



**the dpsa**

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Department:  
Public Service and Administration  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**GUIDELINE ON IMPLEMENTING THE COMPETENCY  
FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RESOURCE  
PRACTITIONERS**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The **dpsa** undertook a study to identify interventions to improve the HRM function in the Public Service. The study focused on areas such as the roles of HR components and the competencies required to fulfil those roles. The competency framework was subsequently designed with the intention to support interventions to improve the HRM function in the Public Service.

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. Chapter 1, Part III.I.4 of the Public Service Regulations, 2001 stipulates that the Minister for Public Service and Administration may provide advice on:

- the possible job content;
- the necessary and desirable competencies for the job;
- indicators of those competencies; and
- desirable characteristics for employment.

### 1.2 Purpose with the guide

This guide is issued in support of the competency framework for human resource management and development which was made available to departments per the DPSA circular 14/1/1P dated 6 August 2008.

The purpose of the guide is to-

- assist with understanding the roles and responsibilities of HR practitioners in repositioning the HR function to render support on a strategic level and to ensure that HR is assisting departments to achieve their strategic goals
- serve as a practical tool to support HR practitioners and managers to effectively utilise the competency framework in accordance to their needs and circumstances; and
- provide an instrument that will enable HR practitioners and managers to integrate the competency framework with HRM&D practices
- contextualize how the competency framework can be used to complement and improve some of the established HRM&D practices such as, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, etc.

The intention is that the guide should be as practical and user friendly as possible. As the use of competency frameworks evolves, the guide will be updated and improved on a continuous basis.

The competency framework for human resource management and development does not exist in isolation and must at all times be used in conjunction with the leadership and management competency framework.

## **2. OVERVIEW OF THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR HRM & D**

The competency framework consists of two main groups of competencies, namely the behavioural competencies and the functional competencies. These competencies are described in more detail in the competency dictionary that consists of two parts. The first part deals with the behavioural competencies reflecting the desired attributes and the second part consists of the technical competencies that provide for different levels of complexity described in terms of proficiency levels.

### **2.1 The competency dictionary:**

#### **2.1.1 PART 1: Behavioural competencies, which consist of:**

- 21 competencies classified into two categories of emotional competencies and professional conduct
- each competency has a title and definition
- the competencies are further defined in terms of the desired attributes which describes the qualities of character required to be an effective and successful performer in the job.

#### **2.1.2 PART 2: Functional competencies, which consist of:**

- 36 competencies classified into five HR functional areas
  - HR Organizational Strategy and Planning
  - HR Practices and Administration
  - HR utilization and Capacity development
  - Employee Health and Wellness
  - Employee Relations and People Management
- each competency has a title and definition

- each competency is described in terms of the proficiency levels and has a collection of related behavioural indicators. It is not possible to provide examples of all behaviours that could be observed within a competency. The behaviours that are included generally indicate the type of behaviour that is expected to be observed, hence, behavioural indicators.

## **2.2 Definition Of Competencies**

Competencies are a mixture of skills, knowledge and attributes displayed in the behaviour or actions that individuals demonstrate when undertaking job relevant tasks effectively within a given organisational context.

The two main themes in the definition are-

- Descriptions of work tasks, ie, what an individual has to do in a job
- Descriptors of behaviour, ie, how an individual does their job

