The Pennsylvania State University
The Graduate School
College of Education

A STUDY OF COMPETENCIES AND
COMPETENCY-BASED HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:
EXPLORING PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES OF
SELECTED SENIOR HUMAN RESOURCE LEADERS/PRACTITIONERS
AND
THOUGHT LEADERS

A Dissertation in
Workforce Education and Development

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to explore competencies and competency-based human resource management (CBHRM) practices and perspectives of selected senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders. The key characteristics of competencies, critical components of competency work, topics related to working with competencies, applications, results, the future, and lessons learned were identified, explored, and described.

The study included a review of the literature. An examination of historical perspectives and theoretical concepts that serve as foundational components of competencies and competency-based human resource management was conducted. The work of five Harvard professors was addressed including some of the many contributions of Professors William James: The Field of Psychology, Gordon W. Allport: Personality Psychology, Henry A. Murray: Psychogenic Needs, Robert W. White: The Concept of Competence, and David C. McClelland: The Concept of Competencies. Significant studies of the field were covered.

The study was qualitative although there was also a quantitative component. Telephone interviews were conducted of the participants.

Three research questions provided the framework for the study, and several themes emerged from the categories of information. An analysis of the findings was provided, and an overview, conclusions, and recommendations were offered.
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As I turn to the next page of my life, I look back but for a brief moment at the many experiences as a student at The Pennsylvania State University…a student with a dream and a goal of learning and trying and finally one of doing. For now, I go as the wind blows but I turn the page with much hope, thankful for the gift of life and ever grateful for the opportunity to learn.

The resiliency of the human spirit, may it be as strong forever as it is today…
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This opening chapter serves to provide an introduction to the research study and its key components. The chapter is divided into ten sections. Each section covers a specific aspect of the study and, in turn, contributes to the building of a foundation for the study and establishes a guiding framework for the research study. This first section states the purpose of the study. The second section presents a background of the study. The third section addresses historical perspectives pertinent to the study. The fourth section describes a conceptual framework and provides a theoretical foundation for the research study. The fifth section lists the research questions to be answered by the study. The sixth section defines the terms related to the study. The seventh section proposes the reasons that the study has relevance by highlighting the significance of the study. The eighth section indicates the assumptions of the study. The ninth section covers the study’s limitations. The tenth section provides a summary of the chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe competencies and competency-based human resource management (CBHRM) practices and perspectives of selected senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders. The key characteristics of competencies, critical components of competency work, applications, topics related to working with competencies, other methods if practices are not competency-based, results, the future, and lessons learned were identified, explored, and described.

Competencies have been defined in many ways. Klemp (1980) defined a job competency as “an underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective and/or
superior performance in a job” (in Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21). Supplementing Klemp’s
definition, Boyatzis (1982, p. 21) wrote, “a job competency is an underlying
class characteristic of a person in that it may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self-
image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses.” In a special 2008
issue of the Journal of Management Development dedicated to updating the
understanding of competencies, how competencies drive performance, and ways in which
they are developed, Boyatzis (2008) offered the following definition of a competency:

A competency is defined as a capability or ability. It is a set of related but different
sets of behavior organized around an underlying construct, which we call the ‘intent.’
The behaviors are alternate manifestations of the intent, as appropriate in various
situations or times (para. 3).

When competencies form the basis for human resource management (HRM), the
result is referred to as competency-based human resource management. Dubois and
Rothwell with King Stern and Kemp (2004) have explained, that when the focus of
human resource (HR) functions is on the identification of outstanding individual
characteristics (as opposed to job descriptions) and aligning those characteristics with
the activities of HR, the functions of human resource management are competency-based.

Human resource management in national and global organizations is an integral part
of business today (Brewster, Sparrow, & Vernon, 2007; Holbeche, 2009; Sparrow,
Brewster, & Harris, 2004; Sparrow, 2009; Sparrow, Hesketh, Cooper, & Hird, 2010;
Tyson, 2006; Ulrich, 1996; Ulrich, Allen, Brockbank, Younger, & Nyman, 2009). In
describing what the term human resource management encompasses, Bohlander and
Snell (2009) captured its meaning and expressed it well when they wrote the following:
The terms, *human resources, human capital, intellectual assets,* and *talent management* imply that it is the people who drive the performance of their organizations (along with other resources such as money, materials, and information). Successful organizations are particularly adept at bringing together different kinds of people to achieve a common purpose. This is the essence of human resource management (p. 4).

This research study is an “elite study” as described in *Research Methods for Elite Studies* (Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987). In this 1987 classic, the importance of working with multiple research methods in such studies is emphasized.

The researcher, therefore, employed several methods of research in this study. A review of the literature related to the study was conducted, and new research was undertaken. A qualitative method of research (Creswell, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2001) was selected and applied to the study. Additionally, a quantitative method of research (Creswell, 2008) was applied but to only a very small component of the study; the research study was, therefore, not an mixed methods study (Bergman, 2008; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006; Greene, 2007; Hess-Biber, 2010; Morse & Niehaus, 2009; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2007; Ridenour & Newman, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2002, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2008).

The new research explored practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners as well as thought leaders of competencies and competency-based human resource management. The thought leaders in this study have a strong knowledge base of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices. Thought leaders are individuals who think original thoughts. “To be thought leaders in
any arena, we need to be free and original thinkers, capable of focusing on how we are thinking as well as what we are thinking” (Phillips, 2006, p. 3).

This research study was an undertaking which abided by high ethical standards (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002; Oliver, 2003; Sales & Folkman, 2000; Shamoo & Resnik, 2009). It involved both participants and the researcher under the guidance of the researcher’s dissertation advisor and chair of committee, William J. Rothwell, Ph.D.

A research study is a learning experience and a journey of self (Roberts, 2004). The researcher and participants are integral components of the study. In conducting this research study, the researcher learned about people and gained insights about their perspectives; in doing so, the researcher experienced ‘learning from strangers’ (Weiss, 1995).

The researcher also gained immense self-knowledge and awareness which are important aspects of personal credibility, a key competency for HR practitioners (Ulrich, 1996; Ulrich, Allen, Brockbank, Younger, & Nyman, 2009; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, & Younger, 2008).

**Background of the Study**

This research study included some of the most sought after businesses worldwide in terms of benchmarking various business and HR practices; the study was specifically focused on the key characteristics of competencies, critical components of competency work, applications, topics related to working with competencies, other methods if practices are not competency-based, results, the future, and lessons learned.

The theoretical background of this research study has a foundation of many concepts,
primarily with origins in the field of psychology such as those of William James, Gordon W. Allport, Henry A. Murray, David C. McClelland, and Robert W. White as well as others and are explored in two sections, *Historical Perspectives* and *Conceptual Framework* which follow this section.

The businesses involved in this research study included companies, which, depending on their designation, are often referred to as America’s foremost companies, others, the fastest growing private companies in America. Additionally, business practices in which thought leaders of competencies and competency-based human resource management are or have been affiliated with during their professional experiences with the topic are reflected.

The background of this study was set in U.S.-based businesses, some of which also have locations in other countries. Additionally, the thought leaders brought to the study a wealth of knowledge and experience in a variety of businesses and settings throughout the world. The following provides a brief introduction to and an overview of the groups represented in this research study:

**America’s Foremost Companies: The FORTUNE 500 and FORTUNE 501 – 1000**

The crash of Wall Street in 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression brought about many changes in America and in the lives of Americans. Just four months later, a fellow by the name of Henry Booth Luce (co-founder of *Time* magazine) published the first issue of *FORTUNE* Magazine in February 1930. His partner, Briton Hadden, was not excited about the endeavor; however, after Hadden’s death in late February 1929, Luce moved forward with plans for the magazine, and its initial issue hit the newsstands the following year.
Since 1955, FORTUNE Magazine has published its well researched and highly recognized and regarded annually ranked lists, particularly the FORTUNE 500. Other annually ranked lists by FORTUNE include the FORTUNE 100 and the FORTUNE 1000 as well as the Global 500, the World’s Most Admired Companies, the 100 Fastest-Growing Companies, the 100 Top MBA Employers, the 21 Dumbest Moments in Business, the Blue Ribbon Companies, the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business, 10 ‘Most Accountable’ Companies, the 35 Largest U.S. Private Companies (Rankings, n.d.).

FORTUNE’s annual ranking of the Best Companies to Work For is an important list for the human resource management field and serves as an HR industry benchmark. Practices of the companies in the other lists are also benchmarked; those practices of the FORTUNE 500 companies, in particular, serve as benchmarks in many fields including human resource management (FORTUNE, 2009).

Other similar lists are published by Forbes, Financial Times, and BusinessWeek. Some of those lists are as follows: Forbes: The World’s Biggest Companies, World’s 100 Most Powerful Women, The Global 2000 (which replaces the Top 500 last published in March 2003, based on 2002 data) (Forbes.com, n.d.); Financial Times: the Financial Times 500 and the Global 500 along with the US 500, Europe 500, UK 500, and Japan 500 (FT.com, n.d.); and BusinessWeek: the 50 Most Innovative Companies (BusinessWeek.com, n.d. a) and the World’s Best Companies (BusinessWeek.com, n.d. b). None of the other lists, however, have quite the recognition as that of the FORTUNE 500.

The lists serve as a kind of barometer of business. The annual compilation of the 500 largest companies in America reflects the current economic climate with its changing
roster of companies (CBS News, 2009).

The companies comprising the FORTUNE 500 are ranked by the total revenue of their fiscal year. The list includes revenues, profits, assets, stockholders’ equity, market value, profits as % of, earnings per share, and total return to investor.


The Fastest Growing Private Companies in America: The Inc. 500

An annual list is also compiled of the Inc. 500 companies. Founded by Bernie Goldhirsh, Inc.’s premier issue was published in 1979 with a listing and ranking of 100 of the fastest-growing small companies; in 1982, the listing and ranking was expanded to include 500 companies. Beginning in 2007, an additional annual listing and ranking of 5,000 companies was also published (Wikipedia, n.d.).

The companies on the Inc. 500 ranked list are measured by their revenue growth for the preceding three years, 2005 – 2008, as an example, for the 2009 listing of the Inc. 500. In order to qualify for 2009, for instance, the companies need to have been founded and also generating a revenue by the very first week in 2005; thereby they have the ability of showing a full calendar of four years of sale. The Inc. 500 companies are U.S.-based and are privately held; they are also for profit and independent. They must not be a part of other companies – not subsidiaries or divisions as of December 31 of 2008. The
minimum revenue for 2005 is $200,000 with the minimum for 2008 set at $2 million. The profile listing in *Inc.* magazine indicated the revenue and employee counts for 2008. Employees that are full-time and part-time were taken into consideration in the employee counts; however, independent contractors were not (*Inc.*, 2009).

**Thought Leaders: Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management**

The thought leaders in this research study have a strong knowledge of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices. Their professional experiences and backgrounds are diverse, and they are based in many areas throughout the world. Their positions are varied including researcher, author, practitioner, consultant, scholar, academic professional, educator, and speaker.

There is much discussion about thought leaders and thought leadership today. Thought leaders are individuals who think original thoughts. “To be thought leaders in any arena, we need to be free and original thinkers, capable of focusing on how we are thinking as well as what we are thinking” (Phillips, 2006, p. 3).

Thought leaders are cutting-edge persons with innovative ideas who can move a group or discipline in a direction or to a point where it has not previously been. They have depth and breadth of knowledge in many areas and seek to influence events to get better outcomes (Thomas, 2004, p. 1).

**Historical Perspectives**

In beginning an introduction to the historical perspectives related to this research study, it is helpful to revisit the definition of a job competency. A job competency as defined by Klemp (1980) is “an underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective and/or superior performance in a job” (in Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21). Later
elaborating on that definition, Boyatzis (1982, p. 21) stated that “a job competency is an underlying characteristic of a person in that it may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses.” More recently, Boyatzis (2008) provided the following definition of a competency:

A competency is defined as a capability or ability. It is a set of related but different sets of behavior organized around an underlying construct, which we call the ‘intent.’ The behaviors are alternate manifestations of the intent, as appropriate in various situations or times (para. 3).

The above definitions provide a framework for which to begin a meaningful discussion of the historical perspectives associated with this study. This research study has a strong foundation in the field of psychology, and the framework is built on various theories of psychology with competencies at the cornerstone.

The history of psychology can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks as a study of the mind and behavior. It also has physiology at its roots and was long regarded as a branch of philosophy. William Wundt (1874) highlighted some of the “major connections between the science of physiology and the study of human thought and behavior” (Cherry, n.d.b, para. 7) in his *Principles of Psychology*. Wundt established the first world’s psychology laboratory at the University of Leipzig in 1879. Wundt (1874) and William James (1890), see below, are generally considered the fathers of psychology and the founders of psychology’s first two great ‘schools’ (Boerre, n.d.).

A review of the literature yielded many different events and points in time which are historically relevant to the study of competencies and competency-based human resource management. Noting that while there are many theories, events, and work of historical
significance which have contributed to and had an impact on the human competency
movement and the topic of competencies and competency-based human resource
management, the researcher selected the work of five psychologists at Harvard
University in Cambridge, Massachusetts to explore as the focal points for the Historical
Perspectives section of this research study. It is noted that work does not occur in total
isolation, and the work of these five psychologists is no different. Their work occurred
during specific times and places and was impacted upon by theories from the past and
current thinking of the time as well as the many events taking place in the world. An
exploration of the work of five psychologists at Harvard University is as follows:

**Early Perspectives from Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States of America:**

**The Influences of a Group of Harvard Psychologists**

The department of psychology (along with another Department, that of Social
Relations, which was eventually folded into it) at Harvard University was “home to some
of the most eminent psychologists in history, including the founder of the field in the
United States” (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the
Department, William James, 2007, para. 1).

Amongst the eminent psychologists at Harvard for a time was a man by the name of
David Clarence McClelland (1951, 1955, 1973, 1985, 1996) whose work has had a
tremendous impact on the field of psychology. His work has also had a profound effect
on the business world, for Dr. McClelland is widely regarded as the founder of a
different way of approaching the human resource needs and challenges of businesses—
by applying competencies to the functions or processes of human resources.

However, before examining the work of McClelland, it is of value to this study and
the topic of competencies and competency-based human resource management to explore
the origins of the field of psychology in North America and some of the work that
occurred thereafter in Cambridge.

William James: The Field of Psychology

The field of psychology first began to emerge in the 1800s at Harvard under the
scholarship of philosopher and psychologist William James (Harvard University, The
Department of Psychology: About the Department, William James, 2007). The inception
of the department of psychology at Harvard was very much tied to the department of
philosophy (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department,
William James, 2007). The psychology department at Harvard University, in their
writings of James, has noted the following:

James himself remained unconvinced that psychology was in fact a distinct discipline,
writing in his 1892 survey of the field, Psychology: Briefer Course, “This is no
science; it is only the hope of a science” (p. 355). Despite James’s skepticism, in the
ensuing century this hope was fully realized in the department he helped to found
(Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, William
James, 2007, para. 3).

One of Harvard’s first psychology courses was taught by James in 1875; the course
was titled The Relations between Physiology and Psychology; in association with this
course, he started the first demonstration laboratory in experimental psychology. At the
very core of his research was a belief in a connection between the mind and body.

Working with that belief as a foundation, he developed a theory which was called the
James-Lange Theory of emotion which hypothesizes that the human experience of
emotion occurs from physiological changes that happen in response to external events (James, 1884; Lange, 1887). Inspired by evolitional theory, his theoretical perspectives related to psychology eventually were referred to as functionalism which sought the causal relationships that exist between internal states and external behaviors (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, William James, 2007).

James (1890) published “a highly influential, two-volume synthesis and summary of psychology, Principles of Psychology” (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, William James, 2007, para. 5). In this work, James (1890) describes psychology as follows:

Psychology is the Science of Mental Life, both of its phenomena and their conditions. The phenomena are such things as we call feelings, desires, cognitions, reasonings, decisions, and the like; and, superficially considered, their variety and complexity is such as to leave a chaotic impression on the observer (James, 1890, p. 1.).

Later, James stepped away from experimental psychology and focused on works of a philosophical nature. James is considered not only to be the founder of psychology in the U.S. but he is also recognized as a founder, one of several, of the school of American Pragmatism (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, William James, 2007).

Gordon W. Allport: Personality Psychology

In the 1930s, a group of Harvard psychologists greatly helped to promote the concept of psychology’s personality theory. Amongst them was Gordon W. Allport (1937) who is regarded as one of America’s founding fathers of personality psychology. Allport’s
influence is recognized as such and indicated by the following:

Allport pioneered research on human personality. At a time when behaviorism held sway in psychology departments in the U.S., and psychoanalytic approaches dominated elsewhere, Allport championed an empirical methodology that considered the influences of current context and conscious motivations, without dismissing the possible contribution of unconscious memories and/or mechanisms to human thought and behavior (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, Gordon W. Allport, 2007, para. 3).

Prior to joining the Harvard faculty in 1930, Allport (1921), who received a Ph.D. from the department of psychology at Harvard in 1922, along with his brother, Floyd H. Allport (1921), who received a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1919, a few years before his brother (as noted in Harvard University, Doctoral Alumni, 2007), wrote a seminal article titled *Personality Traits: Their Classification and Measurement* which was first published in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. In the first two paragraphs of the first section, *The Nature and Criteria of Personality*, of the classic article, the two brothers offered their thoughts on personality as well as intelligence and the meaning of the terms in the following opening remarks:

Those who have been active of late in measuring intelligence have made great progress in the development of measuring scales but very slight progress in the actual definition of intelligence. In dealing with the elusive term ‘Personality’ we may well expect still less satisfactory clarity of definition, no matter what success we have in its measurement. In the measurement of intelligence we have at least the advantage of scales of performance in various mental functions standardized into age or point scale
groups. We have, in other words, a means of comparing an individual with his fellows in certain abilities, even though we may not be so bold as to term those abilities intelligence. We may seek, moreover, for a person’s mental level in his relative success of adjustment, either to the problems of the school curriculum or to the general problems of life. In this manner a quantitative statement of at least an hypothetical intelligence may be obtained.

The measurement of personality, however, embraces none of these advantages. Individual differences are so great and personal traits so vaguely related to the solution of problems that the notion of an age scale in personality has no significance. More, personalities of divers sorts succeed equally well in the general adaptation to situation of practical life. It may be added that differences of personality are of a qualitative rather than a quantitative sort. These difficulties stand in the way of the development of a personality measurement based on the correlation between tests and familiar objective criteria such as those of intelligence. We must strive toward a descriptive treatment rather than quantitative. Our aim is personality study and description rather than personality testing (Allport & Allport, 1921, paras. 1 and 2).

In 1924, Allport taught a personality course at Harvard; the course was perhaps the first personality course offered at a North American college (Pettigrew, 1999). Dismissing behaviorism as not ‘digging deep enough’ and psychoanalysis, too, Allport focused his efforts on working on concepts of his own theory of personality called the trait theory of personality (Wagner, n.d.). Traits are a component of job competencies (Boyatzis, 1982) and, they are, therefore, a relevant part of the historical perspectives for this research study as is Allport’s trait theory of personality.
As Allport (1927) further developed his concepts of traits and personality, he stated the following:

There is also confusion between personality and the factors underlying personality. Tests for physique, for intelligence, or for temperament are not tests of personality. It is not physique which acts, nor intelligence which acts, nor temperament; it is the person who acts. If, then, personality is the object of inquiry, traits of personality should not be confused with qualities or quantities of intelligence, physique, or temperament. These latter factors are merely convenient abstractions by way of which physiology has arrived at the problem of human personality. Inventories of ‘traits’ at present include a reckless array of noncomparable factors (para. 5).

In working on his trait theory, he began categorizing and organizing traits. In fact, Allport’s early work on the trait theory included going through the dictionary and making a list of every term that he found which was a description of a personality trait (Wagner, n.d.). Upon finding 4,500 traits, he then placed them into three different categories of traits including: (1) **Cardinal traits** are rare but dominate a person’s entire personality; (2) **Central traits** are quite common and are what comprise our personalities; kindness is an example of a central trait as are honesty and friendliness; (3) **Secondary traits** are those which are present during specific conditions and circumstances; becoming nervous before a presentation to a large audience is an example of a secondary trait (Wagner, n.d.).

Allport’s concept of personality traits, according to Pettigrew (1999), a student of Allport’s who wrote an article about him titled *Gordon Willard Allport: A Tribute*, which appeared in the *Journal of Social Issues*, often comes under criticism. Pettigrew
(1999, para. 10) indicated that critics contend that Allport had “a static view of traits as pervasive, cross-situational consistencies in behavior.” Zuroff (1986), however, has suggested that Allport advanced a greater dynamic concept of traits (in Pettigrew, 1999). As Pettigrew (1999, para. 20) indicated, Zuroff (1986, p. 993) described Allport as “an interactionist in the sense that he recognized behavior is determined by the person and situation.” Other seminal research included that of studying the “psychological underpinnings of prejudice and discrimination” (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, Gordon W. Allport, 2007, para 9). Allport (1954) published *The Nature of Prejudice* which was based on his research (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, Gordon W. Allport, 2007).

**Henry A. Murray: Psychogenic Needs**

Another of the Harvard psychologists in the 1930s, a colleague of Allport, was Henry Murray. He served as the Director of the Harvard Psychological Clinic from 1928 – 1937 (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, Henry A. Murray, 2007). Murray conducted psychoanalysis at the Clinic; additionally, he directed a research program which investigated “the constituent elements of personality (e.g. emotions, preferences, behavioral tendencies and related characteristics)” (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, Henry A. Murray, 2007, para 2).

