain how you addressed the performance- related problem.
<u>Diversity management</u> This competency requires adaptability to diverse cultures, values, groups, etc. to contribute towards transformation in the workplace.	• Describe how you provided opportunities and equal access to development opportunities to employees reporting to you. • Describe how you contributed towards compliance with employment equity and affirmative action targets.
<u>Impact and influence</u> This competency requires making an impact, persuading and influencing others to achieve a specific objective or result.	• Describe a situation where you had to resolve conflict between yourself and another party or between two other parties.

GENERIC COMPETENCY	INTERVIEWING QUESTION
Networking and building bonds This competency requires developing, building and maintaining a network of professional relations to keep abreast of developments.	• Describe the functioning of a network of colleagues that you have good working relationships with and how information is shared between the group.
Planning and organising This competency requires planning and organising of work, goal setting, developing work-plans, etc. to achieve the required results/outputs.	• Describe how you manage your own work-plan to ensure that you have achieved the required results/outputs at the end of the financial year/performance cycle.
Problem solving and decision making This competency requires the solving of problems by analysing situations, choosing courses of action and implementing them to overcome problems and constraints.	• Describe a problem that you encountered in the work environment and explain how you managed to overcome the constraints it was causing.
Project management This competency requires the management of projects from its inception to completion within time, cost and the required quality.	• Describe how you initiated and managed a project in the work place.
Team leadership This competency requires the building of productive and cohesive work and project teams to achieve the required outputs.	• Describe how you ensured that the team that you were leading in the work place worked together