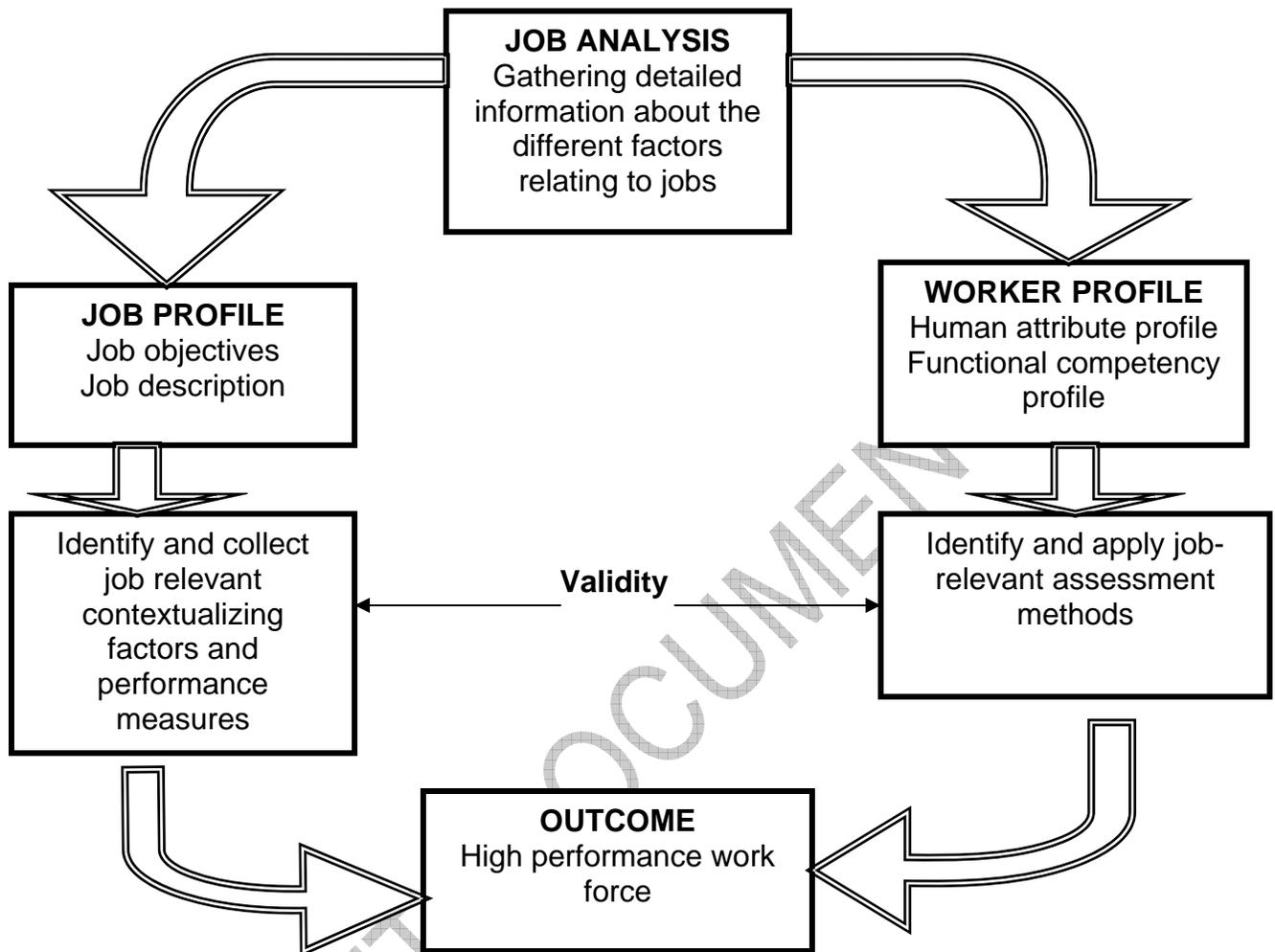
An ability based on work tasks is usually referred to as a '**competence**' (what individuals have to achieve) whilst an ability based on behaviour is usually referred to as a '**competency**' (how individuals have to achieve). The focus of competences is on the job/ role and competencies focus on the person.

In practice, a mixture of tasks, job outputs and behaviours are included as descriptors of competencies. The competencies in the competency framework for HRM&D constitute a blend of tasks, outputs and behaviours.

## **3. INTEGRATING COMPETENCIES WITH HRM&D PRACTICES**

### **3.1 The linkages between Job analysis, Job profile and worker profile**

It is important to recognize the close linkages that competency frameworks have with other processes in the workplace to accurately design and define the job requirements. In this regard the integration between job analyses and the development of a job and worker profiles is summarized in diagram 1 below.



## Job Analysis

Many decisions in the human resources field rely on information about jobs. Job analysis is a systematic process for collecting and analyzing this information.

A thorough job analysis enables the documenting of the tasks that are performed on the job, the situation in which the job is performed and the human attributes needed to perform the job. Information about jobs can be used to develop a job profile (job description, job objectives) and worker profile (competencies).

In practice this information can assist in improving the screening of applicants for a job, we need to know what attributes (knowledge, abilities, experience, etc) they should possess in order to perform the job tasks effectively and within the established organisational climate.

In conducting job analysis, the following should be considered:

- All of the duties and responsibilities of the position
- The scope and level of the job
- The context in which these are to be performed
- The amount of responsibility, authority and accountability required to perform the job
- The major and minor activities

## **Job Description**

Chapter 1, Part III.1.1 of the Public Service Regulations stipulates that job descriptions should be based on the main objectives of the jobs, indicate the inherent requirements of the job and reflect an appropriate emphasis on service delivery.