The results of the research are published in Murray’s (1938) seminal work titled *Explorations in Personality*, a highly regarded work in the field of personality psychology. Murray’s theory of personality included motives, presses, and needs. Press
refers to pressure; Murray (1938) theorized that there are pressures from environmental factors— the pressures are either real (alpha press) or perceived (beta press). As to his perspectives on needs, Murray (1938, p. 124) described them as “a potentiality or readiness to respond in a certain way under certain given circumstances.” Murray (1938) theorized that psychogenic needs, those which are deeply seated within our nature, function most of the time on an unconscious level but have a major role to play in our personality; other needs exist on a temporary basis and are ever changing (Cherry, n.d.a). His research included developing a list of those basic psychogenic needs in personality. Henry identified two types (primary and secondary) of needs, and he and his colleagues identified about 20 or so needs which everyone has but each at their own levels (Cherry, n.d.a)

The U.S. government recruited Murray in 1938 with the task of developing a psychological profile—that of Adolph Hitler (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, Henry A. Murray, 2007). Murray’s (1943) work in that regard is an O.S.S. confidential document titled Analysis of The Personality of Adolph Hitler: With Predictions of His Future Behavior and Suggestions for Dealing With Him Now and after Germany’s Surrender.

During World War II, Murray was in the U.S. Army, temporarily leaving Harvard; he helped the American intelligence agencies assess their agents for psychological fitness (Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, Henry A. Murray, 2007). His other activities during this time included selecting the personnel for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), whose name was eventually changed to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). When returning to Harvard, he worked along with his
colleagues at the Clinic to develop the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), a projective
test that is used to assess the personality and the self-understanding of an individual
(Harvard University, The Department of Psychology: About the Department, Henry A.
Murray, 2007). His co-founder of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) was Christina
Morgan (Morgan, 2001); the TAT remains an integral part of the field of clinical
psychology today.

Murray is recognized for a number of contributions including his study of personality
and the Thematic Apperception Test. Additionally, his concepts of motivation, especially
the need to achieve, have had a profound influence on various theories of psychology.

*Robert W. White: The Concept of Competence*

Another of the Harvard psychologists was Robert W. White who studied under Henry
Murray. White, like some of the other Harvard professors at the time, helped promote
personality theory and studied motivation. White (1959), in his classic article, *Motivation
Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence*, suggested the concept of competence as the
ability of an organism to interact well with its environment and defined competence as
‘the ability to interact effectively with the environment’ (Dewey, n.d., para 2). This
concept was proposed to address those aspects which were not covered by other theories
of motivation at the time. Competence, as suggested by White (1959), happens when
gradual learning occurs as the organism interacts with the environment. His theory of
competence and competence motivation, described as *effectance motivation* is highly
regarded. The term *effectance* “was described as a ‘tendency to explore and influence the
environment’ (Dewey, n.d., para 2). White is also recognized for his study of how normal
people cope in the world, suggesting that in addition to those drives promoted by Freud
that other drives included those associated with being competent and influential (McCoubrey, 2001).

**David C. McClelland: The Concept of Competencies**

David C. McClelland (1951, 1955, 1973, 1985, 1996) was another of the Harvard psychologists who was interested in personality and motivation. An American social psychologist, McClelland (1951) “originally described a theory of personality as comprised of the relationships among a person’s unconscious motives, self-schema, and observed behavioral patterns” (in Boyatzis, 2008, para. 12). Perhaps McClelland’s (1951) most highly recognized theory is his motivational needs theory which suggests that individuals have three types of motivational needs including achievement, power, and affiliation.

In the early 1970s, McClelland (1973) challenged the current thinking and accepted theory and practice that intelligence tests were predictors of competence in a landmark article, *Testing for Competence Rather than for ‘Intelligence’*, which was published in January 1973 issue of *The American Psychologist*. He suggested that although intelligence influences performance, there are other characteristics such as motivation and self-image that are differentiators of successful performance. The influential article was to change the course of business thinking and business practices regarding people and their knowledge, their skills, their abilities, and more. McClelland and his landmark article were the beginning of a different way of thinking and a different way of approaching the human resource management needs of businesses.

McClelland co-founded, along with David Burnham, a consulting company in the 1970s called McBer & Company (now part of the Hay Group), which specialized in
human resource planning and development. Competency assessment and development were done by McClelland and others at McBer & Company along with behavioral event interviews. The first tests that incorporated this new approach were done so with the U.S. State Department Foreign Service information officers (McClelland & Dailey, 1973 in Spencer, McClelland, & Spencer, 1994). McClelland and Burnham (1976) won the McKinsey Award for their article titled *Power is the Great Motivator* published in the *Harvard Business Review*.

McClelland (1951, 1955, 1973, 1985, 1996) was a prolific writer; his highly regarded work in the field of psychology and motivation as well as his work with Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and in the consulting field continues to have a profound effect on business practices today. Dr. David C. McClelland—his contribution of the concept of competencies greatly changed and enriched the world of work.

**Section Summary**

The field of psychology offers much insight into the foundational thoughts and theories that form the basis for the applications of competencies in human resource management practices. The work of a group of Harvard psychologists greatly influenced the work which eventually led to the discovery of a different way of approaching the human resource needs and challenges of businesses. The challenging of current concepts was a consistent theme for the group of Harvard psychologists whose perspectives are addressed in this section. And, thus, McClelland’s (1973) landmark article, *Testing for Competence Rather than for ‘Intelligence’*, is seen as a continuation of a tradition amongst a group of Harvard psychologists—James, 1890; Allport, 1927; Murray, 1938, and White, 1959. In continuing the Harvard tradition of challenging current thinking,
McClelland (1973) forever changed the course of time and business in terms of approaches to human resources.

It is important to understand that the work associated with competencies and competency-based human resource management has a strong foundation and is deeply grounded in theories of psychology, a tradition steeped in the challenge of current thinking, and an entrepreneurial spirit in changing the practices of businesses throughout the world.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research study has as its foundation the discipline of psychology. The work of the five Harvard psychologists explored in the previous section, titled *Historical Perspectives*, including Allport (1937), James (1890), McClelland (1973), Murray (1938), and White (1959), serves not only as focal points for the history of the research topic but their ideas and concepts help form the conceptual framework for this research study. McClelland (1973) is regarded as the founder of the competency approach in human resource practices, and, thus, his work provides a strong foundation for the conceptual framework of this research study; the ideas and work of the four other Harvard psychologists identified and explored, that of—Allport (1937), James (1890), Murray (1938), and White (1959) are amongst the related foundational building blocks in the development of the competency concept. Consequently, they serve as components of the body of knowledge associated with the study of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.

Work, however, is generally not done in isolation; and this can be said to be true for the work of the five Harvard psychologists which was explored in the previous section
and serves as the building blocks of the conceptual framework for this research study.

Work is influenced by many factors including but not limited to experiences, thoughts and feelings, motives and motivation, the setting, the time and place, the work of others, and much more. In exploring the theories and concepts which have helped to develop and shape a body of knowledge about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices, the researcher examined a study conducted by Haggbloom et al., (2002) which was conducted to identify the 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century. The 2002 study is examined below as follows:

2002 Research Study of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists in the 20th Century

Haggbloom et al. (2002) conducted a study with the purpose of creating a rank-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists in the 20th Century. Rankings were done based on three variables which included journal citation as well as introductory psychology textbook citation with an additional variable as survey response. In an effort to identify the top 100, surveys were distributed to 1,725 people with a membership in the American Psychological Society. The results were published in the Review of General Psychology.

Of the five Harvard psychologists whose work is briefly explored in the preceding section titled Historical Perspectives and acknowledged further in the opening statements of this section, Conceptual Framework, several are mentioned in the 2002 study as follows: Gordon W. Allport (1937), ranked 11th in a ranked-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20th Century (Haggbloom, et al., 2002); William James (1890), ranked 14th in a ranked-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20th Century (Haggbloom, et al., 2002); and David C. McClelland (1973), ranked 15th in
a ranked-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20th Century (Haggbloom, et al., 2002). Additionally, William Wundt (1874) listed in the preceding section titled *Historical Perspectives* was ranked 93.5 in a ranked-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20th century (Haggbloom, et al., 2002).

**Other Relevant Work Related to Competencies**

Some of the work of psychologists other than the five explored in the *Historical Perspectives Section* which has had an impact on the field of psychology and has relevance to competency work and, therefore, has significance to this study includes, but is not limited to, the following: Alfred A. Adler (1927a, 1927b), ranked 67th in a ranked-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists (Haggbloom, et al., 2002), conducted research with an emphasis on self-esteem; Chris Argyris (1957, 1962), in his Immaturity/Maturity Theory, suggested that a directive management style fostered immaturity and dependence whereas a participatory management style enhanced maturity and independence; Sigmund Freud (1938a, 1938b), ranked 3rd in a rank-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists (Haggbloom, et al., 2002), conducted work on motivation and human motives; Kurt Goldstein (1939) coined the term self actualization in his work on the human organism; Frederick Herzberg (1959) developed the dual factor theory or two factor hygiene and motivation theory and suggested there are two factors, dual factor theory, in motivation including hygiene factors and motivation; hygiene factors include the work and the environment and the second factor, the motivators, involves what people do on the job along with what should be a part of the job to develop intrinsic motivation (Accel-team.com, n.d.); Carl Jung (1961), ranked 23rd in a rank-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists (Haggbloom, et al., 2002),
conducted work about self-actualization and did much research about dreams, “not so much to diagnose basic human motives as to enlarge the patient’s understanding for therapeutic purposes” (McClelland, 1985, p. 38); Kurt Lewin (1935), ranked 18th in a rank-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists (Haggbloom, et al., 2002), served as a visiting professor at Harvard during the spring semesters of 1938 and 1939, did work on personality psychology; his theories had an influence on both Murray and Allport (Murray 1938). His research, including his theory on change, also served as a foundation for what would become the field of organization development (Burke, Lake & Paine, 2008); Rensis Likert (1967) conducted research on human behavior in the organizational setting and studied types of leadership, the impact on motivation and what constitutes effective management (Accel-team.com, n.d.); Abraham Maslow (1943, 1954, 1968), ranked 10th in a rank-ordered list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists (Haggbloom, et al., 2002), in his hierarchy of needs theory, included the following needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow (1968) later added three additional needs including a need to know and understand and a need for aesthetic beauty; the original self-actualization need was split to include realizing the potential of one’s self and transcendence, assisting others in achieving their potential. Elton Mayo conducted experiments on human behavior at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company between the years of 1924 and 1927. His research findings about work and motivation have contributed to motivational theory (Accel-team.com, n.d.); Douglas McGregor (1960) developed the XY theory which suggests that there are two approaches to managing people. One approach is the authoritarian style, the other is the participative management style; Carl R. Rogers (1961), ranked 6th in a rank-ordered
list of the 100 Most Eminent Psychologists (Haggbloom, et al., 2002), did pioneering research in the areas of personality and human relationships; B. F. Skinner (1938, 1953, 1966) was ranked 1st in a list of 100 Most Eminent Psychologists in the 20th century (Haggbloom, et al., 2002). A Harvard professor, he conducted research in operant conditioning and developed the reinforcement theory (Boeree, n.d.); Victor Vroom (1964) developed the Expectancy Theory of Motivation which focuses on motivation and management and suggests that individuals have different goals and with certain beliefs, valence, expectancy, and instrumentality, can be motivated (ValueBasedManagement.net, n.d.).

These are some of the many psychologists whose highly regarded work serves to add to the building blocks of knowledge for the conceptual framework of this research study about competencies and competency-based human resource management.

**Human Competency Movement Emerges**

As Spencer, McClelland, and Spencer (1994, p. 3) indicated “the modern competency movement in American industrial-organizational psychology dates from the late 1960s and early 1970s.” At a time when interest in personality traits decreased, Spencer, McClelland, and Spencer (1994, p. 3) noted “that traditional academic aptitude and knowledge content tests, as well as school grades and credentials” were not predictors of either job performance or predictors of success in life (McClelland, 1973) and were often biased (Fallows, 1985).

“These findings led McClelland to identify principles for doing research to identify ‘competency’ variables which did predict job performance and which were not biased (or at least, less biased by race, sex or socioeconomic factors” (Spencer, McClelland, &
Spencer, 1994, p. 3).

McClelland’s continued research and work in the area of job performance and competencies ultimately led to the creation of a different way of approaching the challenges in human resource management practices in businesses. McClelland’s work in the field of psychology and interests in the area of motivation served as the catalyst in the formation of concepts guiding the modern competency movement.

“A competency is defined as a capability or ability. It is a set of related but different sets of behavior organized around an underlying construct, which we call the ‘intent’” (Boyatzis, 2008, para. 3). Grounded in theories of psychology and motivation, the concept of competencies and, in turn, performance, are a foundational element of the body of knowledge of the human competency movement and the conceptual framework this research study.

As Boyatzis (1982) indicated “maximum performance is believed to occur when the person’s capability or talent is consistent with the needs of the job demands and the organizational environment” (Boyatzis, 2008).

**Research Questions**

1. What are the Perspectives on the Characteristics of Competencies?
2. What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?
3. What are the Perspectives on the Future of Competencies and Competency Work?
4. What are the Lessons Learned about Competencies?

**Definitions of Terms**

The terms listed below are those which are frequently noted in practices associated with competencies and competency-based human resource management and are,
therefore, related to the research study.

**Accountability:** “The responsibility placed on an individual or group for their own or others’ actions, conduct, performance, projects, etc.” (SHRM, n.d., p. 2).

**Attitudes:**
States of mind, feelings or disposition with regard to some matter. Attitudes often are based on a person’s values and reflect each individual’s assessment of those values when found in a particular situation; attitudes can include psychological states such as confidence or depression (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61).

**Behavior:** “Actions, expressions and words that can be directly observed. Behaviors can range from simple (e.g., the blink of an eye) to complex (e.g., driving a car), and they may be learned (e.g., typing) or reflexive (e.g., scratching)” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61).

**Behavioral-Based Interview:**
An interview technique that focuses on a candidate’s past experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities by asking the candidate to provide specific examples of when he or she has demonstrated certain behaviors or skills as a means of predicting future behavior and performance (SHRM, n.d., p. 9).

**Behavioral-Event Interview (BEI):**
A special type of interview that focuses on identifying the behaviors that an individual uses to accomplish job-/role-related outcomes or to contribute to organizational
success. These generally involve interviewing excellent performers, and sometimes a matched group of average performers, and soliciting success stories around what are termed ‘critical incidents.’ The goal of these interviews, which are also called ‘critical event interviews,’ is to identify those behaviors that are critical to attaining successful outcomes as well as those that are not (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61).

**Benchmarking:** “The systematic process of comparing an organization’s products, services and practices against those of competitor organizations or other industry leaders to determine what it is they do that allows them to achieve high levels of performance” (SHRM, n.d., p. 10); “The process by which an organization seeks to identify top-performing organizations and to analyze their strategies, policies and practices for the purpose of learning some or all of them” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61).

**Benchmarks:** “The standards used as a basis for comparison or measurement” (SHRM, n.d., p. 10).

**Best Practices:** “Defined in a variety of ways, but typically refers to the practices of an organization that enables them to achieve superior organizational performance results” (SHRM, n.d., p. 10).

**Body of Knowledge:** “Domain of essential information, mastery over which is required for success in a field or profession” (BusinessDictionary.com, 2009, para. 1).

**Capabilities:** “The collective abilities of an organization” (Ulrich, Brockbank,
Causally Related: “Means that a competency causes or predicts behavior and performance” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 9).

Competence: “An organism’s ability to interact effectively with its environment” (White, 1959, p. 297).


Competency: “The combination of observable, measurable skill, knowledge, performance behaviors and personal attributes that contribute to enhanced employee performance and organizational success” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61); “A competency is a capability or ability” (Boyatzis, 2008, para. 3).

Competency-Based Human Resource Management: Functions of human resources which have competencies as a foundation (DuBois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004).

Competency-Based Pay: “A compensation system that recognizes employees for the depth, breadth and types of skills they obtain and apply in their work. Also known as skill-based and knowledge-based pay” (SHRM, n.d., p. 18).

Competency Assessment: Related to the measurement of an individual’s competencies (DuBois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004).

Competency Development: The enhancement of an individual’s competencies (DuBois
Competency Identification: A process of discovering the competencies that are linked to job success (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern, & Kemp, 2004).

Competency Model:
A group of related competencies that together describe successful performance for a particular job or role, or in a particular organization. The nature of models depends on whether success is being defined for the organization, a specific function, a given job/role or for a particular level of contribution for an individual performer (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61).

“A written description of the competencies required for fully successful or exemplary performance in a job category, work team, department, division, organization” (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004, p. 23).

Construct Validity: “The extent to which a test or other assessment instrument measures a particular trait” (SHRM, n.d., p. 19).

Content Validation:
Validity is established by systematically examining the content of a measure to determine whether it covers a representative sample of the behavior domain that is intended to be measured. Content validity is a matter of judgment by content experts, not of empirical correlation or statistical relationships between variables (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61).

Core Competencies: “The skills, knowledge and abilities which employees must
possess in order to successfully perform job functions that are essential to business operations” (SHRM, n.d., p. 21); “Core competencies are the collective learning in the organization” (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990).

**Criterion-referenced:** “The competency actually predicts who does something well or poorly, as measured on a specific criterion or standard” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 9).

**Culture:** “The holistic interrelationship of a group’s identity, beliefs, values, activities, rules, customers, communication patterns and institutions” (WorldatWork, 2006).

**Differentiating Competency:** “Differentiating competencies distinguish superior from average performers” (Spencer, McClelland, & Spencer, 1994, p. 6).

**Employee Engagement:** “The means of creating a work environment that empowers employees to make decisions that affect their jobs” (SHRM, n.d., p. 33).

**Ethics:** “A philosophy principle concerned with opinions about appropriate and inappropriate moral conduct or behavior by an individual or social group” (SHRM, n.d., p. 40).

**Focus Groups:**

Groups of individuals representing a range of points of view on a given issue in an organization. These groups, made up of seven to 12 people (on average) are asked a series of questions to gather information on a given topic (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61).

**Human Capital:** “The collective knowledge, skills and abilities of an organization’s employees” (SHRM, n.d., p. 54).

**Human Resources:** “The function dealing with the management of people employed
within the organization” (SHRM, n.d., p. 54).

**Human Resource Development**: “A set of planned activities intended to provide the organization with the skills it requires to meet current and future business demands” (SHRM, n.d., 54).

**Human Resource Management**: “The formal structure within an organization responsible for all the decisions, strategies, factors, principles, operations, practices, functions, activities and methods related to the management of people” (SHRM, n.d., 54).

**Human Resource Planning**: “The process of anticipating future staffing needs and ensuring that a sufficient pool of talent possessing the skills and experience needed will be available to meet those needs” (SHRM, n.d., 54).

**Intellectual Assets**: Knowledge assets of an organization (Rothwell, 2005).

**Job Competency**: “An underlying characteristics of a person which results in effective and/or superior performance in a job” (Klemp, 1980, in Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21); “an underlying characteristic of a person in that it may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21).

**Job Description**: “A written description of a job which includes information regarding the general nature of the work to be performed, specific responsibilities and duties, and the employee characteristics required to perform the job” (SHRM, n.d.). “Describes the work to be done” (Rothwell, 2009, p. 52).

**Knowledge**: “Information and understanding that an individual possesses about some specific content area such as engineering principles or marketing practices” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers

**Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA's):** “The attributes required to perform a job; generally demonstrated through qualifying experience, education or training” (SHRM, n.d., p. 65).

**Leadership:** “The process, by which an individual determines direction, influences a group and directs the group toward a specific goal or organizational mission” (SHRM, n.d., p. 66).

**Leadership Development:** “Formal and informal training and professional development programs designed for all management and executive-level employees to assist them in developing the leadership skills and styles required to deal with a variety of situations” (SHRM, n.d., p. 66).

**Management Development:** “Training and developmental programs designed to provide new managers and existing managers with the resources needed to become more effective in their roles” (SHRM, n.d., p. 68).

**Motive:** “The underlying need or thought pattern which drives, directs, and selects an individual’s behavior” (McClelland, 1955); “recurrent concern for a goal state, or condition, appearing in fantasy, which drives, directs, and selects behavior of the individual” (McClelland, 1973, in Boyatzis, 1982, p. 28);

Underlying drives or desires that compel behaviors or cause them to occur. Motives can be inferred from the behaviors they compel (e.g., the hunger motive causes eating), but they cannot be observed. Psychologists believe that motives are enduring and highly resistant to change, and they lie at the core of personality (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers
Motivation:

Refers to on one hand to conscious intents, to such inner thoughts as, I wish I could play the piano, I want to be a doctor, and I am trying hard to solve this problem. On the other hand, looking at behaviors from the outside motivation refers to inferences about conscious intents that we make from observing behaviors. Thus, if we see a young girl perform a connected series of acts such as walking into a room, drawing up the piano stool, getting out some music, opening the piano, and starting to play, we infer that she wants to play the piano. If she stops playing for a while, we infer that she no longer wants to play the piano (McClelland, 1988, p. 4).

Performance Management: “The process of maintaining or improving employee job performance through the use of performance assessment tools, coaching and counseling as well as providing continuous feedback” (SHRM, n.d., p. 83); “A systematic approach for managing individuals and/or groups that involves planning, monitoring, appraising, rewarding and improving performance in support of the business strategy” (WorldatWork, n.d.); “It includes an entire cycle that begins with planning the work and the results to be achieved, monitoring employee behaviors and results achieved, developing employees’ abilities, evaluating behaviors demonstrated and results achieved, and rewarding results” (Rothwell, 2009, p. 12).

Performance Management Applications: “The entire range of human resources programs and processes dealing with performance planning, actual feedback and assessment of employee performance” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer,
Recruitment: “The practice of soliciting and actively seeking applicants to fill recently vacated or newly created positions using a variety of methods” (SHRM, n.d., p. 91).

Self-Image: “Self-image refers to a person’s perception of himself or herself and the evaluation of that image. This definition of self-image incorporate the constructs of both self-concept and self-esteem” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 33).

Skills: “Ability to demonstrate a system and sequence of behavior that are functionally related to attaining a performance goal” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 33); “A proficiency or ability to perform a specific physical or mental task. Skill typically can be observed directly, or it can be inferred from the quality of a work product” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 62).

Soft Skills: “Personal and interpersonal behaviors that develop and maximize human performance (e.g., coaching, teambuilding, decision making, initiative). Soft skills do not include technical skills, such as financial, computer, quality, or assembly skills” (Bernthal, Weaver, & Wellins, 2003, para. 4).


Subject Matter Expert: “An individual who has a significant amount of knowledge on a particular topic” (SHRM, n.d., p. 105).

