

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF BARBADOS

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When done well, competency frameworks can increase clarity around performance expectations and establish a clear link between individual and organisational performance. Competency frameworks can be extremely useful with recruitment, training and development, talent spotting and performance management.

(The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), U.K)

But what do we mean when we talk about competencies?

There is a lot of discussion among academics surrounding the difference between competence/competences and competency/competencies. In a general sense, they basically mean the same thing.

Teodorescu (2006), provides definitions for these two words – the first from the American Heritage Dictionary which defines competence as the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified; a specific range of skill, knowledge or ability.

The second definition was taken from WordNet which defines a competency as the quality of being adequately or well qualified.

So what's all the fuss about?

While not a debate that deserves as much time as perhaps, how best should Barbados attempt to get out of its current financial position or how best should we assess and place children within our educational system – it is an interesting one that can be explored on its own.

For the purposes of this article we focus on competency/competencies and will use the following definitions to lay the foundational work for what we are talking about when we speak of our competency framework.

David Dubois as cited by Teodorescu (2006) defined competency as:

those characteristics – knowledge, skills, mindsets, thought patterns, and the like – that when used whether singularly or in various combinations, result in successful performance.

Our competency framework notes for its readers that traditionally, the term skills and competencies have been used, virtually, interchangeably but in the modern workplace it has been accepted that competencies incorporate more than just skills. This competency framework for the public service of Barbados thus defined competencies as **the skills, knowledge and behaviours that lead to successful performance outcomes.**

Hopefully, so far this article has provided you with a clearer understanding of what competencies are, but what do you do with this information now? The government of Barbados has taken the bold step to develop a competency framework for the public service which sets out how the government wants each and every public officer to work. A competency framework is simply a compilation of all the competency statements/descriptors which describe the critical behaviours, skills, knowledge and attributes for each role. In such a framework, skills, knowledge, behaviours and attributes are divided into categories as is done in our competency framework as depicted below.



Under each of these headings are, as expected, a list of competencies. Each officer should possess or work on developing all of the management and core competencies albeit to varying degrees, in addition to the professional competencies required for his/her specific job role. This can assist us in selecting the right people for the right jobs, assist officers to manage their performance, identify training and development needs and even chart career paths.

“Competencies are a signal from the organisation to the individual of the expected areas and levels of performance.

They provide the individual with an indication or map of the behaviours and actions that will be valued, recognised and, in some organisations, rewarded.

Competencies can represent the language of performance in an organisation.”

But why are we implementing a competency framework now? Simply put, to further develop a public service that is modern and capable of achieving the vision of the public service of Barbados, that is captured in the middle of the competency framework diagram.

But what does all of this really mean? Any officer can examine his/her job performance and identify any behavioural performance needs that ought to be addressed by matching them against the effective behaviours in the competency framework. In the same vein, interviews become more valid as interviewees are questioned on the behaviours needed to do the job, that is, interviews become more competency based.

As a result of using a competency approach to recruiting, there should be a better fit between officers’ competencies and the job they are given to do. Currently, officers are selected largely on the qualifications they hold and as many of you would agree this isn’t the most effective way to select the right people for the right job.

By taking into consideration all that is needed to effectively perform a job – the skills, whether they be communication skills or team working skills and the functional knowledge required to do the job - managers/supervisors would be assured of the best fit for the organisation. Implementation of this competency framework also means that performance issues can be more objectively defined as they will be based on the competencies outlined in the framework. Furthermore, progression at any level can be planned, that is, an officer, in consultation with his/her supervisor, will be able to enrol in courses to develop in an area he/she can improve.

In the near future, prior learning and experience will be used to assess whether a person is in fact competent in the behaviours identified in the competency framework for a particular job role. As public officers, we already know what we are supposed to do; the mandate of our various ministries/departments clearly outline this. Our competency framework will tell us how desired behaviours look for every level of officer.

To bring it home, we'll leave you with an idea of one competency outlined in our framework and how it is to look at every level of officer.

Management competency	
<i>Managing and team working</i> At all levels of the service, this area is about leading from the front and managing people with fairness and respect in order to develop effective team working. As you will begin to realise each competency is expected of all officers regardless of their level. What differs is that desired behaviours at each level.	
Level	Required Behaviour/s
Band 5 (S2-S1 and P1)	Shape, promote and demonstrate by personal example the desired values and culture of the public service.
Band 4 (S9-S3 and P2-P6)	Inspires staff and delivery partners to engage fully with long term vision and purpose of ministry.
Band 3 (Z16-Z1 and P16-P7)	Conveys enthusiasm and energy about their work and encourages others to do the same.
Band 2 (Z38-Z17 and P36-P17)	Acts in a fair and respectful way in dealing with others.

REFERENCES

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