A job description is a clear, concise depiction of a job's responsibilities and inherent requirements. It is based on the findings of job analysis. A well constructed job description can be used to support most HR functions, e.g, job evaluation, performance evaluations, recruitment, selection, work plans, training and development. It encourages and fosters a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the post as it provides the link between expected outputs and competencies required to perform successfully.

The following components should be considered when developing a competency based job profile:

### **Job purpose (reason why the post was created)-**

Clarify the overall purpose of the job. This is a brief statement of the contribution that the job makes to the department.

Example of a job purpose:

*Job; Deputy Director: Employment Relations*

*To manage employment relations processes in the department.*

### **Key activities-**

Having identified the job purpose, the next step is to identify the key activities that must be performed effectively in order that the job purpose can be achieved.

Example of key activities:

*Job; Deputy Director: Employment Relations*

- *Develop, implement and maintain employment relations policies, guidelines and procedure manuals*
- *Provide employment relations advisory and support services*
- *Manage collective bargaining processes*
- *Facilitate grievances and disciplinary hearings and advise on correct and due processes to be followed*
- *Provide and facilitate training and development interventions*
- *Manage resources (e.g, human and financial)*
- *Compile reports and submissions to management*

### **Competency weightings-**

Key activities are then used to produce weightings for the importance of competencies for the role. Each competency has three proficiency levels and all levels have associated behavioural statements describing how that particular level is distinct from other levels within that competency. Therefore, the standards of competence differ in the context of the three levels within a particular job category.

The proficiency levels are not linked in a one to one relationship to job levels. For example, proficiency level one should not be regarded as to be applicable to the role of HR practitioner and proficiency level two to that of HR specialist. Such an approach will be counter productive for two reasons. Firstly, although there is usually some connection between proficiency levels and seniority of a job, it is not always so. For example, a senior HR position may not require the job holder to have the highest level of proficiency for skills development facilitation competency, whereas a skills development facilitator who occupies a specialist role may.

The second way in which linking proficiency levels so directly with job levels is counter productive is that a lot of time can be spent trying to distinguish the different behavioural statements for each job level, whilst in reality, some behaviours actually overlap. The proposed approach is to link the proficiency levels with the key activities of a position.

The following type of grid can be used to indicate how critical each proficiency level is for each key activity. The level of proficiency identified on the rating scale is likely to be the level required for the profile. The same weighting process should be done using the leadership and management competency framework.

Table 1: Example of competency weightings:

*Job; Deputy Director: Employment Relations*

<b>Key activities</b>	<b>Technical competencies and proficiency levels</b>											
	1. Managing negotiations			2. Managing consultations			3. Managing disputes			4. Managing discipline		
	Prof level 1	Prof level 2	Prof level 3	Prof level 1	Prof level 2	Prof level 3	Prof level 1	Prof level 2	Prof level 3	Prof level 1	Prof level 2	Prof level 3
1. Develop, implement and maintain employment relations policies, guidelines and procedure manuals								x			x	
2. Manage collective bargaining processes			x			x						
3. Facilitate grievances and disciplinary hearings and advise on correct and due processes to be followed								x			x	
4. Provide and facilitate training and development interventions								x			x	

The table below provides an example of how to integrate the HR competencies into a competency based role profile for the Deputy Director. It will provide for identifying the competencies required, including the behaviour required in terms of the proficiency level. The leadership and managerial competencies can also be addressed in a similar way.

Table 2: Integrating the HR competencies into a competency based profile

<b>Post</b>	<b>Key objectives</b>	<b>Competency profile</b>	<b>Other requirements</b>
Deputy Director: Employment Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To develop, implement and maintain employment relations policies, guidelines and procedure manuals</li> <li>▪ To provide employment relations advisory and support services</li> <li>▪ To manage collective bargaining processes</li> <li>▪ To facilitate grievances and disciplinary hearings and advise on correct and due processes to be followed</li> <li>▪ To provide and facilitate training and development interventions</li> <li>▪ To manage resources (e.g, human and financial)</li> <li>▪ To compile reports and submissions to management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Managing negotiations:</b> Ability to manage the development of labour relations strategy and plans that underpin the negotiation approaches.</li> <li>Ability to manage the representation of the department in sectoral bargaining processes and leads the corresponding mandating processes.</li> <li>▪ <b>Managing consultations:</b> Facilitates the creation of sound employer-employee relations.</li> <li>Ability to manage and oversee effective and efficient implementation and compliance with labour laws, collective agreements and international labour conventions.</li> <li>Ability to manage the development of employee relations strategy and plans that underpin the consultation approaches.</li> <li>▪ <b>Managing grievances/</b></li> </ul>	<p>An appropriate qualification at NQF level 6 in either Human Resource Management, Organisational Development or labour relations</p> <p>Knowledge of the public service regulatory framework</p>