Succession Planning: “The process of identifying long-range needs and cultivating a
supply of internal talent to meet those future needs” (SHRM, n.d., p. 105). “The process of identifying individuals to be developed inside an organization” (Rothwell, 2009, 3).


**Talent Management**:

Broadly defined as the implementation of an integrated strategies or systems designed to increase workplace productivity by developing improved processes for attracting, developing, retaining and utilizing people with the required skills and aptitude to meet current and future business needs (SHRM, n.d., p.107);

“The act of handling, directing and controlling star performers—that is, those in the organization who possess a special natural ability or aptitude” (Rothwell, 2009, p. 2);

“Talent management means integrated efforts to recruit, develop and keep the best and most talented people” (Rothwell, 2009, p. 2).

**Thought Leaders**: “Thought leaders open themselves to new questions. They come at challenges from the future, not the past” (Phillips, 2006). A thought leader is someone who has a significant amount of relevant knowledge about a particular topic or topics and who shares with others his or her new thoughts and ideas.

**Three Hundred Sixty Degree Feedback (360-degree feedback)**:

An appraisal process whereby an individual is rated on his or her performance by people who know something about the individual’s work. This can include direct reports, peers, managers, customers or clients; in fact, anybody who is credible to the
individual and is familiar with his or her work can be included in the feedback process. The individual usually completes a self-assessment exercise on his or her performance, which is also used in the process” (SHRM, n.d., 107).

**Training and Development Applications:** “The entire range of human resources programs and processes dealing with training needs analysis, training curriculum design, coaching performance improvement and career development” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 61).

**Trait:**
Characteristics or consistent responses to situations or information that compel behaviors or cause them to occur. Traits can be inferred from the behaviors they compel (e.g., self-control, concern for others), but they cannot be directly observed. Psychologists believe that traits are enduring and highly resistant to change, and they lie at the core of personality (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 62).

**Threshold Competencies:** “Threshold or ‘essential’ competencies are required for minimally adequate or average performance” (Spencer, McClelland, & Spencer, 1994, p. 6).

**Total Rewards:** “All of the tools available to the employer that may be used to attract, motivate and retain employees. Total rewards include everything the employee perceives to be of value resulting from the employment relationship” (WorldatWork, n.d.).

**Training and Development:** “A process dealing primarily with transferring or
obtaining knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to carry out a specific activity or task” (SHRM, n.d., p. 110)

*Underlying Characteristic:* “Means the competency is a fairly deep and enduring part of a person’s personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and job tasks” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 9).

*Validation:*

The process of ensuring that premises from which a conclusion has been drawn are derived systematically. Competency validation is used to ensure that a competency model reflects behaviors that, if actually demonstrated, will lead to enhanced individual or organizational performance, and that the process used to assess a competency in fact provides a reasonable measurement of that competency (i.e., that the process measures what it is intended to measure” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 62).

**Significance of the Study**

The primary significance of this study is its scope of a relevant topic with senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders in areas throughout the world. The study and its findings add to the body of knowledge about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices and indicate suggestions for further research.

**Assumptions**

One assumption is that there would be individuals interested in participating, and there would also be those not interested. Another assumption is that the senior human
resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders would be familiar with the topic and understand the terms.

**Limitations**

The primary limitation is that the larger study is limited to companies within the research study groups. An additional limitation is that these companies are U.S.-based, although many of the companies do have locations throughout the world. There is a limitation concerning the thought leaders in that the representation is limited to those identified by the researcher. Another limitation is access to the myriad relevant works published on the topic worldwide.

Damage to the researcher’s roof and subsequently to her house occurred during the course of the research study. There are certain limitations as to the completeness of the records of this study and its literature review due to water and mold damage.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter One provided an introduction to the research study. The purpose of the study was described. The background of the study was discussed. Historical perspectives were offered. The conceptual framework for the research study was stated. Research questions were listed. Definitions of terms found in the review of literature and in the research study were covered. The significance of the research study was stated. Assumptions for the research study were addressed. Limitations for the research study were provided.
Chapter 2
Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe competencies and competency-based human resource management (CBHRM) practices. The key characteristics of competencies, critical components of competency work, applications, topics related to working with competencies, other methods if practices are not competency-based, results, the future, and lessons learned were identified, explored, and described. Thus, Chapter 2 is a review of the related literature. There are eleven sections in this chapter as follows: The first section provides the background. The second section features significant studies about competencies. The third section covers key characteristics of competencies. The fourth section describes the critical components of competency work. The fifth section highlights the applications. The sixth section address topics related to working with competencies. The seventh section covers other methods if practices are not competency-based. The eight section describes results. The ninth section addresses the future. The tenth section covers lessons learned. The eleventh section provides a chapter summary.

The Background

It has been over 35 years since David C. McClelland wrote his seminal article, *Testing for Competence Rather Than for ‘Intelligence.’* In the article, McClelland (1973) asserted that various tests such as IQ as well as personality tests which were often used as part of the hiring process at the time were not effective as predictors of competence. He suggested that individuals should instead be hired based on their competency in a given field.
In a special issue of *The Journal of Management Development* dedicated to providing an update about competencies and the way in which they drive performance as well as how competencies are developed, Richard E. Boyatzis (2008) served as editor and wrote an article titled *Competencies in the 21st Century*. In his feature article, Boyatzis (2008) pointed out a rather significant problem in the research that has been conducted on the topic since McClelland’s (1973) article first appeared in *The American Psychologist* and the many ensuing discussions which have followed in the literature. Boyatzis’ (2008) sums up the problem as follows:

The concept of competency-based human resources has gone from a new technique to a common practice in the 35 years since David McClelland (1973) first proposed them as a critical differentiator of performance. Today, almost every organization with more than 300 people uses some form of competency-based human resource management. Major consulting companies, such as The Hay Group, Development Dimensions International, and Personnel Decisions Incorporated and thousands of small consulting firms and independent consultants have become worldwide practitioners of competency assessment and development. And yet, the academic and applied research literature has trailed application. This has resulted in continued skepticism on the part of many academics and some professionals and less guidance to practitioners from on-going research than is helpful. Some of this is due to the observation that many of competency validation studies have been done by consultants who have little patience for the laborious process of documenting and getting the results published (para. 1).

The problem which Boyatzis (2008) described in his article has indeed caused a major
dilemma and challenge for the field. This problem is not a new one; it has been at issue amongst competency circles throughout the world since the concept of competencies unfolded with the publishing of McClelland’s *Testing for Competence Rather Than for ‘Intelligence’* article in *The American Psychologist* in 1973, and it remains an important issue today—more than 35 years later.

**Significant Studies about Competencies**

Studies are a significant part of a review of the literature (Fink, 2009; Hart, 1999; Machi & McEvoy, 2008; Ridley, 2008). The studies identified in the review of literature related to this corresponding research study are about competencies and some are also focused on competency-based human resource management. They help create the foundation of this research study by serving as integral building blocks.

The purpose of each of the studies, the reasons for their significance, the research methodologies, the findings, and follow-up as well as the size and scope are greatly varied amongst the foundational studies. This research study has as its building blocks the following kinds of studies: (1) studies conducted with the purpose of learning more about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices; (2) studies conducted to ascertain competencies for leaders; (3) studies conducted to identify competencies required for a profession; and (4) studies that this researcher describes as classic studies. The studies identified, explored, and described in the review of literature for this research study are as follows:

**Studies Conducted with the Purpose of Learning More about Competencies**

Four of the studies identified as significant studies about competencies were conducted with the purpose of learning more about competencies. These studies are as
follows: (1) The 1996 American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc. Study; (2) the 1998 Development Dimensions International (DDI) Job/Role Competency Practices Study; (3) the 1999 – 2000 William M. Mercer Inc. Study; and (4) the 1999 Behavioral Technology® Study. Below is an exploration of each of these four studies.


The American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc. (2002) conducted a research study of competency-based HR applications that are integrated. An introduction to and an overview of the study is as follows:

The 1996 ACA Study: Executive Summary

The American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc. (1996) conducted a very comprehensive research study of “integrated competency-based HR applications” (p. 5). The study (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996) had three tiers of research as follows: Tier 1 included fax-back questionnaires sent to companies in North America; Tier 2 included the development of questionnaires—a set of five different ones to gather information about the 1,257 applications that were identified in Tier 1; In Tier 3, each research firm associated with the study conducted a number of case studies in an effort to discover the objectives of the competency model, time frames required for model development, and applications that were specific for compensation.
The 1996 ACA Study: Reasons for Its Significance

The 1996 ACA study is a very significant study of competency-based practices because of its large-scale size, its methodology, its scope and breadth of inquiry regarding practices, the participation and involvement of four major consulting firms in the field, and its definition of terms.

The 1996 ACA Study: Purpose of the Study

The ACA study was conducted “as part of its ongoing effort to examine and document emerging issues in compensation in North America” (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 5).

The 1996 ACA Study: The Project and Its Methodology

The project featured three tiers of research. The activities within each tier are as follows (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996):

Tier 1: Identifying Competency-Based Applications –

Tier 1 involved a fax-back questionnaire which was distributed to 19,016 companies in North America. The companies were identified from two main sources as follows: (1) a search of the membership of the American Compensation Association’s database, with at least one professional in HR per organization was identified to receive a survey, and (2) a list of human resource vice presidents that were available from the American Business Lists along with a list from Dun & Bradstreet (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996).
The following definition of competencies was developed: “Individual performance behaviors that are observable, measurable and critical to successful individual or corporate performance” (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 10). This definition then formed a question for respondents; the question stated that based on the definition given (listed above) which of the following best described their situation as it related to competency-based applications:

- Competency-based applications are in place now.
- Competency-based applications are being studied or under development.
- Competency-based applications have not been used, nor are they being considered.
- Competency-based applications were implemented but are no longer in place (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996, p. 10).

Out of the 19,016 questionnaires that were sent out during Tier 1, approximately two percent or 426 companies responded with 1,257 competency-based applications identified as being in use or were being studied (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996).

Tier 2: Gathering Application Details –

In Tier 2, a set of questionnaires which included five different ones was prepared in order to gather additional information concerning the close to 1,257 applications which were identified in Tier 1. Then the questionnaires were sent to the respondents from Tier 1 and organizations that the researchers knew had applications or were in the process of
developing them. Those receiving the questionnaires were asked to complete a primary questionnaire of 10 questions which explored business strategies and objectives related to competencies and future goals. Additionally, they were asked to complete questionnaires which had 38 to 44 questions, specifically related to their HR applications (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996).

During Tier 2, data were gathered from 217 companies who indicated they had 247 competency-based applications either in place or in the process of development. Not all of the respondents who completed a primary questionnaire also completed the specific application questions, and other respondents indicated having the same competency model for multiple applications. The researchers, consequently, identified from the data only 148 competency models that were unique. Of the 148 models, 88 were in place, and 58 were in the process of being developed (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996).

Tier 3: Exploring Real-Life Applications –

In Tier 3, each of the research firms conducted several in-depth case studies examining the objectives for the competency model, the time frames for model development, and the specific application for compensation (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996).

The 1996 ACA Study: Findings

An overview of the findings as reported by the American Compensation Association
in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc. (1996) is as follows:

- Competencies are adopted to ‘raise the bar’ on performance.
- Competencies are adopted to focus on the organization’s culture and values.
- Business strategies inform competencies.
- Competencies focus on how the performance results are achieved.
- Today’s competency applications are evolving and are not radical.
- Competencies provide a framework to integrate the HR applications.
- Compensation is the least used and newest application.
- It’s too soon to know how effective competencies are.

Specific findings are as follows:

The Business Case for Competencies –

“A variety of HR strategies are identified that best support business strategies; HR and business strategies are not strongly linked; and competency-based applications focus behavior” (pp. 15-16).

Building Competency Models –

A variety of work-force groups are covered, there is a greater emphasis on higher-level employees, applications are applied to large groups of employees; actual percentages differ, most competency-based HR applications are somewhat new, competencies are mostly defined at multiple levels, number of competencies applied to specific jobs/roles is less than the number for the models, competency models can have any criteria that is able to be described behaviorally, competencies tend to be defined and scaled, competencies are often validated to ensure relevance,
information for competencies comes from multiple sources, business strategy plays an important role in development, a year or more may be needed to create and implement competency applications, organizations use several communication techniques, formal employee training is most often accomplished by person-to-person interaction which is supplemented with written information, often behaviorally anchored rating scales are used for competency assessment, other resources are not required for administration.

Competency-Based HR Applications: Staffing –

· Competencies assist in making work-force planning decisions.

· Competency interviews and supervisor assessments are a part of staffing decisions.

· Many managers are trained to conduct behavioral interviews.

· Noncompetency criteria can have a major influence on hiring/staffing decisions.

· Very few legal challenges of competency-based staffing decisions are noted.

Competency-Based Applications: Training and Development –

· Training programs strive to broaden all types of competencies.

· There is a wide difference in the age of training and development programs.

· A combination of both classroom and experiential approaches support employee competency development.

· Competency gaps determine the training and development selection.

Competency-Based Applications: Performance Management –

· Formal performance processes are widespread.

· Competency-based performance planning is much less used.

· Competencies and results are both rated in performance appraisal programs.
· Competency data are used in employee development as well as in pay, promotion and training decisions.

· Organizations are split on the use of overall ratings for competency performance appraisal.

· Management judgment is still the most critical issue in determining competency ratings.

· Paper-based appraisal systems still predominate.

· Formal individual competency assessments are conducted widely.

· Development plans and objectives are developed by managers and employees together.

**Competency-Based Applications: Compensation –**

· Competencies are used the most for salary increase determination.

· Other factors also drive salary increase decisions.

· Competencies are noted in the determination of annual salary adjustments.

· Competencies are used along with other factors in job evaluation.

· Competencies drive structure position and movement.

· Employees who are overpaid as it relates to competencies are likely to see a slower salary growth or no salary growth.

· Competency-based compensation is often the last application to be developed.

**Lessons Learned –**

· Get more senior management support.

· Take a more systematic approach.

· Conduct more training.
· Improve communication.

· Establish clearer definitions.

· Obtain employee buy-in by having broader participation in design.

The research team also reported findings relative to overall issues in using competencies as well as issues related to the specific applications of staffing, training and development, performance management, and compensation (American Compensation Association (ACA) in Cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc., 1996).

*The 1996 ACA Study: Follow-Up*

A follow-up report to the study appeared the following year in the autumn issue of the *ACA Journal* titled *The State of Competencies: ACA’s Research One Year Later*. The report consisted of perspectives from the ACA research team on the “relevancy of the study and how the results have held up” one year later (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1997, para. 1). Topics of discussion included the following: “raising the bar on performance, measurement of competencies, competencies and change management, concerns about competencies, and the future of competencies” (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1997, para. 4 – 7).

*The 1998 Development Dimensions International (DDI) Job/Role Competency Practices Study*

Cook and Bernthal (1998) conducted a study about practices related to job/role competencies. An introduction to and an overview of the study is as follows:
The 1998 DDI Job/Role Competency Practices Study: Executive Summary

Researchers at Development Dimensions International (DDI) conducted a survey of their HR benchmark group on the topic of job/role competencies and their applications. The results were published in 1998 in a report titled *Job/Role Competency Practices Survey Report* (Cook & Bernthal, 1998).

The 1998 DDI Job/Role Competency Practices Study: Reasons for Its Significance

This study is significant because of its scope and depth in the coverage of competency-based human resource management practices. The questions in the study are very well organized and afford the opportunity for the gathering of a great deal of information with a limited number of acutely targeted questions.

The 1998 DDI Job/Role Competency Practices Study – Purpose of the Study

This study was designed with two objectives as follows: (1) to investigate the ways in which organizations identify job/role competencies as well as use them, and (2) examine the ways in which the applications affect organizational outcomes (Cook & Bernthal, 1998).

The 1998 DDI Job/Role Competency Practices Study: The Project and Its Methodology

This study involved a survey of HR Benchmark Group members. There were 292 participants in the survey. Cook and Bernthal (1998) reported the following topic areas covered in the survey:

- A general profile—percentage of the organizations that have defined job/role competencies, the job levels that competencies were first defined, the amount of time organizations have used competencies, and usage differences across the globe.
- Ways in which organizations identify job/role competencies.
The links to organizational systems.

- The value of job/role competencies.
- Impact on the bottom-line.
- Barriers.
- Job/role competencies.

Cook and Bernthal (1998) indicated that “the word ‘competencies’ is used in many contexts, with very different meanings” (p. 1). Competencies, explained Cook and Bernthal (1998) basically “fall into three categories or types” (p. 1) as follows:

1. Organizational competencies—unique factors that make an organization competitive.
2. Job/role competencies—things an individual must demonstrate to be effective in a job, role, function, task, or duty, an organizational level, or in the entire organization.

The 1998 DDI Job/Role Competency Practices Study: Findings

Cook and Bernthal (1998) indicate the following findings:

Definition and Coverage –

The findings indicated that competencies were fairly new to most organizations—two-thirds of those organizations responding used competencies for five years or less.

Priority in Defining Competencies –

Defining competencies was done most comprehensively for the first-level managers. It was done less fully for the senior-level managers. Non-management employees are usually the first group that competencies are defined.
Sources –

In terms of sources for supplying the data for the job/role competencies, of the organizations responding, eighty-five percent or more relied on data from managers as well as job incumbents. In terms of the number of sources, data was collected from three to seven sources by eighty-six percent.

Methods –

Methods of collecting competency data include interviews, focus groups, and surveys with eighty percent using interviews. Many of the organizations combine the methods but only a few rely on all three extensively. Close to seventy-five percent of the respondents use an analysis of the values and objectives for competency information.

Links to HR Systems –

In terms of applications, seventy-five percent of the organizations use job/role competencies for support of selection and promotion as well as training and development. Of the organizations responding, sixty-five percent have their performance management systems linked to job/role competencies. More than fifty percent of the organizations use job/role competencies to support their individual career planning and succession planning.

Value and Impact –

In terms of value and impact, a large percentage, ninety-one percent, of the responding organizations indicated that their processes related to selecting and designing of training programs were improved when training and development were supported by competencies. Organizations who reported six of their systems were supported by competencies amounted to ninety-one percent of the respondents, eighty-four percent
indicated five systems, seventy-three noted five systems, fifty-seven percent reported three systems, and thirty percent indicated two or fewer. Job/role competencies were viewed as at least moderately effective in improving overall organizational performance by sixty-seven percent of the respondents. Organizational improvement through competencies varied across the world with ninety-two of Asian and Pacific Rim organizations having reported that a moderate or better organizational improvement through competencies. That result was statistically higher than the improvement reported by the other regions including Canada, Europe, and the United States as well as Latin and South America.

Barriers –

As for barriers, more than half (fifty-four percent) of the organizations indicated that time and expense related to conducting comprehensive job analysis was a barrier, and close to half (forty-five percent) reported that there was a lack of a strategy for using the job/role competencies which was a significant barrier, and thirty-eight percent reported that linking competencies to the other organizational strategies was a significant barrier.

*The 1999–2000 William M. Mercer Inc. Study*

Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, and Dalik (2001) discussed a study involving competency-based HR applications which was conducted in 1999–2000 by consultants at William M. Mercer Inc. An introduction to and an overview of the study is as follows:

*The 1999–2000 William M. Mercer Inc. Study: Executive Summary*

Researchers with William M. Mercer Inc. conducted a study in 1999–2000 of over 130 HR executives with the goal of identifying practices, trends, needs, and determining the future of competencies and competency-based applications (Rahbar-Daniels,
Ericksen, & Dalik, 2001).

The 1999 – 2000 William M. Mercer Inc. Study: Reasons for Its Significance

The study was of significance because of the range of questions about competencies and their applications.

The 1999 – 2000 William M. Mercer Inc. Study: Purpose of the Study

Consultants of William M. Mercer Inc., conducted interviews with over 130 HR executives representing various large organizations through the U.S. towards the end of 1999 and continuing through early 2000. The purpose of the study was to do the following: “(1) Learn about their experiences in implementing competency-based HR, (2) Identify trends in system development and integration, (3) Gain knowledge of employers needs as they face the challenge of managing talent for today and tomorrow, and (4) Ascertain the future role of competencies” (Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, & Dalik, 2001, para. 4).

The 1999 – 2000 William M. Mercer Inc. Study: The Project and Its Methodology

The research included interviews either via telephone or face-to-face with HR executives and other individuals; each interview lasted on an average one to two hours. Of those companies who participated, forty percent had used competencies for either five years or longer, and seventy-five percent of those who participated had used competencies at least two years (Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, & Dalik, 2001).

The 1999 – 2000 William M. Mercer Inc. Study: Findings

The following four factors were listed (Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, & Dalik, 2001) as drivers found most commonly when introducing using competencies in an organization:

- Strengthening HR processes. Improve talent management processes through
integration of common practices. This could include using competencies to create more powerful recruiting and selection tools and/or training and career development grounded in the specific skills and competencies needed for success in a given organization (Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, & Dalik, 2001, para. 7).

- Achieve cultural integration and organizational alignment. Maintain cohesion and alignment following a disruptive organizational change such as merger/acquisition activity, divestiture or downsizing. This typically involves using an organization-wide core competency model to give employees a clear, explicit picture of the behaviors that the future organization will require for success and will expect in organizational members and leaders (Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, & Dalik, 2001, para. 7).

- Improve operational effectiveness. Build a competitive advantage by strengthening core operations. This entails using function-specific or job-specific competency models to raise the bar by identifying and reinforcing the behaviors that lead to top performance rather than simply evaluating behaviors required for average performers (Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, & Dalik, 2001, para. 7).

- Drive organizational change. Fundamentally change the way an organization operates in a new business, new markets, new technologies, etc. This involves creating competency models for selection and development that define the future. It also involves identifying the skills and competencies needed in the new venture area that are not present in abundance in the current employees, traditional business, market or technology (Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, & Dalik, 2001, para. 7).

Other findings focused on the scope, scope of coverage, methods used to create competency models, applications, use of multi-raters, linking competencies to pay,
measuring success, barriers to success, reaching the next level, integration, outcomes measurement, global applications, and the future potential future as it relates to competencies (Rahbar-Daniels, Erickson, & Dalik, 2001).

