



# Driving Sales Excellence Through Competency Modeling

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In the increasingly competitive marketplace of the pharmaceutical industry, a high performance salesforce is perhaps the most critical source of competitive advantage. Attracting and selecting the right talent is essential to success, given both current business needs and future market opportunities. Knowing the right talent to achieve strategic goals and objectives is the key to success. Knowing the right talent to have on your sales team is the key to dominating the marketplace.

## Expertise Necessary

The demand for competency models has grown in recent years, but the demand has sometimes outpaced the underlying expertise. The value of modeling comes from the behaviors that comprise the competencies and the methodology used for identifying them. Entering "competency models" in any internet search engine will yield literally thousands of models, many based on questionable development techniques.

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### Advantages of a Competency-Based Approach

The heart and soul of any pharmaceutical company lies in its salesforce. Therefore, the capabilities, attitudes, and behaviors of the sales team must be aligned with the business strategy. The way in which those capabilities are defined must reflect current needs, as well as prepare the organization to be ready to face changing needs and expectations. To do so, many organizations have leveraged competency models as a tool in establishing a common language, framework, and strategy for strengthening their capabilities. It is critical for organizations to establish effective competency models that will allow them to best define the critical skills and gain competitive advantage through a best-in-class sales team.

A competency model defines the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes that lead to high performance. A well-designed model translates an organization's strategic objectives into actionable behaviors, illustrating the capabilities needed to meet business challenges. The best models are not overly complex, with a "laundry list" of attributes, complicated levels, or highly conceptual definitions. Each competency should have an overall description and specific statements of behavior that provide further definition. Good models are usable, easily understandable, and simply defined by recognizable behaviors.

These behaviors can be found in either position-specific or enterprise-wide models, depending on the organization. Many pharmaceutical companies have created specific models for their sales organizations, articulating the skills and behaviors applicable to and expected of all sales representatives, regardless of title. Examples of common sales competencies include customer focus, results orientation, communication skills, and accountability.

Models must be grounded in the requirements of the job or role, particularly if they are to be used as part of an assessment process, such as selection (i.e., pre-employment testing, structured interview protocols), performance management (i.e., performance appraisals, compensation, 360-degree feedback), or succession planning (i.e., talent reviews, potential assessments). The value of any model rests in its application. Therefore, be it through interviews, employee surveys, focus groups, or leadership skill databases, competencies should be developed according to empirically valid and technically sound standards. Taking this approach, will ensure that the model provides the optimal utility in driving organizational excellence.

### Creating a Framework for Success

Competencies provide a common language and framework around performance, creating the foundation for an integrated platform of tools and processes to identify, assess and develop talent. When used to evaluate current employees, a well-designed competency model can identify areas for training and development that lead to improved sales performance. When incorporated into the recruiting and hiring system, a competency model can identify candidates who possess the skills needs for high performance, speeding ramp up times and increasing overall sales capability. At an individual level, the model can serve to show employees how they contribute to the bottom line, as well as set clear expectations for behavior. The more a competency model is integrated into various talent-management initiatives, the more it will become part of the DNA of the company. ■

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