		<p><b>disputes:</b></p> <p><i>Ability to empower line managers to understand their roles and responsibilities as well as the employee relations strategies.</i></p> <p><i>Ability to provide technical support to line managers on the handling of grievance procedures</i></p> <p><i>Ability to monitor the utilization of the grievance procedures, and to advice on possible solutions to resolve grievances.</i></p> <p><i>Ability to investigate grievances and act as a presiding officer of an appeal panel.</i></p> <p>▪ <b>Managing discipline</b></p> <p><i>Ability to facilitate the administration of discipline in the department.</i></p> <p><i>Assist during disciplinary investigations.</i></p>	
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### 3.2 Recruitment and selection

Generally the recruitment and selection process can be divided into six distinct phases, which includes; job evaluation, advertising, registering applications, screening, short listing and final selection of the most successful candidate(s). Defining and selecting the right competencies during these different phases is critical to ensure improvement in levels of service delivery. To integrate the competency framework with these phases the following should be considered:

a) Job evaluation

To ensure accurate recruitment and selection practices, the following issues pertaining to the implementation of job evaluation should be considered.

- ensuring that the jobs are clearly defined in a job description
- job descriptions must be accurate and updated
- job evaluators need to gain a thorough understanding of the job in terms of the key responsibility areas, inherent job requirements and the job outputs
- the relative demands of a job (not the amount of work allocated to a post), the complexity, level of responsibility, level of decision making and competencies required to carry out the job effectively.

b) Advertising

The Public Service Regulations require that a job advertisement clearly sets out the inherent requirements of the job, which have to be met by applicants (competencies, experience and relevant qualifications). This will assist with candidates understanding exactly what the job requirements are and will also provide a set of clearly defined selection criteria up front. Further to this, it may also assist in reducing the number of non-qualifying applications and ultimately contributes to better outcomes in terms of recruitment and selection.

Utilising the competency framework will also assist in defining the inherent requirements of a job without unfairly discriminating against any group of people on the basis of subjective criteria such as race, gender, disability, etc as required in terms of section 6 (1) of the Employment Equity Act, 1998 and Chapter 1, Part VII.C.1 of the Public Service Regulations, 2001.

Defining the inherent requirements of the job rigidly in the form of specific educational qualifications or years of experience may prejudice some candidates. The result is often that potentially suitable candidates, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds are discouraged or excluded from applying. Such candidates might not possess the specific academic qualifications or have the required years of experience, but could have acquired the required competencies through practical work experience. The competency framework can also be used with success in justifiable cases where it is not necessary to unduly emphasize academic requirements but to be very specific in terms of behavioural requirements. This is in line with what is contemplated in Chapter 5 of the White Paper on HRM in the Public Service as well as Chapter 1, Part VII C.1 and C.2 of the Public Service Regulations, 2001.

Example of an advertisement:

*Deputy Director: Employment relations*

*Key responsibilities:*

- *Develop, implement and maintain employment relations policies, guidelines and procedure manuals*
- *Provide employment relations advisory and support services*
- *Manage collective bargaining processes*
- *Facilitate grievances and disciplinary hearings and advise on correct and due processes to be followed*
- *Provide and facilitate training and development interventions*
- *Manage resources (e.g, human and financial)*
- *Compile reports and submissions to management*

*Requirements:*

- *An appropriate qualification at NQF level 6 in either Human Resource Management, Organisational Development or labour relations*
- *Knowledge of the public service regulatory framework*
- *Ability to monitor and provide technical support on the handling of grievance and disciplinary procedures*
- *Knowledge of collective bargaining processes and methodologies*
- *Ability to manage projects*
- *Ability to manage relationships*
- *Sound self awareness, management and ability to manage others*
- *Good communication skills (verbal and written)*
- *Display a high level of ethical conduct*

c) Screening and Shortlisting

The screening process seeks to identify those applicants that meet the basic entry-level requirements contained in the advertisement and as contemplated in section 11 of the Public Service Act, 1994 as amended. The suitability of applicants then needs to be assessed against the requirements in the advertisement and the behavioural requirements for the particular role as reflected in the HR competency framework by analyzing the knowledge, skills and experience of the candidates against the HR competencies.

d) Final selection

The final selection phase involves identifying the most suitable candidate(s) from amongst the pool of short-listed candidates.