*The 1999 Behavioral Technology® Study*

Green (1999) provided an introduction to and an overview of the 1999 Behavioral Technology® Study as follows:

*The 1999 Behavioral Technology® Study: Executive Summary*

Behavioral Technology® (a training and development firm later purchased by Provant, Inc.) conducted a survey of 134 people working in diverse organizations. The topic was on the design and use of competency systems (Green, 1999).

*The 1999 Behavioral Technology® Study: Findings*

The following findings were reported (Green, 1999) and rank ordered as it relates to the objectives of competency systems:

- Link interviews, appraisal, coaching, training, and compensation to vision, mission, values, and culture.
- Plan for the skills needed to grow the organization.
- Communication valued behaviors.
- Clarify the focus of our leadership.
- Focus attention on quality/customer-oriented behaviors.
- Close gaps.
- Develop our competitive advantage.
- Identify selection criteria for interview.
- Structure the topics discussed in a performance appraisal.
· Develop a 360° feedback system.
· Plan for succession.
· Orient managers to corporate strategy and culture.
· Encourage cross-functional cooperation.
· Guide promotional decisions.
· Ease the flow of people across business and global boundaries (Green, 1999, p. 12).

Studies Conducted to Ascertain Competencies for Leaders

One significant study identified as a key study in the field was conducted to ascertain competencies for leaders and is the 2006 Dye and Garman Exceptional Leadership Study.

_The 2006 Dye and Garman Exceptional Leadership Study_

Dye and Garman (2006) provided an introduction and in-depth discussion of a study they conducted which involved identifying key competencies of value to healthcare leadership. The discussion included the following:

_The 2006 Dye and Garman Study: Executive Summary_

Dye and Garman (2006) conducted a research study to identify the key competencies for healthcare executives. The study was published in 2006 by Health Administration Press in a book titled _Exceptional Leadership: 16 Critical Competencies for Healthcare Executives_. A major contributor to the significance of the study is the way in which the competencies are grouped and defined. The purpose of this study was to identify the key competencies for healthcare executives. The project and its methodology involved the following steps: (1) an examination of competency lists that were prepared by various boards and executives in conducting executive searches, (2) the list was shortened to
include only those competencies that reliably differentiated those leaders who usually made it to a short list and got hired—the highest-performing leaders, (3) interviews with eight seasoned search consultants, (4) interviews with executive coaches and healthcare chief executive officers, and (5) a refinement of the 16 competencies through comparing and contrasting the competencies with a review of the literature and competency lists of major consulting firms (Dye & Garman, 2006).

The 2006 Dye and Garman Study: Reasons for Its Significance

The significance of the study is the way in which the competencies are grouped and defined.

The 2006 Dye and Garman Study: Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify key competencies for healthcare executives.

The 2006 Dye and Garman Study: The Project and Its Methodology

The project and its methodology involved the following steps: (1) an examination of competency lists that were prepared by various boards and executives in conducting executive searches, (2) the list was shortened to include only those competencies that reliably differentiated those leaders who usually made it to a short list and got hired—the highest-performing leaders, (3) interviews with eight seasoned search consultants, (4) interviews with executive coaches and healthcare chief executive officers, and (5) a refinement of the sixteen competencies through comparing and contrasting the competencies with a review of the literature and competency lists of major consulting firms (Dye & Garman, 2006).

The 2006 Dye and Garman Study: Findings

The findings included sixteen competencies related to exceptional leadership in
healthcare. The competencies were organized into four traits and are referred to as the “cornerstones of exceptional leadership” (Dye & Garman, 2006, p. xxi). The cornerstones are as follows: “(1) Well-Cultivated Self-Awareness, (2) Compelling Vision, (3) Real Way with People, and (4) Masterful Style of Execution” (Dye & Garman, 2006, pp. xxi – xxiv).

**Studies Conducted to Identify Competencies Required for a Profession**

Several significant studies were noted that sought to identify competencies required for a profession including the following: (1) The 1997 – 2003 Canadian Council of Human Resource Associations (CCHRA) and Canadian Federal Government (Human Resource Development) Study; (2) The 1999 World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA), Chartered Institute of Personnel (CIPD), and Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Study; (3) The 1987 – 2007 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and RBL Institute Studies; and (4) The 1978 – 2009 American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) Studies.

*The 1997 – 2003 Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations (CCHRA) and Canadian Federal Government (Human Resource Development) Study*

The Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations (CCHRA) and the Canadian Federal Government (Human Resource Development) (1997-2003) conducted a project to “define the body of work for Human Resources, to raise the expectations of H.R. practitioners, to establish credibility and to increase the market value of the designation and establish a common standard assessment of CHRP candidates throughout Canada” (Charette, n.d.). Below is an introduction to and an overview of the study:

*The 1997 – 2003 CCHRA Study: Executive Summary*
The Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations (CCHRA) is an umbrella organization which represents associations in the field of human resources and several specialist associations within the provinces. In 1997, the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations embarked on a project with five goals related to the profession of human resources. The project consisted of four phases and comprised a number of activities including a literature review, subject matter expert involvement, focus groups sessions, and an assessment. Once approval was achieved, the standards for the profession were launched in March 2003. A framework for a recertification was also created for holders of the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) credential; the emphasis for the framework was continual professional development. Charette (n.d.), the former President of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations, described the project in the details that follow.

*The 1997 – 2003 CCHRA Study: Reasons for Its Significance*

The study is significant because of the goals, the extensive literature review, the research methodology during the four phases, and the outcomes. The term “capabilities” was used in some of the activities, and in other parts, the term “competencies” was used.

*The 1997 – 2003 CCHRA Study: Purpose of the Study*

The Canadian Council of Human Resource Associations, an umbrella organization representing human resource associations and several specialist associations in the provinces, began a project in 1997 with the following goals: (1) to define a body of work for human resources, (2) to increase the expectations of practitioners, (3) to establish credibility, (4) to enhance the market value of their certified human resources professional (CHRP) designation which was established in the 1990s to
recognize achievement and capabilities of human resource practitioners, and (5) to establish a standard assessment for CHRP candidates that would be the same throughout Canada (Charette, n.d.).

_The 1997 – 2003 CCHRA Study: The Project and Its Methodology_

The Canadian Council of Human Resources Association joined forces with the Canadian Federal Government (Human Resource Development Canada) and formed a National Capabilities Committee (NCC) which was comprised of experienced practitioners to oversee the process of developing a profile of required HR capabilities, the standards of assessment for the capabilities, and a model for measuring the capabilities of candidates. The project consisted of four phases.

Phase One –

During Phase One, which took place in 1997 and 1998, the National Capabilities Committee (NCC) developed an outline for capabilities, a study of the capabilities that human resource professionals needed to meet the requirements of both Canadian clients and employers. Focus group sessions were conducted with chief executive officers (CEOs), senior level executives, practitioners in the field of human resources, and individuals across Canada who represented the educational committee. The National Capabilities Committee (NCC) then edited as well as validated the capabilities on the list. Nearly two hundred individuals participated in this phase, and the Canadian Human Resources profile was published as a result of the work.

Phase Two –

In Phase Two, which occurred during 1998 and 1999, teams comprised of subject matter experts developed assessment standards for those human resource capabilities
listed in the Canadian Human Resources Capabilities Profile. The standards highlighted the evidence needed to make a determination of whether or not an individual possesses each of the capabilities.

Phase Three –

Phase Three was underway during 1999 and 2000 and included the development of a pilot assessment centre in cooperation with one of the member associations of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Association (CCHRA), the Human Resources Association of Nova Scotia (HRANS). The pilot centre was established in Halifax; the use of the developed assessment standards as it relates to professional accreditation programs was tested there.

Phase Four –

The fourth and final phase of the project involved implementation and took place from 2000 to 2003. At this time, the developmental work to establish national assessment processes and build support structures for the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) candidates across Canada was conducted. This resulted in the creation of an organization called the Professional Standards Organization to be responsible for the management and support of the national process in Canada. Agreement was achieved nationally in Montreal, Quebec in June 2001 with the unanimous approval by all of the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) granting associations; this is now referred to as The Montreal Framework. Following agreement on this framework, objectives were revised and budgets were developed as was a business model for the organization, governance, and financing for the Professional Standards. Upon approval, a national launch date was established for March 2003. A framework for a three-year re-
certification was also created for all Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) holders with an emphasis on continual professional development.

Following the completion of the project, there were many transitional issues to be managed as well as specific issues related to various individual association members of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Association (CCHRA).

In addition to the above listed activities, a review of the literature and accompanying bibliography was compiled (Catano, 1998) and published.

The 1997 – 2003 CCHRA Study: Findings

The standards for the profession were launched in March 2003. A framework for a recertification was also created for holders of the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) credential; the emphasis for the framework was continual professional development.

The 1997 – 2003 CCHRA Study: Follow-Up

Since completion of that project, the work of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations (CCHRA) has continued with the creation of a revised body of knowledge and required professional capabilities in October 2007 (Canadian Council of Human Resources Association, 2007), and, in November 2009, the findings from input of more than 8000 professionals in the field of human resources throughout Canada was slated to be validated as the new body knowledge will be implemented during exam sessions in October 2010 (CCHRA, 2009).

The 1998 – 1999 World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Study
The World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) conducted a study in 1998 – 1999. An introduction to and an overview of the study is provided below.

The 1998 – 1999 WFPMA, CIPD, and SHRM Study: Executive Summary

The World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA), now called the World Federation of People Management Associations (WFPMA), was established in 1976 and represents over 400,000 professionals in the field of people management in over 70 national personnel associations. In 1998 and 1999, the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA) began a research study to create a definition of what it is that a human resources professional means and does via a set of global competencies. The project included the development of research questions, a literature review, and the creation and implementation of three surveys. Additionally, there was a follow-up survey conducted in 2004.

The 1998 – 1999 WFPMA, CIPD, and SHRM Study: Reasons for Its Significance

This is a significant study because it involved a global exploration of what an human resource professional means and does as it relates to a global set of competencies. Additionally, the report of the study is comprehensive and includes a review of literature.

The 1998 – 1999 WFPMA, CIPD, and SHRM Study: Purpose of the Study

In 1998, the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA), now called the World Federation of People Management Associations (WFPMA), began a research project with the goal of developing “a worldwide definition of what an HR professional is and does in terms of a ‘global set of core competencies’” (Brewster,

The 1998 – 1999 WFPMA, CIPD, and SHRM Study: The Project and Its Methodology

The study, international in scope, was funded by the WFPMA and was supported by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), which was the Secretariat of the WFPMA at that time, and the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM). Brewster, Farndale, & von Ommeren, (2000) describe the study as indicated below.

The first step involved determining how plausible the study was, and, if appropriate, how the project would continue in an effort to define the competencies in detail. After this was achieved, the second phase focused on defining “a set of professional standards” (Brewster, Farndale, & von Ommeren, 2000, p. 1). “The approach that was taken considered the full range of practices in various countries’ professional standards as well as certification programmes through a literature review and worldwide surveys” (Brewster, Farndale, & von Ommeren, 2000, p. 1).

The research questions associated with the project were as follows:

∙ How do different countries define the standards for what constitutes an HR professional?

∙ What are the competencies they will need to be able to apply at various levels of their professional activities, from the operational to the most strategic?

∙ How do national associations certify the attainment of professional standards?

∙ What are the learning and development routes they might pursue in order to keep up-to-date those competencies?

∙ Are there generic standards of professionalism in HR common to all or many countries?
· What are the professional standards that might be appropriate to certify their attainment of these competencies?

· Could standards be expressed in such a way that they would be helpful to emerging professional associations wishing to develop HR professionalism in their country? (Brewster, Farndale, & von Ommeren, 2000, p. 1).

The project included a literature review which examined relevant topics as follows:

human resources as a profession, definitions of HR competencies, developing an HR competency model, variations in the HR competency requirements, national context, organizational context, time context, and competency acquisition.

The methodology of the study included three surveys, each separate, but related and were as follows: (1) a survey for personnel management associations worldwide which sought to gather data about the nature of the association, education and training, skills and knowledge, and respondent demographics; (2) a follow-up survey conducted at a U.S. conference which was focused on education and training as well as levels/tasks of practitioners, and (3) a survey of the human resource academics worldwide.

A total of fifty-three countries were contacted; there were twenty-eight responses by either the returning of a personnel management association questionnaire and/or the returning of an academic literature questionnaire. The overall response rate, therefore, was fifty-three percent.

A postal survey with four sections was developed for the survey of personnel management associations. The topics addressed in each section are follows: (1) the nature of personnel management association, such as demographic information about the membership, (2) education and training, such as the types of training courses; (3) skills
and knowledge, such as which levels of HR practitioners are assigned which tasks; and
(4) personal details of the respondents.

Seventy questionnaires were mailed to fifty-one countries throughout the world on
January 5, 1999. The questionnaires were primarily sent to the senior level of the
individual national personnel management associations. The response rate was thirty-
one percent and covered forty-one percent of those countries contacted.

The second survey was circulated amongst those attending a presentation about the
project during a conference in Orlando in April 1999. There were ten shortened
questionnaires, and the questions asked were limited, focusing on education and training,
the levels practitioners were responsible for various tasks, and personnel details
regarding the respondents. The results were checked against the response from SHRM. It
provided additional information about whether effects of idiosyncratic answers from the
respondents was limited. To a large degree, the results reinforced data which was
provided by SHRM.

The academic literature survey, the third of the surveys of the project, was sent to
forty-eight individuals in twenty-seven countries, and all seventy of the recipients of the
primary (first) survey were asked send an academic literature questionnaire on to an
appropriate academic representative of their country. A total of twenty-three responses
were received from twenty countries.

*The 1998 – 1999 WFPMA, CIPD, and SHRM Study: Findings*

Amongst the background information of the personnel management associations
collected, the findings indicated that most of the associations (sixty-two percent) offered
a combination of individual and organizational membership categories and only two
countries of the twenty-two limit their membership to organizations.

The second section focused on education and training, in particular, the level of achievement of the associations’ members and education and training endeavors of each association. More than half of the respondent associations offered certified courses of study in personnel management and/or recognize the programs of other institutions. Of the courses, over half of those offering programs differentiate between the levels of competencies with an elementary level course of study and an advanced level. Approximately 550 individuals per association or a total of more than 51,000 individuals per year in twenty-two countries participated in programs offered. The courses offered addressed a full spectrum of personnel management issues in most countries.

In the skills and knowledge section, the focus was on what was required by practitioners according to the associations. About half (fifty-three percent) of the respondent associations defined or published a guideline on what skills and knowledge are required for the activities and responsibilities of practitioners. More than three-quarters of the associations have established a code of conduct which sets guidelines for practitioners. Data gathered in this section of the survey indicated that there was the existence of both a body of knowledge as well as codes of conduct which are key findings as it relates to establishing professionalism for the field of human resources.

The 1998 – 1999 WFPMA, CIPD, and SHRM Study: Follow-Up

A follow-up questionnaire was developed and sent out to seventy people in October 2004 inquiring as to which countries had made use of the WFPMA competencies research in subsequent developments. A total of ten responses were received; of those responding, two countries including Slovakia and Venezuela had used the research on
competencies. Other countries had used the research to increase awareness or had used
competencies identified in the research in their training programs. Several of the
respondents reported that following the publication of the research on competencies by
the WFPMA an increase use of competencies (WFPMA, n.d.).

The 1987 – 2007 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and
RBL Institute Studies: The Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS)

Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, and Younger (2008) reported the latest
round in the Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS) and also provided an overview
of past studies. The following is an introduction to and an overview of the studies:

The 1987 – 2007 Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS): Executive Summary

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the RBL Institute have
conducted studies for more than twenty years on human resource competencies (Ulrich,
Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, & Younger, 2008). The HR Competency Study (HRCS)
has had five rounds of data collection during this time with five competency models
developed—one in each of the following years, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2007
(Ulrich et al., 2008). The significance of the studies includes the goals, the length of time
during which the studies were conducted, the evolvement of the project over time, the
size and scope, the findings, and the way in which the findings are presented.

The purpose of the studies was to identify the competencies of a human resources
professional. A major purpose of the initial Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS)
study was to develop an understanding of HR competencies as well as practices of
leading U.S. firms, which biased the research in that the companies were large American
companies (Ulrich et al., 2008). In the subsequent rounds, the sample was more global as
well as more emphasis was placed on firms of various sizes (Ulrich et al., 2008).

In 1988, 250 companies were invited to participate with 91 choosing to be involved with the study (Ulrich et al., 2008). The companies were drawn from the 1988 FORTUNE magazine’s list of the most admired companies in America, 50 of the largest firms in America in 1988 as listed in the Human Resource Executive, and firms that research team members had contacts (Ulrich et al., 2008). In 1992 and 1997, similar methodologies were used (Ulrich et al., 2008). A greater emphasis was placed on gaining a sample that was more global by including partners from various geographic areas (Ulrich et al. 2008). This partnership methodology was continued in latest Round in 2007 which resulted in 441 participating companies worldwide (Ulrich et al., 2008).

The project and its research methodology have evolved during the five rounds but the same premises, in terms of the sample procedure and participants as well as the survey questions, has been applied (Ulrich et al., 2008). The findings of the most recent study include six competency domains in the latest model including the following: “Credible activist, operational executor, business ally, talent manager/org designer, culture and change steward, and strategy architect” (Ulrich et al., 2008). The latest model (Ulrich et al., 2008) is the most dynamic because of the many changes in the field during the last few years.

The 1978 – 2009 American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) Studies

An introduction to and an overview of the ASTD competency studies is as follows:

The 1978 – 2009 ASTD Studies: Executive Summary

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) has conducted seven studies related to competencies for the profession including the following: A Study of

The studies are significant because they are focused on competencies and have been conducted over a long period of time. The project activities, the research methodology, and outcomes of the study are noteworthy. The 2004 study was of particular interest as it led to the Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP) credential for the profession which is earned through meeting the requirements developed for the certification, and many different and new learning opportunities for competency development are now offered (ASTD.org, n.d.).

The purpose of the most recent study was to identify the current and emerging trends of the field and develop a comprehensive and future oriented competency model with the required competencies to meet the challenges of the profession. The 2004 study involved four phases. The first phase included a needs assessment and data collection activities; the second phase featured the development of the competency model; phase three was focused on validation and expansion via an online survey, and the fourth phase included a refinement and approval of the model (Bernthal et al., 2004).

The ASTD workplace learning and performance (WLP) model developed in 2004
includes roles, areas of expertise (AOEs), and foundational competencies (Bernthal et al., 2004). The four identified roles are as follows:

*Learning strategist, business partner, project manager, and professional specialist;*

the nine areas of expertise (AOEs) include: *career planning and talent, coaching, delivering training, designing learning, facilitating organizational change, improving human performance, managing the learning function, managing organizational knowledge, and measuring and evaluating;* and three foundational competencies, which define the relevant behaviors needed as a learning and performance professional including *interpersonal, business and management, and personal* (Bernthal et al., 2004, p. 50).

As a follow-up to the 2004 study, ASTD conducted an in-depth literature review and survey as well as conducted interviews with both practitioners and thought leaders (Salopek, 2008). The research team determined that the competencies and areas of expertise in the current WLP model continue to be relevant today; it was noted, however, that there are two significant trends, that of technology and increased expectations to leverage the technology and globalization (Salopek, 2008). Also, a foundational competency, *applying business skills* and an area of expertise, *career planning and talent management*, are even of greater prominence (Salopek, 2008).

Separately, ASTD recently conducted a study to identify the competencies required for a world-class sales organization. A four-phase process was used which included the following: data collection, competency model development, validation, and, finally, refinement and confirmation. Specifically, the study included over forty-five one-on-one interviews of subject matter experts, seventeen focus groups world-wide, and validation
of the model with more than 2,000 international survey respondents (Lambert, Ohai, & Kerkhoff, 2009; Salopek, 2009).

**Classic Studies about Competencies**

Two significant studies were identified as classic studies in the field. The first is The 1970 McBer and Company and U.S. State Department Study, and the second is The 1981 Boyatzis Competent Manager Study. An introduction to and an overview of the studies are as follows:

*The Early 1970’s McBer and Company Study*

One classic study in the field of competency work which was amongst the very first is the 1970 McBer and Company Study. The study is briefly summarized below.

*The Early 1970’s McBer and Company Study: Executive Summary*

One classic study in the field was amongst the very first of the studies conducted “to look for research methods that would identify ‘competency’ variables, which could predict job performance and were not biased (or at least less biased) by race, sex, or socieoeconomic factors (McClelland, 1993, in Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 3).

The U.S. State Department approached McBer and Company in the early 1970’s with the request for help in the selection of junior Foreign Service Information Officers (FSIOs). Previously, the selection of FSIOs was based on the results of a Foreign Service Officer exam.

The McBer and Company representatives compared a group “composed of superstars, the most brilliant and effective young diplomats” with an average group comprised of “people who did their jobs just well enough not to get fired” (McClelland, in Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 4).
Additionally, the McBer and Company representatives developed a technique which was called the Behavioral Event Interview (BEI) which combined the critical incident method developed by Flanagan (1954) with the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) probes which were created during thirty years of studying motivation (McClelland, in Spencer & Spencer, 1993). As McClelland (1993) indicated Flanagan’s interest had been in identifying task elements of jobs while McBer and Company were interested in those characteristics of the people who performed a job well. The BEI transcripts were thematically analyzed and coded. The differences between characteristics shown by superior and average performances are measured empirically and then tested statistically. The results were those competency characteristics that differentiated the superior from the average information officers.

The 1981 Boyatzis Competent Manager Study

Another study which has become a classic in the field of competency work is the 1981 Boyatzis Competent Manager Study. A brief summary is included below.

The 1981 Boyatzis Competent Manager Study: Executive Summary

Richard E. Boyatzis (1982) and colleagues conducted what has become a classic study in the field of competency work. His research involved the study of over 2,000 people in forty-one management jobs within twelve organizations. The 1981 Richard E. Boyatzis study is significant in that it was a large-scale study of 2,000 people, the focus of the study was competencies, and the study identified nineteen competencies related to a successful performance as a manager. As a classic in the field, the published account (Boyatzis, 1982) of the study defined and described in great detail many of the key terms in competency work and is, therefore, an excellent resource for terminology in the field.
A leading thought leader in the area of competency work, Boyatzis studied at Harvard under McClelland, the founding father of a new method of approaching human resources through competencies, and worked with McClelland at McBer and Company.

The purpose of the study was “to determine which characteristics of managers are related to effective performance in a variety of management jobs in a variety of organizations” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 8). Further describing the study, Boyatzis (1982) stated:

It was not an objective of this study to predict managerial performance to a high degree (i.e., explain a majority of the variance in performance). Specifically, the objective was to explain some of the differences in general qualitative distinctions of performance (e.g., poor versus average versus superior managers) which may occur across specific jobs and organizations as a result of certain competencies which managers share (pp. 8-9).

The study had an additional purpose and is described as follows:

To investigate how these competencies may affect other each other (i.e., a competency model of management) and to propose a framework of how they relate to other aspects of management jobs. In addition to the competency model of managers, this will result in a broader theoretical model of management (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 9).

The findings identify competencies critical to performance in management. The study (Boyatzis, 1982) was published by John Wiley & Sons, New York in a book titled The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance.

Key Characteristics of Competencies

The characteristics of competencies are explored below.
What is a Competency?

“We all have competencies” (Pickett, 1998, para 2). “These are the sum of our experiences and the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes we have acquired during our lifetime” (Pickett, 1998, para. 2). In the world of work, we use our competencies to perform as indicated by the following:

In the workplace we use our competencies to perform a variety of behaviors and activities, which in turn produce outputs (products and services) that we provide to others. It is the quality of these outputs and the reactions of those who receive them that lead to results with positive, negative or neutral consequences for the organization; the people who work there; and its suppliers, shareholders, clients, and customers (Pickett, 1998, para. 3).

Boyatzis (2008) defined a competency “as a capability or ability” (para. 3). In further describing a competency, Boyatzis (2008) added “it is a set of related but different sets of behavior organized around an underlying construct, which we call the ‘intent’. The behaviors are alternate manifestations of the intent, as appropriate in various situations or times” (para. 3).

Others have created their own versions in defining a competency since Klemp (1980) defined the term, and Boyatzis (1982) supplemented Klemp’s definition. A review of the literature produced a number of variations in the defining of the word. The following definitions serve as examples:

“A competency is an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 9);
“Competencies are tools used by workers in a variety of ways to complete units of work or job tasks” (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004, p. 18);
“An individual competency is a written description of measurable work habits and personal skills used to achieve a work objective” (Green, 1999, p. 5);
“Competencies are abilities, skills, traits, and behaviors that contribute to superior performance in a job” (Cripe & Mansfield, 2002, p. 2);
“Competencies are a set of professional and personal skills, knowledge, values, and traits that guide a leader’s performance, behavior, interaction, and decisions” (Dye & Garman, 2006, xii).

Another definition of a competency that was synthesized from suggestions of HRD specialists who attended a conference about competencies in October 1995 in Johannesburg, South Africa is as follows:

A cluster of related knowledge, skills and attitudes (K, S, A) that affects a major part of one’s job (a role or responsibility) that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured against well-accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development (Parry, 1996, para. 11).

And Spencer, McClelland, and Spencer (1990) offer the following definition:

Competencies can be motives, traits, self-concepts, attitudes or values, content knowledge, or cognitive or behavioral skills—any individual characteristic that can be measured or counted reliably and that can be shown to differentiate significantly between superior and average performers, or between effective and ineffective performers (p. 6).

The research team representing the American Compensation Association (ACA), Hay
Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, and William M. Mercer, Inc. (1996) defined competencies as “individual performance behaviors that are observable, measurable and critical to successful individual or corporate performance” (p. 10).

Byham (2006) prefers to use the term dimensions instead of competencies for the following reasons:

The term dimension is free of the common-usage meanings or interpretations usually attributed to competencies. While some organizations describe attributes of a job/role as competencies, an equal number use the term to describe attributes of the organization itself (such as, the “core competency” of the Canon Corporation is optical Technology).

Dimensions is the term used in many scientific books and journals.

Because the term dimension has no inherent meaning, it can be defined in ways that are more responsive to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Guidelines. The term competency, on the other hand, is associated with individual capability or proficiency and implies mastery of an area that might not be applied by a job/role analysis (Byham, 2006, p. 2).

Byham (2006) defines both dimensions and competencies as “descriptions of clusters or groupings of behaviors, motivations, and knowledge related to job success or failure under which data on motivation, knowledge, or behavior can be reliably classified” (p. 2).

There are a large number of definitions for the term competencies; the above list represents just a few. The number has even been described as bewildering as indicated in the following statement, “there is a bewildering number of definitions of ‘competency’
As to the reason(s) for the term being redefined so frequently, the following suggestion was offered: “In part this is because organizations and competency ‘experts’ seem to prefer their own definitions of competencies to those that have gone before” (Whidett & Hollyforde, 2000, p. 3).

Schools of Thought about Competencies

There are a number of schools of thought regarding competencies. While some consider competencies a capability, others view capabilities as separate and distinct from competencies. Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, Younger (2008) view the two as “not interchangeable terms” (p. 22). Ulrich et al. (2008) provide the following definitions: “Competencies refer to the knowledge and behaviors demonstrated by individuals in the course of getting their work done,” and capabilities are defined as “the collective abilities of an organization” (p. 22).

There is also another difference in perspectives about the meaning of the term competencies. As Dubois and Rothwell with King Stern and Kemp (2004) pointed out there is a difference between worker competencies, or as they are often referred to—job/role competencies, with another term called organizational core competence, and it sometimes creates confusion. Prahalad and Hamel (1990), in their highly regarded work, suggest that “core competencies are the collective learning in the organization,” and that “if core competence is about harmonizing streams of technology, it is also about the organization of work and the delivery of value” (p. 81). With that philosophy and in that use of term, “an organization’s core competence is built on its core competencies” (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004, p. 40).
Critical Components of Competency Work

In order for competencies to be applied to the functions and processes of human resources, there is work involved in order to accomplish that. The following represents some of the critical components of competency work.

Competency Identification

A key activity involved with competency work is that of competency identification. The term competency identification means a process of discovering the key competencies that are linked to job success (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004). There are a number of ways to identify competencies; amongst the methods are the job competence assessment method (JCAM), the competency menu method, and the modified DACUM method (Dubois & Rothwell, 2000; Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004).

The job competence assessment method was originated by David C. McClelland (1996). A behavioral event interview is used to collect and analysis data. This method combines a technique developed by John Flanagan (1954) called the critical incident technique with another way of data gathering which McClelland (1985) worked on for many years called the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The emphasis of the critical incident technique developed by Flanagan (1954) was the identification of task elements of jobs; McClelland’s (1985) focus, on the other hand, was on the characteristics of people who did well on a job (Spencer, McClelland, & Spencer, 1990).

The basis for the competency menu method, another type of competency identification tool, is competency lists which are obtained from various sources; menus are created from the lists and then the menus are used to identify the competencies required for a role
or job (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004).

A third method of competency identification is the modified DACUM method which takes the DACUM method (Norton, 1997), a job analysis technique that calls for a focus group approach in collecting, analyzing, and then presenting the results, and extends it so that abstract competencies, which are more difficult to identify as well as verify, are identified (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004). While DACUM can be used as a basis for arriving at competencies, the technique alone will not produce a competency model. It is used rather to describe categories that can be explored to identify underlying competencies.

**Competency Modeling**

“A competency model is a written description of the competencies required for fully successful or exemplary performance in a job category, work team, department, division, or organization” (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004, p. 23).

Competency models can be purchased or they can be built from scratch either by the organization or by a consultant. The process by which a competency model is developed varies greatly from one organization to another. Methods include such techniques as focus groups, surveys, and interviews (Dubois, 1993; Dubois & Rothwell, 2000; Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004; Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999).

Rothwell (2009) provides the following description of competency models:

Competency models describe the kind of people who are successful, or outstanding, in doing the work. Unlike activity-oriented job descriptions, competency models should be based on the results desired and then traced back to the individual characteristics required to achieve those results” (p. 53).
Competency Assessment

The process of measuring an individual’s competencies is called competency assessment. The methods of competency assessment vary; any approach that compares an individual’s current competencies with the competencies required for success on the job is a competency assessment. The competency is “what should be.” The individual’s rating is “what is.” The difference is “the gap” (Rothwell, 2009).

Two of the most popular methods of assessment are the multi-rater assessment and the assessment center method. Multi-rater assessment is also called full circle assessment (Rothwell, 2009). The method came to be called 360-degree feedback because it “covers the entire 360 degrees of the feedback circle” (Fleenor, Taylor, & Chappelow, 2008, p. 2). Feedback is gathered from an individual’s boss and co-workers as well as from the individual, people who report to the individual, various superiors, and others who interact with the individual (Bracken, Timmreck, & Church, 2000; Fleenor, Taylor, & Chappelow, 2008; Lepsinger & Lucia, 2009; Tornow & London, 1998).

“The assessment center method is a procedure used by human resource management (HRM) to evaluate and develop personnel in terms of attributes or abilities relevant to organizational effectiveness” (Thornton & Rupp, 2005, p. 1).

Applications

As human-resources (HR) departments have become more integrated it makes sense to have one common set of criteria to cover common themes in different people-management processes. This would ensure that key criteria used to select an individual are also used to monitor and manage their performance and to focus their training and development. Competencies are an efficient way of providing a common
framework of performance criteria for use across the full range of people-management processes (Whiddett & Hollyforde, 2006, p. 1).

Competencies have a number of applications in human resources (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004; Mitrani, Dalziel, & Fitt, 1992). It has been stated that “the term ‘human resources’ may refer to five different subjects” (Ulrich et al., 2008, p. 3). Those five subjects are all connected to this research study. The five subjects suggested to comprise the term human resources are as follows: “the HR profession, the HR department, HR practices (People, Performance, Information, and Work), HR professionals, and HR issues (Ulrich et al., 2008, pp. 3-5). Each of these “subjects” are connected to this research study in that competencies can be, and often are, connected with each.

Some of the applications for competencies in human resources are as follows: recruitment, selection, and placement; orientation of new employees; training; individual career development of non-leaders; development of leaders; succession planning; incentive, rewards, and compensation; managing day-to-day performance; and human resource planning (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004).

Topics Related to Working with Competencies

In working with competencies, there are benefits and challenges as well as many other aspects involving the beginning of a competency project through completion and onto evaluation and updates. The following topics are a few of those related to working with competencies.

Benefits: Some of the Reasons for Introducing Competencies

Leaders decide to use competencies in their organizations and embark on competency
projects for a variety of reasons. Pickett (1998, para. 24) suggested some of the following reasons for introducing competencies:

- Improve overall enterprise performance and increase competitiveness;
- Support the introduction of a cultural change program;
- Increase the effectiveness of training and development;
- Improve recruitment and selection processes and reduce employee turnover;
- Clarify managerial and specialist roles and increase focus on business objectives;
- Assist in career and succession planning;
- Analyze skills and identify current and projected skill deficiencies;
- Increase workforce flexibility;
- Facilitate the integration of enterprise human resource strategies;
- Support remuneration and reward programs.

**Guiding Principles to Integrate Competencies**

Adopting principles so as to have a guideline for integrating competencies when conducting a competency project aids in the success of a project. Pickett (1998) relayed some of the principles adopted in a project of the Australian Competency Research Center as they explored “ways of further integrating key competencies into existing training and learning arrangements for vocational education and training” (para. 28). “The project recognizes the need to develop flexibility and transferability of competencies as an outcome of training” (Pickett, 1998, para. 28). Those principles were as follows:

- Key competencies support lifelong learning;
- Key competencies can be learned and should be taught;
- Key competencies are transferable;
- Key competencies build on existing good practice;
- Key competencies must be integrated into all aspects of training;
- Key competencies should be assessed and reported in an integrated manner;
- Key competency performance is variable between contexts (Pickett, 1998, para. 28).

Pickett (1998) indicated that although the competencies were “intended specifically for application in the context of vocational education and training they also provide some helpful guidelines for people who may be called upon to lead or participate in a competency identification and development project” (para. 29).

Success Factors

There are many factors that come into play in projects involving competencies. Some of the factors identified include the following: “high level of management commitment and support, considerable staff involvement and input, commitment of adequate financial resources, and clearly defined objectives” (Pickett, 1998, para. 22) and certain required accountabilities and behaviors (G. D. Nelson, personal communication, August 2009).

Issues and Challenges

Issues and challenges can occur in working with competencies. Some of those problems are as follows: “Difficulty in identifying competencies, not allowing sufficient time for the project, resistance by staff, and lack of time, management support, and commitment” (Pickett, 1998, para. 23).

Pointing out a particularly significant problem, Pickett (1998, para. 23) suggested that causes for competency project failure includes “poor communication resulting in a
lack of understanding, insufficient available background information, and unmet expectations.”

**Number of Competencies**

The number of competencies selected by organizations varies greatly. In a sample of more than one hundred United Kingdom organizations with close to half a million people showed that most organizations chose to use ten or less competencies. More than one quarter of these organizations elected to use three to five competencies, and a similar number chosen between six and nine (Pickett, 1998).

**Developing Competencies**

An individual development plan (IDP) is a critical component in the use of competencies. The written plan includes the development needs, how those needs will be developed, and how the development efforts will be evaluated (Rothwell, 2009). It provides a focused approach to each individual’s development needs (Jacobson, n.d.).

There have been criticisms of the individual development plan process in that the Individual Development Plan (IDP) often places too much emphasis on an individual’s weaknesses and establishes expectations that every individual can effectively develop every competency (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). An effective individual development plan focuses on both the strengths and talents of an individual as well as those areas of skill and knowledge development (Jacobson, n.d.).

**Differences and Similarities in International Perspectives**

Some of the differences in competency practices internationally stem from the evolvement of the terms used in competency work. Whiddett and Hollyforde (1999) pointed out some of the origins of the terms including the way in which competencies
are defined and suggest that there are two main themes within the definition including that of descriptions of work tasks or job outputs (originating from national training schemes such as those with the National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications) and descriptions of behavior originating with definitions provided by Klemp (1980) and Boyatzis (1982).

Several of the studies (i.e., Brewster, Farndale, & van Ommeren, 2000; Cook & Bernthal, 1998) in the review of literature include data related to competency practices internationally, but there is a noticeable gap in comparing and contrasting competency-based practices globally.

**Other Methods if Human Resource Practices are not Competency-Based**

Dubois and Rothwell with King Stern and Kemp (2004) offer a chart which provides a comparison between traditional and competency-based human resource management. The authors indicate that the foundation of traditional human resource management is work analysis and job descriptions with work analysis serving as the basis for many of the human resource functions (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004). Listed in the job description are the work activities, while the expected work results are not stated in terms that are measurable or observable (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004). In competency-based human resource management, competencies are those traits which individuals use to achieve successful and exemplary performance (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004). Competency identification, competency modeling, and competency assessment are the foundational elements of competency-based human resource management (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004). The HR function is thus interested in discovering the worker traits which
results in fully successful and exemplary performance; the HR activities are then configured around cultivating the desired worker traits (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004).

**Results**

There are many results which can be achieved from applying competencies as the foundation of competency-based human resource management practices. Results can be achieved for individual contributors, for leaders, and for the organization. From providing a common language (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004) to describing to employees what is valued (Lamoreux, 2008), there are many results which can be achieved.

Some of the other results which can be achieved are noted by Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004) are as follows:

- Enhance competitive advantage;
- Develop better quality in products and services;
- Increase productivity;
- Position the organization for future growth;
- Facilitate culture change and transformation;
- Assist with large-scale organizational change;
- Foster positive outcomes with customers or suppliers;
- Increase financial performance;
- Establish systematic linkages and integration among HR management practices;
- Align HR management practices with the mission, vision, values, or the business strategies or objectives of the organization (p. 35).
With targeted competencies and through the effective use of competency models, a number of business and HR needs and challenges can be met (Dubois & Rothwell with King Stern & Kemp, 2004). Some of those needs and challenges are as follows: “clarifying job and work expectations, hiring the best available people, maximizing productivity, enhancing the 360-degree feedback process, adapting to change, and aligning behavior with organizational strategies and values” (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999).

**The Future**

Spencer, McClelland, & Spencer (1994) discuss four areas of focus for the future in competency work including the following:

- Rapid growth of the worldwide competency database will produce more precise generic models for superior performance in more economically important jobs, and more detail about cultural differences in competency expression.
- Advances in measurement more precise scaling of competencies and more ‘operant’ tests of non-traditional abilities should produce more and better methods of assessing and ‘credentialing’ competencies.
- Increased use of competency-based selection with diverse populations: better competency assessment methods will better discover what people *can* do—irrespective of their race, age, sex, formal education, credentials or previous work histories.
- Use of computers and artificial intelligence programs will evolve into integrated human resource information systems which can aid in determining the competency requirements of jobs, assessing individuals’ competencies, making optimum job-person matches using increasingly sophisticated pattern-matching algorithms, and
providing development advice or actual training based on assessed gaps between competencies people have and those needed to perform their jobs well (pp. 37-38).

Lessons Learned

There are many lessons to be learned from doing competency work in terms of competency projects and applications (American Compensation Association in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Towers Perrin, & William M. Mercer, Inc., 1997), and there are also lessons learned in conducting competency studies for professions (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, & Younger, 2008). Some of the lessons learned are “limit the number of job families, simplify competency models, select one vendor for competencies, integrate with talent management, and develop a common language” (Lamoureux, 2008, pp. 43-44).

Chapter Summary

Studies that have been conducted and are of relevance to this research study are those which focus on competencies including how competencies are used in organizations, for professions, and positions in organizations as well as studies which are focused on applications. There are also studies which can be described as classic studies in the field. Studies involving competencies can be conducted in a number of different ways, and they vary greatly in terms of the purpose, the reasons for their significance, the research methodologies, the findings, and follow-up as well as the size and scope.

Some researchers focus more on the applications than on the competencies themselves especially in terms of the literature. A significant challenge in competency work is in the terminology as many consultants and practitioners prefer to define the terms with their own definitions and that practice includes the word competency. There are many critical
components of competency work as well as topics related to working with competencies. Applications and results vary from one organization to another. And the lessons learned are many and rather varied.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe competencies and competency-based human resource management (CBHRM) practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders. The key characteristics of competencies, critical components of competency work, applications, topics related to working with competencies, other methods if human resource practices are not competency-based, results, the future, and lessons learned were identified, explored, and described.

To accomplish this, a research study was conducted to explore the practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders. This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first section provides the target population. The second section features the researcher’s professional background. The third section highlights a step-by-step approach to the pre-methodology phase including preliminary considerations, decisions, and background work. The fourth section describes the instrumentation phase. The fifth section covers the data collection phase. The sixth section addresses the data analysis phase. The seventh section provides a summary of the chapter.

Target Population

The population for this research study consisted of senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders of competencies and competency-based human resource management including researchers, authors, practitioners, consultants, scholars, academic professionals, educators, and speakers.
Professional Background of Researcher

The researcher is a former senior level healthcare executive and has experience working with an organizational psychologist during a period of time in which the psychologist was a consultant with the Hay Group, which McBer & Company, founded by David C. McClelland, is now a part of, and then worked with her as she started her own consulting firm during the merging of two hospitals with very different cultures into a healthcare system. In the researcher’s areas of operational responsibility at the healthcare system as Vice President of the Health Services Division, the researcher facilitated many focus group sessions and conducted interviews, including behavioral event interviews, to identify the requirements for the newly reconstructed positions in the merged organization.

Additionally, the researcher is experienced and skilled in researching, interviewing, writing, and editing with twenty years of experience in healthcare marketing and public relations. As a doctoral student, the researcher has co-authored two books (one on competency-based human resource management), conducted research for one other book, and worked on many projects in the field.

Pre-Methodology Phase

Preliminary Considerations, Initial Decision Making, and Early Research

The Pre-Methodology Phase involved preliminary considerations, initial decision making, and early research. The researcher took a step-by-step approach to the Pre-Methodology phase. Some of the steps overlapped in terms of timing. The approach taken in the Pre-Methodology Phase was as follows:

Step 1: Considered Research Study Topics.
The researcher discussed research topics with the chair of her doctoral committee. After a discussion, the researcher’s doctoral committee chair suggested competency-based human resource management as a research study topic. Having experienced the intense work involving the merging of two healthcare facilities, the researcher had a keen interest in the topic of competencies as well as that of psychology. Since competencies and competency-based human resource management practices have at their root the varied theories of psychology, the topics were an excellent choice and a great match for the researcher’s interests.

Step 2: Considered Target Population.

In considering the target population, the researcher was interested in business research including health care but desired a broad spectrum of industries. The researcher’s doctoral committee chair suggested looking at the FORTUNE companies and the Inc. 500 companies, two very different types of businesses, one set comprised of large, established, more traditional companies and the other being smaller, newer, and entrepreneurial-based.

As the researcher began a preliminary review of literature, she decided that the practices and perspectives of thought leaders of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices would add another dimension and bring additional value to the study. The researcher’s doctoral committee chair agreed.

Step 3: Conducted Several Reviews of Literature.

Literature reviews were conducted on several different topics covered in this research study. Those literature reviews were as follows: (1) a review of literature for Chapter 1 for sections titled Background of the Study, Historical Perspectives, Conceptual
Framework, and Definition of Terms; (2) a review of literature for Chapter 2 for the Key Characteristics of Competencies, Critical Components of Competency Work, Topics Related to Working with Competencies, Applications, Results, the Future, and Lessons Learned; (3) a review of literature for Chapter 3 on research methodology and its sub-topics and elite studies and elite interviewing.

Literature review work took place virtually at the PSU library, several other libraries, online at Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk, Barnes and Noble.com, Borders.com, publishers’ web sites, the search engines and stores of many associations and societies throughout the world, and general keyword searches with the major search engines. As a research study with global aspects, it was imperative to conduct a review of literature for Chapter 2 which included a review of available literature worldwide, that is, literature written by from authors in various parts of the world.

A review of literature was also conducted on elite studies and elite interviewing. As a skilled interviewer having conducted many interviews with elites during the course of her career, the researcher felt comfortable with the target population and conducting elite interviewing. The literature review on this topic served as a source of current techniques in the field. Below is a description of elite studies and elite interviewing.