Effective selection requires skilled people to assess applicants, using relevant assessment criteria and techniques before taking decisions about the suitability of applicants for a particular vacancy. Competencies alone are not sufficient to ensure an effective selection process, but they can contribute towards improving the credibility of the selection process.

### Selection methods

Various methods are used to determine the most suitable candidate to be appointed. Interviews are the most common method used in the Public Service, despite the low level of reliability. Considering that the behavioural event type interview has a higher predictive reliability than the normal interview it follows that its application can improve the quality of recruitment without significant financial implications. In this regard the competency framework already provides information on the desired behaviours to be displayed in the work environment and what remains is to structure the interview and practical exercises accordingly. The table below provides a synopsis of how the competency framework can be utilised to enhance the selection process:

Table 3: A synopsis of how the competency framework can be utilised to enhance the selection process:

Type of Assessment	Additional Information
<b>Reference checking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When using references, it may be beneficial to provide referees with a questionnaire which requires responses linked to key competencies,</li> <li>▪ A reference check may provide information about previous experience, perceptions of others</li> </ul>
<b>CVs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The CV should provide evidence of the candidates acquired and applied competencies,</li> <li>▪ Previous experience, qualifications, personal circumstances, accomplishments</li> </ul>
<b>Interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A structured interview that probes past behaviours is most useful when using a competency based approach,</li> <li>▪ Interview that will seek responses to questions about previous experience and job knowledge,</li> </ul>

<p><b>Simulations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A series of work-related exercises will provide the most accurate assessment of an applicant's competency suitability (e.g, presentations, case studies can be used as assessment methods)</li> <li>▪ Ideally, simulations should be developed based on the job for which individuals are being assessed.</li> <li>▪ Several competencies can be assessed, critical or desirable; functional or behavioural competencies</li> <li>▪ Behavioural indicators can serve as the basis for assessing the responses</li> <li>▪ A rating can be assigned to each competency</li> </ul>
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### 3.3 Performance Management

Many performance management systems emphasise measuring what has been accomplished and very little attention is given to how it was achieved. Competency based systems provide 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. The competency framework can be used to define performance standards during the annual performance contracting between the employee and his/her supervisor.

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.

Integrating competencies with a performance management system:

- Firstly the job purpose and main objectives need to be confirmed.
- Identify the competencies required to ensure successful accomplishment of those objectives.
- The expected standards of performance can be linked to the required competencies. Therefore, the performance standards provide benchmarks against which work performance can be evaluated.

The performance standard defines how and 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 competency framework.

On completion of the performance standards it should then be agreed that it will be expected from the employee to display those behaviours in their work related performance during the assessment cycle and that it will form part of the next performance assessment.

Table 4: Integrating performance standards with competencies

<b><i>Performance standard</i></b>	<b><i>Associated competencies</i></b>	<b><i>Typical behaviours</i></b>
<i>Provide support to line managers on the handling of grievance procedures as requested</i>	<i>Managing grievances Conflict management</i>	<i>Helps others to work through conflicts and find solutions  Objective when attending to conflict situations  Provides technical support on the handling of grievances  Empowers line managers to understand their roles, responsibilities and employee relations strategies</i>

### **3.4 Training and Development**

The behavioural dimension of competencies provides an important component to training and development. The competency based role profile and the learning outcomes in the curriculum framework will form the basis for identifying training and development gaps. The performance standards defined during the annual performance contracting between the employee and his/her supervisor will be considered during the review processes to determine any development needs and be linked to a particular training intervention by analyzing the learning outcomes and evaluating it against the proficiency descriptors in the competency framework

Table 5: Example of the curriculum framework

*Deputy Director: Employment relations*

<b>Training area</b>	<b>Module</b>	<b>Learning outcome</b>
<i>Employee relations</i>	<i>Labour relations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Be able to provide expert advice to line management on the management of labour relations.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Be able to formulate policies, which adhere to essential legal requirements and to facilitate the implementation of such policies.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Be able to monitor and evaluate the extent to which line management is capacitated to discharge its labour relations accountabilities.</i></li> </ul>
	<i>Managing consultations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Be able to facilitate negotiated processes in order to create sound employer/employee relations.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Be able to provide expert advice on consultation processes in order to progress issues requiring co-determination and mutual interest.</i></li> </ul>
	<i>Negotiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Be able to facilitate management planning and preparations for departmental negotiations.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Be able to provide expert advice on appropriate approaches to negotiation.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Be able to formulate the development of an employee relation's strategy that underpins negotiations.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Be able to represent the department in sectoral bargaining instances and manage</i></li> </ul>