Elite Studies and Elite Interviewing

This research study is an “elite study” as described in Research Methods for Elite Studies (Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987). In this 1987 classic, the importance of working with multiple research methods in such studies is emphasized.

Today, expert interviews are considered a standard method of qualitative approach in divergent fields of the political and social sciences, such as international relations,
science and technology studies, organizational research, gender studies etc. However, expert interviews are still marginalized in international discussions about the methodology and methods of qualitative research. Nevertheless expert interviews are frequently applied in empirical research and there is an increasing need for theoretical reflection and practical aid (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009, p. 1).

One study of elite interviewing in international business was identified as a relevant study on the topic. The study, conducted by Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen (1999), is described below.

*The 1999 Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen Study*

The 1999 Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen Study is a study about elite interviewing in international business. The study is explored below.

*The 1999 Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen Study: Executive Summary*

The Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen Study (1999) was a study about interviewing elites in international business (IB). To that end, the methodological experiences related to four international business projects were explored. The challenges and benefits of interviewing elites were discussed as were the experiences that occurred during four projects. The researchers indicated that there was a gap in the literature on the topic of interviewing elites in terms of depth and substance. Four major findings were reported.

*The 1999 Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen Study: Reasons for Its Significance*

This is a significant study of the topic because the researchers compared and
contrasted methodological experiences in interviewing elites and conducted a review of literature in a manner that resulted in findings that are rich in detail.

*The 1999 Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen Study:*

**Purpose of the Study**

The study was conducted to examine the topic of interviewing elites in international business.

*The 1999 Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen Study:*

**The Project and Its Methodology**

The project involved comparing and contrasting methodological experiences associated with the interviewing of elites as it related to four international business projects. Additionally, a review of literature was also conducted.

In an introduction to the topic in their published report of the study, Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen (1999) noted the following challenge in conducting an interview with an elite in international business research:

Most researchers in international business are likely to interact with elite interviewees at some stage of their research projects. The power of an elite interviewee stems from organizational hierarchy, corporate values and history, personal assets and degree of international exposure. However, handbooks on qualitative methodology do not address the ‘double trouble’ that most of us face: namely, the task of conducting an in-depth interview, while simultaneously balancing the power of an influential elite (p. 2).

Although the world is a very global one these days, and there is every reason to believe this will continue to be the case, a lack of substantial scholarly research devoted
to in-depth research on the topic of interviewing elites in international business research was evident. On that subject, Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen (1999) noted the following:

Despite growing recognition of the benefits associated with qualitative methods, there has been little examination of the specific issues regarding their application to international business research. Much of the existing work centres on the practical challenges of such research, particularly time and cost, or on the possibilities for cultural misunderstandings. These are important issues, but only few of the many hurdles an IB researcher typically faces. Researchers undertaking IB projects have had little alternative but to follow guides to qualitative methods which were developed for other fields of study, notably sociology (pp. 2 – 3).

The word “elite” means a group of persons who by virtue of position or education exercise much power or influence according to Merrian-Webster Online (n.d.). The elite group within a traditional business organization is said to be comprised of the firm’s top echelons (Giddens, 1972 in Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999). “Elite status is also affected by the company’s standing in relation to other firms in the industry and more broadly by its public image” (Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999, p. 6).

In their report of the study, Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen (1999) indicated they identified in their review of literature common concerns in interviewing elites centered around four themes as follows: “(1) getting access to elites, (2) dealing with their power in an interview situation, (3) assessing their openness, and (4) providing feedback to elites” (p. 6). In addressing these four issues in their study,
Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen (1999) discussed the following:

Gaining Access to Elites –

∙ Because access to elites is often restricted, researchers commonly find they need to approach interview subjects well in advance and in a formal way, deal with problems of incomplete and possibly unrepresentative samples, and gain approval from multiple gatekeepers prior to gaining direct contact with potential interviewees (pp. 6 – 7).

∙ Gaining access to elite settings and individuals poses different challenges compared to those encountered when studying non-elites. Where access issues differ is in the process of gaining the consent of informants. The two groups have different needs and respond to different cues (p. 7).

∙ Researchers must demonstrate they are worthy of the time and support of busy and often powerful individuals (p. 7).

Gaining the confidence of individuals who are non-elites “requires… a sympathetic understanding” (Hertz & Imber, 1993, p. 3, in Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999, p. 7). “This means putting interview subjects at ease, showing empathy, and affirming the validity of their opinions” (Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999, p. 7). “The challenge for researchers in elite settings is somewhat different. There, the issue is rather a matter of proving one’s professional credentials and standing” (Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999, p. 7).

Power of Elite Interviewees –

The problem of a power imbalance begins for the researcher when first seeking to
gain access (Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999, p. 8). Elite subjects may dominate an interview because as elites they are ‘professional communicators’ (Fitz & Halpin, 1995, p. 68 in Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999). Researchers run the risk of “overestimating the importance of what elites have to say, assuming, for example, that they necessarily know more and better what is going on in an organization” (Ostrander, 1993, p. 19 in Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999).

Openness of Elite Interviewees –

The concern here is that senior level individuals may be more guarded in their responses because they are representing the organization; however, as Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen (1999) indicated, on the other hand, some researchers have reported being surprised by the “degree of frankness they encountered from some elite informants” (p. 8), and some researchers have observed that the candor in interviews was related directly to the seniority of the interviewee (Sinclair & Brady, 1987, in Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999).

Feedback to Elite Interviewees –

Cooperation following the interview with elite subjects is very often of value to the research project (Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999). Follow-up correspondence (Thomas, 1993) and presentations of preliminary findings to an organization’s managers (Useem, 1995) are two methods of providing feedback to the elite interviewee (in Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999). However, Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen (1999) indicated that opinions on feedback differ with some researchers having concerns that their findings
will be censored by the elites (Ostrander, 1993 in Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999) or that the findings may be misinterpreted by managers (Hirsh, 1995 in Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 1999).

**The 1999 Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen Study: Findings**

Based on the data gathered from the four qualitative research projects involving interviewing elites in international business, Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, and Tahvanainen (1999) reported that the following major findings emerged:

First, identifying elites is far more complex than what the formal organizational hierarchy or interviewees’ expert knowledge would suggest. Second, our analysis showed that the researcher must be aware of differences in professional values, seniority, gender and culture when interacting with elites. Third, these gaps offer an opportunity to enhance communication and information exchange with elite interviewees. Fourth, it was observed that some procedures are more effective than others in balancing the power of elite interviewees and responding to the requirements of academic integrity (p. 2).

**Research Design**

The next consideration during the Pre-Methodology Phase was research design. “Research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2008, p. 3). Three main types of research design are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. “Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2008, p. 4, adapted from Creswell, 2007). “Quantitative research is a means of testing objective
theories by examining the relationships between variables” (Creswell, 2008, p. 4).

Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and qualitative approaches and the mixing of both approaches in a study. Thus, it is more than simply collecting and analyzing data: it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006 in Creswell, 2008, p. 4).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2002) have suggested the existence of unresolved issues and controversies in using mixed methods. Those issues and controversies are as follows:

1. The nomenclature and basic definitions used in mixed methods research.
2. The utility of mixed methods research (why do we do it).
3. The paradigmatic foundations for mixed methods research.
4. Design issues in mixed methods research.
5. Issues in drawing inferences in mixed methods research.

The research design selected for this research study was qualitative research; however, there was a quantitative component. This research study does not, however, fall within the scope of a mixed methods study since the majority of the study was qualitative research.

**Instrumentation Phase**

The researcher took a similar step-by-step approach to the Instrumentation Phase as
was undertaken in the Pre-Methodology Phase. Again, some of the steps overlapped in terms of timing. The approach taken in the Instrumentation Phase was as follows:

Step 1: Development of Research Questions.

In order to effectively develop the research questions, it was important to conduct a review of literature and identify potential areas for research questions. This included both an exploration of the topics related to the focal points of the study as well as research studies conducted on those areas of focus. Preliminary research questions were drafted and refined over time. “Research questions are not like ordinary questions” (Andrews, 2003, p. 2). “They are somewhat inquisitorial in that they expect an answer (not necessarily a reply)”(Andrews, 2003, p. 2). “A research question must be answerable” (Andrews, 2003, p. 2). A research question needs to have the potential of being answered—it is then answerable. It may be that there is not a clear answer to the question. This outcome is acceptable because there has at least been an attempt to answer the question (Andrews, 2003).

The research questions for this research study are as follows:

1. What are the Perspectives on the Characteristics of Competencies?

2. What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

3. What are the Lessons Learned about Competencies?

Step 2: Considered Type of Data Collection Instrument.

There are many different methods of collecting data for a research study including self-administered online surveys and mail out surveys, telephone interviews, and face-to-face interviews to name a few (Alreck & Settle, 2004; Fowler, 2008). The researcher reviewed the methods of data collection in the foundational studies as a means of further
understanding the various ways data could be collected on the topic. Then the researcher
developed a preliminary data collection instrument with the intention of conducting a
self-administered, mail out survey. But after some reflection on this method and a great
deal of self-reflection related to the researcher’s personality, extensive experience and
skills in interviewing elites, and what seemed to be the way for the greatest return in
terms of participation, the researcher decided to forego the self-administered mail out
survey and developed a draft of two complementary telephone interview guides for a
telephone interview format, one telephone interview guide for the senior human resource
leaders/practitioners and one telephone interview guide for the thought leaders.

Step 3: Developed Telephone Interview Guides.

Developing survey questions takes not only a broad knowledge of the topics to be
covered but also a keen understanding of the steps involved in creating questions. “The
major advance in question design in the last 20 years has been improved strategies for
evaluating questions” (Fowler, 2008, p. 5).

Two telephone interview guides for this research study were drafted and then
redrafted with several revisions. Time was allotted for reflection. And then the two
telephone interview guides were refined resulting in the final versions. The telephone
interview guides are as follows: (1) Telephone Interview Guide for the Research Study of
the Practices and Perspectives of Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and (2)
Telephone Interview Guide for the Research Study of the Practices and Perspectives of
Thought Leaders of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource
Management.

In an interview survey, the survey questionnaire plays a key role, but it isn’t the most
important element; the role of the interviewer is perhaps the most significant part of the survey (Alreck & Settle, 2004). Interviewer training is viewed as an important pre-step for researchers conducting interviews as a part of a study so as to ensure the quality of the data (Fowler, 2008). This is particularly so in the case of elite interviewing (Berry, 2002).

As an experienced and skilled interviewer, the researcher felt comfortable with conducting the interviews and became very familiar with the telephone interview guides in an effort to strive for consistency and in an effort to strive for the gathering of quality data.

Step 4: Developed Research Study Materials.

The researcher drafted and refined the following research study materials for this research study: (1) Criteria for eligibility for thought leaders, (2) Invitations to participate, one invitation for the senior leaders/practitioners and one for the thought leaders, (3) Accompanying information including information sheet, participation sheet, informed consent form: investigator’s copy, informed consent form: participant’s copy, and prize drawing sheet, (4) telephone interview guides.


The researcher selected paper, a folder, label, ink pen, and large and small envelope for the packet of research materials to be sent to the target population. The colors and texture of the paper and envelopes were professional in appearance and coordinated in terms of complementary colors. The ink color selected to handwrite the label addressed to the target population and the return label were also coordinated in terms of color to
give a professional appearance upon arrival to the businesses.

Step 5: Sought Approvals.

The researcher submitted the materials to her doctoral committee chair and then upon his approval submitted the materials to the Office for Research Protections at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. Upon approval, the researcher conducted a pre-test to help enhance the validity and reliability of the telephone interview guides.

Step 6: Conducted a Pretest.

One of the researcher’s concerns in developing the telephone interview guides for this research study was the differences in terminology and differences in the meanings of terms that are inherent in competency work. Careful consideration was given to that aspect of the development of the telephone interview guides. A pretest is of value in research studies to determine if the questions are understandable (Alreck & Settle, 2004; Fowler, 2008). In the case of this research study, conducting a pretest was of immense value, in particular, because of the terminology.

Once the questionnaire, or telephone interview guide, has been developed, a pretest can be conducted in order to determine typical respondents’ understanding and reactions (Alreck & Settle, 2004; Fowler, 2008). “It is valuable to be told that questions were found to be comprehensible and that coding of behavior during pretests revealed that questions were asked as worded and usually could be worded readily” (Fowler, 2008, p. 173). “Also, sometimes pretesting indicates a problem with a question that, nonetheless, is retained” (Fowler, 2008, p. 173.). “Pretests of surveys have become more systematic, using analyses of tape-recorded interviews to identify problem questions. As a result, the
choice of wording is becoming more objective and less a matter of research judgment” (Fowler, 2008, p. 5).

Once the telephone interview guides were redrafted and refined for a final version and approvals gained, the researcher then conducted a pretest of the telephone interview guides with several individuals typical of those individuals who were to be invited to participate in the study as well as several individuals with positions outside of human resources. This was done in order to gather perspectives from different points of reference. The feedback from the pretests indicated the individuals understood the questions, and there were no suggested changes to the instrument. A posttest was, therefore, not administered.

A key issue in the instrumentation phase of any research study including this one is validity and reliability. “A measurement of any kind is valid to the degree it measures all of that which it’s supposed to measure and only that which it’s suppose to measure” (Alreck & Settle, 2004, p. 59). “Reliability means freedom from random error. The most fundamental test of reliability is repeatability—the ability to get the same data values from several measurements made in the same way” (Alreck & Settle, 2004, p. 59). “The greater the random error, the lower the reliability” (Alreck & Settle, 2004, p. 60). “One step toward ensuring consistent measurement is that each respondent in a sample is asked the same set of questions” (Fowler, 2008, p. 78).

The pretest was of great value in enhancing the validity and reliability of the telephone interview guides. The pretest also afforded the opportunity for the researcher to read the questions and practice doing so in a consistent manner.

The minimum amount of time to collect data with the telephone interview guide for
the senior human resource leaders/practitioners and the telephone interview guide for
the thought leaders has been twenty-two minutes with an average amount of time of
about thirty minutes. The maximum amount of time for interviewing has occasionally
been far longer and has occurred in interviews with thought leaders, some of whom have
dedicated much of their entire careers to competency work.

**Research Questions and Interview Questions**

In developing the telephone interview guides and in conducting the pretest, the
researcher kept in the forefront of her thinking that the interview questions needed to be
linked to the research questions in order to effectively explore the research questions and
search for the answers.

To show the linkages between the research questions and the interview questions, the
research question numbers and corresponding interview question numbers for the study
of the practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners are
shown in Table 1, and the research question numbers and corresponding interview
question numbers for the study of the practices and perspectives of thought leaders are
shown in Table 2.

Table 1

**Research Questions Linked to Interview Questions**

*Practices and Perspectives of the Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Number 1</td>
<td>Interview Question Number 1 A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Number 2</td>
<td>Interview Question Number 2 A, B, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Question Number 3 A, B, C, D, E, F, G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Questions Linked to Interview Questions

Practices and Perspectives of Thought Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Number 1</td>
<td>Interview Question Number 1 A, B, C, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Number 2</td>
<td>Interview Question Number 2 A, B, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Question Number 3 A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Question Number 4 A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Question Number 5 A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Question Number 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Question Number 7 A, B, C, D, E, F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Phase

A step-by-step approach was applied in the Pre-Methodology Phase and the Instrumentation Phase. A similar approach is applied in the Data Collection Phase. Again, some of the steps overlapped in the Data Collection Phase. The approach taken in the Data Collection Phase was as follows:

   Step 1: Gathered Mailing Lists.

   The researcher purchased a mailing list for the FORTUNE 500 and 501 – 1000 HR leaders and purchased an Inc. magazine issue with the Inc. 500 list. From the review of literature which included a worldwide search of the literature for this research study, the researcher compiled a list of three hundred thought leaders of competencies and competency-based human resource management and then searched for their mailing addresses.

   Step 2: Obtained Maps and a Desktop Globe.

   In an effort to familiarize herself with the locations of the target population of the senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders of competencies and competency-based human resource management, the researcher purchased a large map of the United States of America and a large map of the world, had them then framed, and then mounted on the wall. Additionally, a desktop globe was purchased.

   Step 3: Obtained Tape Recorder and Tapes.

   A tape recorder designed for telephone interviewing was purchased along with
cassette tapes to record the interviews.

Step 4: Identified the World Clock.

Time was a significant issue in conducting interviews. The identification of the World Clock was of immense value to the research study. The virtual World Clock features major cities across the globe and has a searchable engine with access to the times in tiny towns as well as metropolitan cities across the continents. In accessing this tool, the researcher was better prepared to coordinate the interview time in advance as well as be prepared for the interview at the scheduled time. The web address for the World Clock is as follows: http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/

Step 5: Obtained Journal.

A journal was purchased for the safekeeping of notes about perspectives of the interviews as it related to themes noted during the interview or other relevant thoughts.

Step 6: Preparing for Interviews.

In preparing for the interviews, the researcher consulted with either the map of the United States or the world map to identify the location of the participant for an upcoming interview. The researcher also performed keyword searches and virtually went to a bookstore and associations of the country in which the participant was located to determine if the participant had published any work on the topic. This served as a double checking for the review of literature. Additionally, the researcher visited the company for which the participant worked to become familiar with the nature of the business, the industry, size, products, and other relevant information as preparation work for the interview. The desktop globe was easily accessible during the interviews in case of issues related to geography were discussed.
Step 7: Conducted a Pilot Study.

In a pilot study, the “respondents receive each of the mailings or other contacts just as they would the main survey” (Dillman, 2000, p. 146). The researcher conducted a pilot study for this research study. The pilot study afforded the researcher reflection time not only about the steps in the study but about the interview process itself. In the pilot study, an invitation was mailed to randomly selected individuals comprised within the study. The invitation was accompanied with the various collateral pieces which makeup the invitation packet.

Individuals receiving the invitation either faxed back the participation form or mailed it back. They either indicated their willingness to participate or declined the invitation. Interviews were conducted of those interested in participating, and the tapes were transcribed. Thank you notes were mailed. Follow-up telephone calls and e-mails were done with the non-respondents.

Step 8: Updated Study.

During a hiatus from conducting interviews due to hurricane damage to the researcher’s home, the researcher updated the reviews of literature, read, and eventually resumed the study with the purchase of an updated FORTUNE 500 and FORTUNE 501 – 1000 mailing list of the HR leaders and purchased the most recent issue of the Inc. magazine with the Inc 500 lists, and the thought leaders were double checked for any changes in location. Many of the companies in the FORTUNE 500 and FORTUNE 501 – 1000 were the same as on the list of the pilot study. The study then resumed. Additionally, the researcher has worked on content for a web site related to this research study and content for a presentation on the topic, both as indicated in study materials.
**Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves the generation of themes and then interpretations about the data collected from the interviews. “Quantitative data analysis is the analysis of numerical data using techniques that include (1) simply describing the phenomenon or interest or (2) looking for significant differences between groups or among variables” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2008, p. 5). “Qualitative (thematic) data analysis is the analysis of narrative data using a variety of inductive and iterative techniques, including categorical strategies and contextual (holistic) strategies” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2008, p. 5).

In this research study, the researcher took notes during the interviews in a preliminary search for common themes, then searched the transcribed tapes for other common themes as well as practices and perspectives which corresponded to and reflected the research questions. Coding was done to separate the data into categories which affords the opportunity for comparing and contrasting the data.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter covered the target population of the research study, the professional background of the researcher, the pre-methodology phase including preliminary considerations, initial decision making, and early research, instrumentation phase, data collection phase, and data analysis phase. The next chapter presents the findings of the research study.
CHAPTER 4

Study Results

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe competencies and competency-based human resource management (CBHRM) practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders. The key characteristics of competencies, critical components of competency work, applications, topics related to working with competencies, other methods if practices are not competency-based, results, the future, and lessons learned were identified, explored, and described.

This fourth chapter provides the study results and is divided into five sections. The first section provides a profile of the participants of the study. This section begins with information about the number of responses received in reply to the letters of invitation to participate in the research study. Additionally, this section includes the results of the demographic questions that are included in the telephone interview guides (see Appendix C). The second section describes a summary of the procedures that were used in collecting the data for the research study. Also included in this section is a listing of the research questions. The third section presents the study findings. Responses from the survey questions that are associated with the research questions are also provided. The fourth section addresses the themes that are related to the study and created as a result of an analysis of the information gathered from an analysis of the information from the telephone interview questions. The fifth section provides a summary of the topics covered in the chapter.

Profile of the Participants

Senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders participated in this
research study. Of those participating in the research study, ten human resource leaders/practitioners and four thought leaders are reported in this prepared document of the study results.

The individuals in the senior human resource leader/practitioner group were identified in two ways including a mailing list and a website listing. The individuals in the thought leader group were identified through research involving books, articles, websites, keyword searches, amongst other types of research. Individuals were invited to participate in the study with a letter of invitation sent via U.S. Mail. In addition to the letter of invitation, individuals also received a packet of information about the research study and consent forms.

Respondents in the research study were interviewed via the telephone. While the taped interviews were anticipated to last thirty to forty minutes, the length of the actual interviews ranged from twenty-two minutes to two hours and forty-six minutes.

Demographic Information

Demographic information was collected from senior human resource leader/practitioner participants; the data gathered including the following: (1) title; (2) whether or not they have a specialization in the field; (3) if so, what specialization; (4) whether or not they have a specialization in competencies and competency-based human resource management; (5) if so, what specialization, (6) the number of years of experience in the field of human resource management; (7) the number of years of experience with competencies and competency-based human resource management practices; (8) whether any of the human resource processes or functions are competency-based; what industry they represent; (9) the number of employees in the organization; and (10) whether the
organization has employees working in a country or countries other than the United States.

Demographic information was also collected from the thought leaders. The data included the following: (1) title; (2) whether they have a specialization in the field of human resources; (3) if so, what is the specialization; (4) whether they have a specialization in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management; (4) how many years of experience they have in the field of human resources, (5) how many years of experience they have in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management, and (6) in what roles they have worked with competencies and competency-based human resource management.

A summary of demographics and the characteristics of senior human resource leader/practitioner participants can be seen in Table 3, and a summary of demographics and the characteristics of thought leader participants can be seen in Table 4.

Table 3

Summary of Demographic Characteristics of Participants: Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Vice President, Human Resource Strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Vice President, Organizational Effectiveness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Human Resources Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Personnel Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Global Human Resources</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Executive Leadership Development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Leadership Development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Human Resource Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Senior Vice President of Human Resources | 1

*Highest Ranking HR Official*

- Yes | 5
- No  | 5

*Gender*

- Male  | 5
- Female | 5

*Years of Experience in HR*

- One or less
- Two to Five
- Six to Ten  | 2
- Eleven to Fifteen  | 2
- Sixteen to Twenty  | 2
- Twenty-One to Twenty-Five  | 4
- Twenty-Six to Thirty
- More than Thirty

*Specialization in Human Resource Management*

- Yes  | 6
- No  | 4

*Group – Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners*

- FORTUNE 500  | 8
- FORTUNE 1000  | 2

*Industry*

- Banking  | 1
- Computer Services  | 1
- Construction  | 1
- Consumer Products  | 1
- Healthcare  | 2
- Information Technology  | 1
- Telecommunications  | 1
- Transportation  | 1
- Wholesale Distribution  | 1

*Number of Employees*
Employees Working in a Country Other than the United States

Yes 8
No 2

Competency-Based Human Resource Practices in the Company

Yes 9
No 1

Listing of Competency-Based Human Resource Practices

Recruitment, Selection, and Placement 8
Orientation of New Employees 0
Training 5
Individual Career Development of Non Leaders 2
Development of Leaders 8
Succession Planning 4
Incentives, Rewards, and Compensation 4
Managing Day-to-Day Performance 4
Human Resource Planning 2
Other
  Yearly Performance Assessment 1
Other
  Organization Development 1
  Management Development 1
  Labor Relations 1
  Diversity 1
  Employee Relations 1

Table 4

Summary of Demographic Characteristics of Participants: Thought Leaders
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title/Category</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Professional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years of Experience in HR</td>
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<tr>
<td>One or less</td>
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<td>Two to Five</td>
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<tr>
<td>Six to Ten</td>
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<td>Eleven to Fifteen</td>
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<td>Twenty-Six to Thirty</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than Thirty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialization in Human Resource Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Procedures**

A step-by-step approach was applied throughout the research study. In Chapter Three, the step-by-step approach included the Pre-Methodology Phase, Instrumentation Phase, Data Collection, and Data Analysis Phase. In Chapter Four, a step-by-step approach was also taken in the procedures involving the gathering and analyzing of data.
to produce the study results; the steps are as follows:

Step 1: Arranged for Telephone Interview Appointments.

The researcher responded to the participation forms which were completed and returned to the researcher by the senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders invited to participate in the study. Appointments were made for telephone interviews.

Step 2: Scheduled Telephone Interviews were Held.

Materials were gathered including the appropriate telephone interview guide, and scheduled telephone interviews were conducted to gather data about the participants’ practices and perspectives related to competencies and competency-based human resource management.

Each participant was asked a series of ten questions during the telephone interview. Each of the ten questions had several parts. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to provide any additional information about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices not covered in the questions. The responses of participants during the telephone interview were used to describe and interpret the practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders.

Step 3: Notes were Taken During and After Each of the Telephone Interviews.

The researcher took notes during each of the interview about comments or perceptions. After some time for reflection, additional notes were made about thoughts on the interview.

Step 4: Listened to Taped Telephone Interviews.
The taped telephone interviews were listened to several times so the researcher could become familiar with the content of each interview.

Step 5: Printed Transcripts were Made of the Taped Telephone Interviews.

The taped telephone interviews were transcribed so that each interview was not only listened to but read as well.

Step 6: Highlighting of Pertinent Information.

Different colors of highlighters and stickees were used to indicate various categories of information and emerging themes.

Step 7: Analyze Categories of Information and Themes.

Once highlighted, the categories of information and emerging themes were analyzed.

Step 8: Producing Results.

The interview questions themselves provided the foundation for determining the themes which emerged from the content of the interviews. The telephone interview guides (see Appendix C) include questions designed to provide data related to the three research questions. The three research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What are the Perspectives on the Characteristics of Competencies?
2. What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?
3. What are the Lessons Learned about Competencies?

Results of these telephone interviews are presented in the next section.

Interview Findings

In exploring the interview findings, the research questions were reviewed along with the corresponding interview question and the categories of information that emerged
from the responses to the questions. Each research question along with its corresponding interview question and categories of information which emerged from the responses are presented below.

**Research Question Number 1**

*What are the Perspectives on the Characteristics of Competencies?*

The first research question in this study was developed in an effort to learn about the characteristics of competencies from the perspectives of participants in the research study. As Boyatzis (2008) indicates, many of those studying, researching, and writing about competencies, too often focus primarily on the applications of competencies. Key components of competency work are the competencies themselves. Thus, this research study began with an exploration of competencies.

The first interview question (Interview Question Number 1) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the first interview question (Interview Question Number 1) from Telephone Interview Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 1 and are listed below. The findings for Interview Question 1 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides, the summary, and summary listing in Table 5 are then listed.

**Interview Question Number 1**

**Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners**

*Competencies*

1 A Could you provide a very brief historical perspective on the use of competencies in your organization including a description of their use today?
Thought Leaders

Competencies

1 A  How do you define competencies?

1 B  How do you describe competencies?

1 C  What are your perspectives about (your thoughts on) competencies?

1 D  What do you find interesting or noteworthy about competencies?

Interview Question Number 1

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Findings

Interview Question Number 1, Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) yielded five main Categories of Information. The Categories of Information which emerged are as follows: (1) Behaviors, (2) Core Competencies, (3) Performers, (4) Performance, (5) Results. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 1, Category 2, Category 3, Category 4, and Category 5 respectively in the overall research study.

Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information and are listed immediately below. A summary follows, and for a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 1, Interview Question Number 1, please also see Table 5.

Categories of Information

Category 1 – Competencies (Behaviors)

Respondent 4: A set of behaviors that distinguish excellent from average or poor performers.

Respondent 5: Competencies are those behaviors that are demonstrated by superior
performers in conducting their work.

*Respondent 5:* It’s critical that we be able to define those *behaviors* that people demonstrate.

*Respondent 5:* Don’t care what the source of the *behaviors* is; source of that is irrelevant.

**Categories of Information**

**Category 2 – Competencies (Core Competencies)**

*Respondent 7:* Core competencies across the board.

*Respondent 6:* The core competencies go across the entire company.

*Respondent 4:* Core competencies are very hard to change.

*Respondent 4:* Core competencies are very related to your temperament and motives.

*Respondent 1:* Looked at some external benchmarks and concluded there were core skills, core competencies that we would need if we wanted to move this into a world class performance.

*Respondent 3:* The larger set is across the board for all exempt and some non exempt

*Respondent 12:* We started looking at what were the core competencies for success.

How were the results achieved, and what were the core competencies that really were driving those results.

*Respondent 14:* Shared competencies those are competencies that all employees are expected to be able to demonstrate.

**Category of Information**

**Category 3 – Competencies (Performers)**

*Respondent 5:* It is really not of interest what an average *performer* does, just the
difference between an average **performer** and an outstanding one.

**Category of Information**

Category 4 – Competencies (Performance)

*Respondent 4:* Observable and distinguish excellent **performance**.

*Respondent 1:* Looked at some external benchmarks and concluded there were core skills, core competencies that we would need if we wanted to move this into a world class **performance**.

*Respondent 1:* Looked at certain types of roles a few years and concluded that we needed certain types of skill sets and competencies to be successful and did an assessment on our actual **performance** in the company.

**Category of Information**

Category 5 – Competencies (Results)

*Respondent 12:* We started looking at what were the core competencies for success. How were the **results** achieved, and what were the core competencies that really were driving those **results**.

**Interview Question Number 1**

**Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders**

**Summary**

Participants shared their perspectives on competencies. Five Categories of Information emerged as follows: Behaviors, Core Competencies, Performers, Performance, and Results. Quotes from participants in this research study are listed by Categories of Information immediately below and are followed by a summary listing detailed in Table 5.
Behaviors – A set of behaviors that distinguish excellent from average or poor performers; Competencies are those behaviors that are demonstrated by superior performers in conducting their work; It’s critical to be able to define the behaviors that people demonstrate; Don’t care what the source of the behaviors is; source of that is irrelevant.

Core Competencies – Core competencies across the board; The core competencies go across the entire company; Core competencies are very hard to change; Core competencies are very related to your temperament and motives; Looked at some external benchmarks and concluded there were core skills, core competencies that we would need if we wanted to move this into a world class performance; The larger set is across the board for all exempt and some non exempt; We started looking at what were the core competencies for success; How were the results achieved, and what were the core competencies that really were driving those results; Shared competencies those are competencies that all employees are expected to be able to demonstrate.

Performers – It is really not of interest what an average performer does, just the difference between an average performer and an outstanding one.

Performance – Observable and distinguish excellent performance; Looked at some external benchmarks and concluded there were core skills, core competencies that we would need if we wanted to move this into a world class performance. Looked at certain types of roles a few years and concluded that we needed certain types of skill sets and competencies to be successful and did an assessment on our actual performance in the company.

Results – We started looking at what were the core competencies for success.
How were the results achieved, and what were the core competencies that really were driving those results.

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 1, Interview Question Number 1, please see Table 5 below.

Table 5

Summary Listing
Categories of Information
Research Question Number 1, Interview Question Number 1
What are the Perspectives on the Characteristics of Competencies?
Results from Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competencies</td>
<td>Category 1: Behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Category 2: Core Competencies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3: Performers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 4: Performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Category 5: Results</td>
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Research Question Number 2

What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

The second research question in this study was designed to learn about competency work from the perspectives of participants in the research study. Competency work is a way of approaching many of the tasks of human resource management in a systematic manner. McClelland (n.d.) noted, as indicated in the excerpt of a taped interview listed below, that competencies are of value in determining job fit.
There's nothing more satisfying than seeing a person with the right set of capabilities, characteristics, competencies what have you working at a job that needs those competencies and doing well as a result...different jobs require different competencies. And I like to see people fitted for what they are trying to do (McClelland, n.d., http://www.haygroup.com).

The concept of competency-based human resources has gone from a new technique to a common practice in the 35 years since David McClelland (1973) first proposed them as a critical differentiator of performance. Today, almost every organization with more than 300 people uses some form of competency-based human resource management (Boyatzis, 2008, p. 5).

The second through ninth interview questions (Interview Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 3, Interview Question Number 4, Interview Question Number 5, Interview Question Number 6, Interview Question Number 7, Interview Question Number 8, and Interview Question Number 9) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the second through ninth interview questions (Interview Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 3, Interview Question Number 4, Interview Question Number 5, Interview Question Number 6, Interview Question Number 7, Interview Question Number 8, and Interview Question Number 9) from Telephone Interview Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below.

The second interview question (Interview Question Number 2) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the second interview question (Interview Question Number 2) from Telephone Interview Guide (2):...
Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below. The findings for Interview Question 2 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides, the summary, and summary listing in Table 6 are then listed.

**Interview Question Number 2**

**Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners**

*Competency Identification, Modeling, and Assessment*

Could you very briefly describe the methods that your organization uses in identifying competencies, developing competency models, and conducting competency assessments?

2 A Competency identification?
2 B Developing competency models?
2 C Conducting competency assessments?

**Interview Question Number 2**

**Thought Leaders**

*Competency Identification, Modeling and Assessment*

What do you consider are the most effective approaches for the following:

2 A Competency identification?
2 B Developing competency models?
2 C Conducting competency assessments?

**Interview Question Number 2**

**Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders**

**Findings**

Interview Question Number 2 from Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) produced five main Categories of Information. The Categories of Information which emerged are
as follows: (1) Consulting Firms, (2) Competency Study, (3) Competency Models, (4) External Benchmarks, and (5) Assessment. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 6, Category 7, Category 8, Category 9, and Category 10 respectively in the overall research study. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information and are listed immediately below. For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 2, please also see Table 6. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information as follows:

**Categories of Information**

**Category 6 – Competency Identification, Modeling, and Assessment (Consulting Firms)**

*Respondent 1:* We had used some **outside firms** to help us do the right type of assessment in the company.

*Respondent 3:* We did a competency study using **an outside consultancy** to help us with that study. And we came up with a list of competencies that we validated internally; and also validated against common practice externally.

*Respondent 3:* Worked with a couple of **external consultants** in identifying through interviewing processes with senior executives what were the critical competencies necessary for success in the organization broadly and, from that work, we landed on a set of competencies that were best suited for our organization. Since then we have also consulted with **another consultant** who helped us to identify which of those 12 competencies were most appropriate for non exempt based on some studies he had research. The validation occurred in 2 stages. Essentially for leadership and executives and managers and supervisors and then later when it was applied to non exempt through
a validation study done by an external consultant. Took our set of competencies and developed a web enabled 360.

Respondent 14 – Contracted with an outside company to develop out competency models.

Categories of Information

Category 7 – Competency Identification, Modeling, and Assessment (Competency Study)

Respondent 3: We did a competency study using an outside consultancy to help us with that study. And we came up with a list of competencies that we validated internally; and also validated against common practice externally.

Categories of Information

Category 8 – Competency Identification, Modeling, and Assessment (Competency Models)

Respondent 1: Built some of our own competency models in some areas of the organization but using core templates from other companies.

Categories of Information

Category 9 – Competency Identification, Modeling, and Assessment (External Benchmarks)

Respondent 1: Looked at some external benchmarks and concluded there were core skills, core competencies that we would need if we wanted to move this into a world class performance.

Categories of Information

Category 10 – Competency Identification, Modeling, and Assessment (Assessment)

Respondent 1: Looked at certain types of roles a few years and concluded that we needed
certain types of skill sets and competencies to be successful and did an assessment on our actual performance in the company.

**Interview Question Number 2**

**Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders**

**Summary**

Participants shared their perspectives on competency identification, modeling, and assessment. Five Categories of information emerged as follows: Consulting Firms, Competency Study, Competency Models, External Benchmarks, and Assessment.

*Consulting Firms* – We had used some outside firms to help us do the right type of assessment in the company; We did a competency study using an outside consultancy to help us with that study. And we came up with a list of competencies that we validated internally; and also validated against common practice externally; Worked with a couple of external consultants in identifying through interviewing processes with senior executives what were the critical competencies necessary for success in the organization broadly and, from that work, we landed on a set of competencies that were best suited for our organization. Since then we have also consulted with another consultant who helped us to identify which of those 12 competencies were most appropriate for non exempt based on some studies he had research. The validation occurred in 2 stages. Essentially for leadership and executives and managers and supervisors and then later when it was applied to non exempt through a validation study done by an external consultant. Took our set of competencies and developed a web enabled 360; Contracted with an outside company to develop out competency models.

*Competency Study* – We did a competency study using an outside consultancy to
help us with that study. And we came up with a list of competencies that we validated internally; and also validated against common practice externally.

*Competency Models* – Built some of our own **competency models** in some areas of the organization but using core templates from other companies.

*External Benchmarks* – Looked at some **external benchmarks** and concluded there were core skills, core competencies that we would need if we wanted to move this into a world class performance.

*Assessment* – Looked at some **external benchmarks** and concluded there were core skills, core competencies that we would need if we wanted to move this into a world class performance.

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 2, please also see Table 6 below.

### Table 6

*Summary Listing*

**Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 2**

What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

*Results from Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competency Identification, Modeling, and Assessment</td>
<td>Category 6  Consulting Firms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 7  Competency Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 8  Competency Models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 9  External Benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 10 Assessments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Research Question Number 2 (Continued)**

*What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?*

The third interview question (Interview Question Number 3) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the third interview question (Interview Question Number 3) from Telephone Interview Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below. The findings for Interview Question 2 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides immediately follows.

**Interview Question Number 3**

**Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners**

*Human Resource Processes or Functions*

Please indicate whether or not the following processes or functions are competency-based in your organization; at the end of the list, select one process or function and very briefly describe from your experience an example showcasing how competencies can be applied in that process or function along with the business result(s) or possible business result(s) that can be achieved.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 A</td>
<td>Recruitment, Selection, and Placement: Competency-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 B</td>
<td>Recruitment, Selection, and Placement: Not Competency-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 C</td>
<td>Orientation of New Employees: Competency-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 D</td>
<td>Orientation of New Employees: Not Competency-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 E</td>
<td>Training: Competency-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 F</td>
<td>Training: Not Competency-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 G</td>
<td>Individual Career Development of Non Leaders: Competency-Based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Career Development of Non Leaders: Not Competency-Based
Development of Leaders: Competency-Based
Development of Leaders: Not Competency-Based
Succession Planning: Competency-Based
Succession Planning: Not Competency-Based
Incentives, Rewards, and Compensation: Competency-Based
Incentives, Rewards, and Competency-Based: Not Competency-Based
Managing Day-to-Day Performance: Competency-Based
Managing Day-to-Day Performance: Not Competency-Based
Human Resource Planning: Competency-Based
Human Resource Planning: Not Competency-Based
Other Human Resource Processes or Functions that are Competency-Based
Other Human Resource Processes or Functions that are Not Competency-Based

Could you please select any one of the processes or functions and describe briefly how competencies are used in your organization and the business result(s) or possible business result(s)?

Interview Question Number 3

Thought Leaders

Human Resource Processes or Functions

Please select one human resource process or function and describe from your experiences how competencies can most effectively be applied in that particular process or function along with the business result or results that can be achieved.

3 A Recruitment, Selection, and Placement
Interview Question Number 3

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Findings

Interview Question Number 3, Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) resulted in three primary Categories of Information and a list of practices that are competency-based in the companies represented by respondents. The Categories of Information which emerged are as follows: (1) Applications – Recruitment, Selection and Placement, (2) Applications – Succession Planning, and (3) Retention. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 11, Category 12, and Category 13 respectively in the overall research study. For a summary listing of Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 3, please see Table 7. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information as follows:

Categories of Information
Category 11 – Applications (Recruitment, Selection and Placement)

Respondent 1: It has **shortened the hiring time** for key roles plus it has improved the retention rate in the company as well also. So you get it at both ends, you **fill the job quicker** and the associates that you hire tend to stay longer because you have done a **better job at selecting that individual.**

Respondent 2: **Fairly extensive screening process** for certain competencies.

Respondent 2: Each job family has **different kinds of screens and tests** to see if one has and possesses the core competencies to do the job.

Respondent 2: **Saves a tremendous amount of money** and **a tremendous amount of churn.**

Respondent 2: **Saves a tremendous amount of dollars** and **anguish for putting people in jobs for which they are either not suited or qualified.**

Respondent 2: We at least have **the backup that says they have passed the screens to get in there.**

Respondent 2: **Behavioral interviews** are used for some positions.

Respondent 7: Getting **the right people in the right job** at **the right time** is critical.

Category of Information

Category 12 – Applications (Succession Planning)

Respondent 3: Nothing we do is exclusively competency-based, a component of **succession planning.** We look at supply and demand relative to competencies. What are the business needs that are currently existing in the strategy? And what competencies will drive the success of that strategic plan? And from that, our discussion around **succession management** flows, that is who are the individuals who are most likely to move into a
role in the near future and what competencies do they have that they are extremely skilled at and what are the competencies in the roles that they might assume that are most needed? And in doing a gap analysis of that we know not only who to place but what kind of development they will need relative to specific competencies of that role.

Categories of Information

Category 13 – Applications (Retention)

Respondent 1: It has shortened the hiring time for key roles plus it has improved the retention rate in the company as well also. So you get it at both ends, you fill the job quicker and the associates that you hire tend to stay longer because you have done a better job at selecting that individual.

Interview Question Number 3

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Summary

Participants shared their perspectives on human resource processes and functions. Three Categories of Information emerged as follows: Recruitment, Selection, and Placement, Succession Planning, and Retention.

Recruitment, Selection, and Placement – It has shortened the hiring time for key roles plus it has improved the retention rate in the company as well also. So you get it at both ends, you fill the job quicker and the associates that you hire tend to stay longer because you have done a better job at selecting that individual; Fairly extensive screening process for certain competencies; Each job family has different kinds of screens and tests to see if one has and possesses the core competencies to do the job;
Saves a tremendous amount of money and a tremendous amount of churn; Saves a tremendous amount of dollars and anguish for putting people in jobs for which they are either not suited or qualified; We at least have the backup that says they have passed the screens to get in there; Behavioral interviews are used for some positions; Getting the right people in the right job at the right time is critical.

Succession Planning – Nothing we do is exclusively competency-based, a component of succession planning. We look at supply and demand relative to competencies. What are the business needs that are currently existing in the strategy? And what competencies will drive the success of that strategic plan? And from that, our discussion around succession management flows, that is who are the individuals who are most likely to move into a role in the near future and what competencies do they have that they have that they are extremely skilled at and what are the competencies in the roles that they might assume that are most needed? And in doing a gap analysis of that we know not only who to place but what kind of development they will need relative to specific competencies of that role.

Retention – It has shortened the hiring time for key roles plus it has improved the retention rate in the company as well also. So you get it at both ends, you fill the job quicker and the associates that you hire tend to stay longer because you have done a better job at selecting that individual.

Participants also responded to a listing of human resource processes and functions and indicated whether or not the practice was competency-based. The results are provided with the process or function listed along with the number of participants indicating a competency-based practice. The results, which can also be seen in Table 3,
are as follows: Recruitment, Selection, and Placement, 5; Orientation of New Employees, 0; Training, 5; Individual Career Development of Non Leaders, 2; Development of Leaders, 5; Succession Planning, 4; Incentives, Rewards, and Compensation, 4; Managing Day-to-Day Performance, 4; Human Resource Planning, 2; Other, In Progress, 1; Other, Organization Development, 1; Management Development, 1; Labor Relations, 1; Diversity, 1; and Employee Relations, 1.

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 3, please see Table 7 below.

Table 7

Summary Listing
Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 3
What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?
Results from Senior Practitioner/Leaders and Thought Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resource Practices</td>
<td>Category 11 Recruitment,</td>
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<td>Selection, and</td>
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<td>Placement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Category 12 Succession</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 13 Retention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question Number 2 (Continued)

What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

The fourth interview question (Interview Question Number 4) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the fourth interview question (Interview Question Number 4) from Telephone Interview Guide (2):
Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below. The findings for Interview Question 4 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides immediately follow.