		<i>the department's role in such bargaining processes.</i>
	<i>Discipline</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Is able to facilitate the creation of sound employer/ employee relations through managing and overseeing the implementation and compliance with labour laws.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Be able to advise and empower line managers to understand their roles in the disciplinary process.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Be able to provide technical and operational support to line managers on the handling of disciplinary procedures.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Is able to manage and coordinate internal disciplinary processes and assist disciplinary investigations.</i></li> </ul>
	<i>Grievances</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Is able to assist in the creation of sound employer/ employee relations in line with current labour laws.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Is able to provide operational and technical support to line managers on the handling of grievance procedures.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Is able to provide expert advice to line management.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Is able to assess the effectiveness of grievance procedures and provide advice on possible improvements.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Is able to investigate grievance and act as a presiding officer of an appeal panel.</i></li> </ul>

### **3.5 Human Resource Planning**

Human resource planning is a process of systematically reviewing human resource needs to ensure that the required number of employees, with the required competencies, is available when they are needed. A competency model

provides answers on what competencies are required to do the job, what behaviours have the most direct impact on performance and success in the job.

As part of the process to develop departmental HR plans, there's a need to analyse the competency requirements. The analysis involves identifying the relevant competencies the department requires in the current situation and in the future.

Determining required competencies is based on a thorough understanding of the department's strategic plan, organizational structure and service delivery model, as well as the associated departmental programmes. The competency analysis should be carried out using the following; the competency framework for HRM&D, the leadership and management competency framework as well as the CORE.

The competency requirements can also be analysed specifically for the HR components, an example is illustrated in the table below:

Table 6: Competency review

	Competency Requirements		Availability of competencies		Can be developed	
	Competencies	Definitions	No	Yes	No	Yes
HR Competencies	Organizational structure design	The ability to create organizational structure where the functions and responsibilities can be organized to ensure proper workflow in line with the organizational strategy.				
	HR planning	The ability to ensure that a department has the right number of people, with the right competencies, in the right place and at the right time.				
	Job access management	The ability to provide support in ensuring the rights, recruitment, retention, employability, accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities within the department.				
	Gender mainstreaming	The ability to mainstream gender in the department and assess the implications for women and men of any planned action, including				

		policies or programs, in any area and at all levels.		
Leadership and management competencies	Strategic capability and leadership	The ability to provide a vision, give direction and inspire others in order to deliver on the organizational mandate.		
	Financial management	The ability to compile and manage budgets, control cash flow, institute risk management and administer tender procurement processes in accordance with generally recognized financial practices in order to ensure the achievement of organizational objectives.		
	Programme and project management	The ability to develop, implement, evaluate and adjust plans to achieve the desired objectives, while ensuring the optimal use of resources.		

#### 4. Linkages with the leadership and management competency framework

The HR behavioural competencies are complemented by and should be read in conjunction with the leadership and management competencies. These are set out in the table below.

Table 7: Relationship between the HR behavioural competencies and the leadership and management competencies:

Leadership and management competencies	HR Behavioural competencies
	Emotional self awareness
	Self confidence
	Emotional self control
	Conscientiousness
	Initiative
Service delivery orientation	Service orientation

	Achievement drive
	Organisational awareness
People management and empowerment	Developing others
	Team work and collaboration
	Conflict management
	People orientation
	HR technical competencies
Communication	Communication
	Influencing others
Change management	Adaptability
	Valuing diversity
Client orientation and customer focus	Responsiveness
	Punctuality
	Honesty
	Empathy
Financial management	
Knowledge management	
Problem solving and analysis	
Strategic capability and leadership	
Project and programme management	

## **5. Conclusion**

The use of competency frameworks can increase consistency between different HR applications. However, competencies alone cannot guarantee that these applications will be more effective. The most comprehensive competency framework, no matter how well designed and appropriate, will not make a bad process good. Where effective and appropriate processes are allied with appropriate tools and skilled users, competencies can help significantly to improve the standards and consistency of people management processes.

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