**Interview Question Number 4**

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners

*Issues and Challenges in Working with Competencies*

4 A What are the key issues and challenges related to competencies and competency-based human resource management practices?

4 B What suggestions do you have for most effectively meeting the challenges associated with the issues?

**Interview Question Number 4**

Thought Leaders

*Issues and Challenges in Working with Competencies*

4 A What are the key issues and challenges related to competencies and competency-based human resource management practices?

4 B What suggestions do you have for most effectively meeting the challenges associated with the issues?

**Interview Question Number 4**

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

**Findings**

Interview Question Number 4 from Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) resulted in five main Categories of Information. The Categories of Information which emerged are as follows: (1) Defining What is Meant by the Term Competency, (2) Determining
The Right Competencies, (3) Change, (4) Skills, and (5) Agreement on Core Competencies. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 14, Category 15, Category 16, Category 17, and Category 18 respectively in the overall research study. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information and are listed immediately below. For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 2, please also see Table 8. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information as follows:

Categories of Information

Category 14 – Issues and Challenges (Defining What is Meant by the Term Competency)

Respondent 12: The biggest challenge is defining what exactly a competency is so that people understand it a little bit better.

Categories of Information

Category 15 – Issues and Challenges (Determining the Right Competencies)

Once you have them understand what a competency means and what the definition of the competency is, then getting down to what are all the competencies that people can demonstrate and how they can be used for success and also how they can actually be negative for an organization…there’s a certain set, that is going to, it’s like putting a recipe together; you have the right ingredients to make it turn out right at the end.

Categories of Information

Category 16 – Issues and Challenges (Change)

Respondent 1: How quickly the roles can change in your company.

Respondent 1: How quickly the competition changes so you have to change your
business model.

Respondent 1: Continue to refine the tool, make sure it stays current with the business plan or model.

Respondent 1: Current is very important.

Respondent 2: Upgrade and keep them current.

Respondent 3: Managing to a set of competencies at a strategic level makes sense; however, as businesses are ever changing certain competencies that need to be practiced in a business change also. One of the challenges and obstacles in competency-based anything is that when you have invested substantial…the cost of changing those when the organization has a need to change can be very costly. …

Respondent 3: The other…people resist change.

Respondent 3: The other thing that I find problematic if you have multiple systems that are linked to a competency then you have multiple changes that need to occur to keep that integration effective. So having competencies too tightly wired into every system becomes very problematic when you want to change any one system.

Respondent 3: Competencies as a guidance tool are very helpful but if you over engineer the use of competencies in an organization you are inviting tremendous amounts of cost, confusion, resistance to change. I highly favor a more loosely structured use of competencies. Our organization has learned that we have too tightly wired competencies here and now are at a point where we need to make some changes and realize the magnitude of that change.

Respondent 14: Managing the change away from the focus on skills to this more competency-based focus, that’s a change management focus.
Categories of Information

Category 17 – Issues and Challenges (Skills)

*Respondent 1:* If someone has a multitasking role, **how to go about finding the specific bundle of skills** that make that person successful.

*Respondent 1:* You can build a competency model so that you know exactly what will drive performance in a job but have **a hard time finding people who fit that profile.**

*Respondent 6:* **Having the right competencies in the right places.**

*Respondent 7:* The right **balance between developing competencies** and **how people can take those competencies** and translate them into **business results** is an area that is a challenge.

Categories of Information

Category 18 – Issues and Challenges (Agreement on Core Competencies)

*Respondent 2:* **Trying to get everyone to agree** that that is the list of core competencies that one possess for in order to be successful on the job.

*Respondent 2:* **Trying to get everyone aligned** for each job family…to say that those are the things that are very important and those are the things we consider to be absolutely necessary to be successful on the job.

Interview Question Number 4

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Summary

Participants shared their perspectives on issues and challenges related to competencies and competency-based human resource management practices. The five Categories of Information emerged are as follows: Defining What is Meant by the
Term Competency, Determining The Right Competencies, Change, Skills, and Agreement on Core Competencies.

Defining What is Meant by the Term Competency – The biggest challenge is defining what exactly a competency is so that people understand it a little bit better.

Determining The Right Competencies – Once you have them understand what a competency means and what the definition of the competency is, then getting down to what are all the competencies that people can demonstrate and how they can be used for success and also how they can actually be negative for an organization…there’s a certain set, that is going to, it’s like putting a recipe together; you have the right ingredients to make it turn out right at the end.

Change – How quickly the roles can change in your company; How quickly the competition changes so you have to change your business model; Continue to refine the tool, make sure it stays current with the business plan or model; Current is very important; Upgrade and keep them current; Managing to a set of competencies at a strategic level makes sense; however, as businesses are ever changing certain competencies that need to be practiced in a business change also. One of the challenges and obstacles in competency-based anything is that when you have invested substantial…the cost of changing those when the organization has a need to change can be very costly; The other…people resist change; The other thing that I find problematic if you have multiple systems that are linked to a competency then you have multiple changes that need to occur to keep that integration effective. So having competencies too tightly wired into every system becomes very problematic when you want to change any one system; Competencies as a guidance tool are very helpful but if you over engineer
the use of competencies in an organization you are inviting tremendous amounts of cost, confusion, resistance to change. I highly favor a more loosely structured use of competencies. Our organization has learned that we have too tightly wired competencies here and now are at a point where we need to make some changes and realize the magnitude of that change; Managing the change away from the focus on skills to this more competency-based focus, that’s a change management focus.

Skills – If someone has a multitasking role, how to go about finding the specific bundle of skills that make that person successful; You can build a competency model so that you know exactly what will drive performance in a job but have a hard time finding people who fit that profile; Having the right competencies in the right places; The right balance between developing competencies and how people can take those competencies and translate them into business results is an area that is a challenge.

Agreement on Core Competencies – Trying to get everyone to agree that that is the list of core competencies that one possess for in order to be successful on the job; Trying to get everyone aligned for each job family…to say that those are the things that are very important and those are the things we consider to be absolutely necessary to be successful on the job.

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 4, please also see Table 8 below.

Table 8

Summary Listing
Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 4
What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?
Results from Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues and Challenges</td>
<td>Category 14</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Category 15</td>
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<td>Category 16</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Category 17</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question Number 2 (Continued)

What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

The fifth interview question (Interview Question Number 5) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the fifth interview question (Interview Question Number 5) from Telephone Interview Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below. The findings for Interview Question 5 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides immediately follow.

**Interview Question Number 5**

**Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners**

*An International Perspective*

What are the similarities and differences in your organization’s use of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally? (if applicable, and if so, please describe.

5 A  ____ Yes, there are similarities in competencies and competency-based human
resource management practices globally.

5 B Please describe the similarities.

5 C _____ No, there are not any similarities in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.

5 D _____ Yes, there are differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5 E Please describe the differences.

5 F _____ No, there are not any differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5 G _____ Not applicable.

Interview Question Number 5

Thought Leaders

An International Perspective

5 A _____ Yes, there are similarities in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5 B Please describe the similarities.

5 C _____ No, there are not any similarities in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.

5 D _____ Yes, there are differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5 E Please describe the differences.

5 F _____ No, there are not any differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.
Interview Question Number 5

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Findings

Interview Question Number 5 from Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) produced three main Categories of Information. Those Categories of Information which emerged are as follows: (1) the Differences in Global Practices, (2) the Similarities in Global Practices, and (3) Consistent Applications across the Globe. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 19, Category 20, and Category 21 respectively in the overall study. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information and are listed immediately below. For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 2, please also see Table 9. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information as follows:

Categories of Information

Category 19 – Global Practices (Differences Across the Globe)

Respondent 1: Some different laws, a different history, and a different culture so you do have to adapt your recruiting practices and competency models to the local environment, and they are different.

Categories of Information

Category 20 – Global Practices (Similarities Across the Globe)

Respondent 2: Use some of the similar tests.
Category 21 – Global Practices (Consistent Applications Across the Globe)

Respondent 7: **Consistent applications** across all countries.

Interview Question Number 5

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Summary

Participants shared their perspectives on global practices of competencies and competency-based practices. Three Categories of Information emerged as follows: Differences, Similarities, and Consistent Applications across the Globe.

*Differences across the Globe* – Some **different laws**, a **different history**, and a **different culture** so you do have to adapt your recruiting practices and competency models to the local environment, and they are different.

*Similarities across the Globe* – Use some of the **similar tests**.

*Consistent Applications across the Globe* – **Consistent applications** across all countries.

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 2, please also see also Table 9 below.

Table 9

*Summary Listing*

*Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 5*

*What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?*

*Results from Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Practices</td>
<td>Category 19  Differences Across the Globe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 20  Similarities Across the Globe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question Number 2

What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

The sixth interview question (Interview Question Number 6) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the sixth interview question (Interview Question Number 6) from Telephone Interview Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below.

The findings for Interview Question Number 6 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides immediately follows.

Interview Question Number 6

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners

Other Methods and Approaches to Human Resource Management Practices if Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices are not used?

6. Could you very briefly describe a human resource process or function that is not competency-based in your organization?

Interview Question Number 6

Thought Leaders

Other Methods and Approaches to Human Resource Management Practices if Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices are not used

In considering your experiences in the field, what are some of the other methods of approaching the processes and functions of human resource management you have encountered other than those with competencies or competency-based human resource
management practices?

Interview Question Number 6

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Findings

Interview Question Number 6 from Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) produced one main Category of Information. The Category of Information which emerged included the following: (1) Historically Based. It is indicated as Category 22 in the overall research study. For a summary listing of the Category of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 6, please see also Table 10. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information as follows:

Categories of Information

Category 22 – Other Methods (Historically Based)

Respondent Number 12: Orientation is historically based. A lot of it is historical. We talk about us a lot in our orientation process so it isn’t so focused on the individual because I think that’s important to talk about why we have been so successful.

Interview Question Number 6

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Summary

A participated shared perspectives on other methods of approaching human resources Resources. One Category of Information emerged as follows: Historically Based.

Historically Based – In terms historically based human resource processes or functions “Orientation is historically based. A lot of it is historical. We talk about us a lot
in our orientation process so it isn’t so focused on the individual because I think that’s important to talk about why we have been so successful.”

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 6, please also see Table 10.

Table 10

Summary Listing
Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 6
What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?
Results from Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Methods and Approaches to Human Resource Management</td>
<td>Category 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices if Competency-Based Human Resource Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices are not used?</td>
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Research Question Number 2 (Continued)

What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

The seventh interview question (Interview Question Number 7) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the seventh interview question (Interview Question Number 7) from Telephone Interview Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below. The findings for Interview Question Number 7 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides immediately follows.
Interview Question Number 7

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners

*Human Resource Needs and Challenges and the Impact of Competencies*

Please describe one of the following:

7 A The greatest human resource needs(s) in your organization
7 B The greatest human resource challenge(s) in your organization
7 C The greatest human resource need(s) that you see in the business world today
7 D The greatest human resource challenge(s) that you see in the business world today
7 E The greatest human resource need(s) that you anticipate in the future
7 F The greatest human resource challenge(s) that you see in the future

Would you please very briefly describe the following?

7 G What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges of today?
7 H What do you consider will be the potential impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges anticipated in the future?

Interview Question Number 7

Thought Leaders

*Human Resource Needs and Challenges and the Impact of Competencies*

7 A What do you consider to be the greatest human resource needs(s) of today?
7 B What do you consider to be the great human resource challenges(s) of today?
7 C What do you consider to be the greatest human resource need(s) in the future?
7 D  What do you anticipate will be the great human resource challenges in the future?
7 E  What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges of today?
7 F  What do you consider will be the potential impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges anticipated in the future?

Interview Question Number 7

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Findings

Interview Question Number 7 from Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) resulted in three main Categories of Information. The Categories of Information which emerged are as follows: (1) Skills, (2) Competency Models, and (3) Serving as a Strategic Business Partner. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 23, Category 24, and Category 25 respectively in the overall research study. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information and are listed immediately below. For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 7, please also see Table 11. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information as follows:

Categories of Information

Category 23 – Human Resource Needs and Challenges (Skills)

*Respondent 1:* Typical challenge we have everyday…*Skills*…a workforce that is skilled to work in the complexity that we work in, obviously if you can do assessments and
competency models obviously you are going to hire a better workforce.

Categories of Information

Category 24 – Human Resource Needs and Challenges (Competency Models)

Respondent 2: The competency models become outdated.

Categories of Information

Category 25 – Human Resource Needs and Challenges (Serving as a Strategic Business Partner)

Respondent 7: Playing the role of the strategic partner with business unit leaders is the biggest business opportunity we have, versus transactions that are more administrative.

Interview Question 7

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Summary

Participants shared their perspectives on human resource needs and challenges. Three Categories of Information emerged as follows: Skills, Competency Models, and Serving as a Strategic Partner.

Skills – Typical challenge we have everyday…Skills…a workforce that is skilled to work in the complexity that we work in, obviously if you can do assessments and competency models obviously you are going to hire a better workforce.

Competency Models – The competency models become outdated.

Serving as a Strategic Partner – Playing the role of the strategic partner with business unit leaders is the biggest business opportunity we have, versus transactions that are more administrative.
For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 7, please also see Table 11.

Table 11

Summary Listing
Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 7
What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?
Results from Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Needs and Challenges</td>
<td>Category 23 Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 24 Competency Models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 25 Serving as a Strategic Partner</td>
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Research Question Number 2 (Continued)

What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

The eighth interview question (Interview Question Number 8) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the fourth interview question (Interview Question Number 8) from Telephone Interview Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below. The findings for Interview Question 8 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides immediately follows.

Interview Question Number 8

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners

Business Needs and Challenges and the Impact of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices
8 A  The greatest business need(s) in your organization
8 B  The greatest business challenge(s) in your organization
8 C  The greatest business need(s) that you see in the business world today
8 D  The greatest business challenge(s) that you see in the business world today
8 E  The greatest business need(s) that you anticipate in the future
8 F  The greatest business challenge(s) that you anticipate in the future
Would you please very briefly describe the following?
8 G  What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges today?
8 H  What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges in the future?

**Interview Question Number 8**

**Thought Leaders**

*Business Needs and Challenges and the Impact of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices*

8 A  What do you consider to be the great business needs(s) of today?
8 B  What do you anticipate will be the great business challenges in the future?
8 C  What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges of today?
8 D  What do you consider will be the potential impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges anticipated in the future?
8 E  What do you consider is the impact of competencies of competencies and
competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges today?

8 F What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges in the future?

Interview Question Number 8

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Findings

Interview Question Number 8, Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) produced seven main Categories of Information. The Categories of Information which emerged are as follows: (1) Revenue Growth, (2) Productivity, (3) Volatility, (4) Skilled Workforce, (5) Selecting Competencies for the Future, (6) Methods of Practice, and (7) the Impact of Competencies. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 26, Category 27, Category 28, Category 29, Category 30, Category 31, and Category 32 respectively in the overall research study. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information and are listed immediately below. For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 8, please also see Table 12. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information as follows:

Categories of Information

Category 26 – Business Needs and Challenges (Revenue Growth)

Respondent 1: Revenue growth and then after that productivity how do you produce a better product for similar or less costs. Productivity, not just cost management. And then volatility, how you manage risks, are the big challenges.
Categories of Information

Category 27 – Business Needs and Challenges (Productivity)

*Respondent 1:* Revenue growth and then after that **productivity** how do you produce a better product for similar or less costs. **Productivity, not just cost management.** And then volatility, how you manage risks, are the big challenges.

Categories of Information

Category 28 – Business Needs and Challenges (Volatility)

*Respondent 1:* Revenue growth and then after that productivity how do you produce a better product for similar or less costs. **Productivity, not just cost management.** And then **volatility,** how you manage risks, are the big challenges.

Categories of Information

Category 29 – Business Needs and Challenges (Skilled Workforce)

*Respondent 2:* Trying to keep things competency-based; **to find the people we need to hire.** If we have to hire so many people so fast, we couldn’t get enough people to pass those tests.”

*Respondent 3:* **Ability to develop talent rapidly** enough to meet the changing business needs. And **having a sufficient store or bench strength** so that when opportunities present themselves in the form of an acquisition or something like that there is adequate talent in the pipeline to support the major change in the organization. **Talent** is the biggest challenge.”

*Respondent 6:* **Biggest challenge is workforce shortages.** Those who can be strategic and innovative will be able to meet their business challenges more effectively.”

Categories of Information
Category 30 – Business Needs and Challenges (Selecting Competencies for the Future)

*Respondent 3:* Organizations have given sufficient thought to leading indicators – that is, what competencies will get the organization where they need to go. Knowing what the competencies are for the future while living in the present – developmentally and from a recruitment perspective.”

Categories of Information

Category 31 – Business Needs and Challenges (Methods of Practice)

*Respondent 7:* How do you operate globally but act locally? The ability to collaborate across cultures and time zones.

Categories of Information

Category 32 – Business Needs and Challenges (Impact of Competencies)

*Respondent 1:* If you hire better people, you can probably enhance your revenue. You might find more creativity and produce more for less and if you can lower your turnover with the right skill sets, you can obviously take some of the volatility away.

Interview Question 8

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Summary

Participants shared their perspectives on business needs and challenges. Seven Categories of Information emerged as follows: Revenue Growth, Productivity, Volatility, Skilled Workforce, Selecting Competencies for the Future, Methods of Practice, and Impact of Competencies.

*Revenue Growth* – “Revenue growth and then after that productivity how do you produce a better product for similar or less costs. Productivity, not just cost management.
And then volatility, how you manage risks, are the big challenges.

*Productivity* – “Revenue growth and then after that *productivity* how do you produce a better product for similar or less costs. *Productivity*, not just cost management. And then volatility, how you manage risks, are the big challenges.”

*Volatility* – “If you hire better people, you can probably enhance your revenue. You might find more creativity and produce more for less and if you can lower your turnover with the right skill sets, you can obviously take some of the volatility away.

*Skilled Workforce* – “Trying to keep things competency-based; **to find the people we need to hire**. If we have to hire so many people so fast, we couldn’t get enough people to pass those tests.” **“Ability to develop talent rapidly** enough to meet the changing business needs. And **having a sufficient store or bench strength** so that when opportunities present themselves in the form of an acquisition or something like that there is adequate talent in the pipeline to support the major change in the organization. **Talent** is the biggest challenge.” “**Biggest challenge is workforce shortages.** Those who can be strategic and innovative will be able to meet their business challenges more effectively.”

*Selecting Competencies for the Future* – “Organizations have given sufficient thought to leading indicators – that is **what competencies will get the organization where they need to go**. Knowing what the **competencies are for the future** while living in the present – developmentally and from a recruitment perspective.”

*Methods of Practice* – “How do you operate globally but act locally? The ability to collaborate across cultures and time zones.”
Impact of Competencies – “If you hire better people, you can probably enhance your revenue. You might find more creativity and produce more for less and if you can lower your turnover with the right skill sets, you can obviously take some of the volatility away.

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 8, please see Table 12.

Table 12

Summary Listing
Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 8
What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?
Results from Senior Human Resource Practitioner/Leaders and Thought Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>Business Needs and Challenges</td>
<td>Category 26 Revenue Growth</td>
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<td>Category 27 Productivity</td>
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<td>Category 28 Volatility</td>
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<td>Category 29 Skilled Workforce</td>
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<td>Category 30 Selecting Competencies for the Future</td>
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<td>Category 31 Methods of Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Category 32 Impact of Competencies</td>
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</table>

Research Question Number 2 (Continued)

What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?

The ninth interview question (Interview Question Number 9) from Telephone
Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the
ninth interview question (Interview Question Number 9) from Telephone Interview
Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 1 and are listed
below as follows:

Interview Question Number 9

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners

The Future

9 A. What do you anticipate is the future direction in your organization in the area of
competencies and competency-based human resources?

9 B. What do you anticipate is the future direction generally in the field of
competencies and competency-based human resources?

9 C. What suggestions do you have for enhancing or improving it (the field of human
resources in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource
management)?

Interview Question Number 9

Thought Leaders

The Future

What do you anticipate will be the future direction in the field of human resources within
the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management, and what
suggestions do you have for enhancing or improving it?

9 A. Future direction in the field of human resources within the area of competencies
and competency-based human resource management

9 B. Suggestions for enhancing or improving the field of human resources in the area
of competencies and competency-based human resource management.

**Interview Question Number 9**

**Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders**

**Findings**

Interview Question Number 9 from Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) produced eight main Categories of Information. The Categories of Information which emerged are as follows: (1) Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Will Become a More Common Practice, (2) Technology, (3) Increased Need for Leadership Skills and the Ability to Coach and Lead, (4) Ability to Create a Diverse Workforce, (5) Staying Current with Business Plans, (6) Flexibility, (7) Matching People to Roles, and (8) Renewing Competencies Based on the Way that Business and the World are Changing. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 33, Category 34, Category 35, Category 36, Category 37, Category 38, Category 39, and Category 40 respectively in the overall research study. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information and are listed immediately below. For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 9, please also see Table 13.

**Categories of Information**

**Category 33 – The Future (Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Will Become a More Common Practice)**

*Respondent 1:* It (competencies and competency-based human resource management practices) will become much more of an **everyday practice across the board because you minimize your risks while enhancing the upside, the potential you can hire.**
Categories of Information

Category 34 – The Future (Technology)

*Respondent 1:* Technology, web based information, and information sharing much more a need in the future.

Categories of Information

Category 35 – The Future (Increased Need for Leadership Skills and the Ability to Coach and Lead)

*Respondent 1:* Leadership skills and the ability to coach and lead will become much more important as we go forward; you have to shape and change the workforce.

Categories of Information

Category 36 – The Future (Ability to Create a Diverse Workforce)

Respondent 1: I think the ability to create a diverse workforce is going to be even more critical as it has in the past as demographics are changing.

Categories of Information

Category 37 – The Future (Staying Current with Business Plans)

*Respondent 1:* I think what we simply need to continue to refine the tools and make sure it (competency model) stays current with business plans or business activities; one of the things I see that can happen with a competency model is if it doesn’t stay very current with the business plan it becomes stale or if not it doesn’t have application pretty quickly so current is very important; flexibility because sometimes roles do change even as the year starts.

Categories of Information

Category 38 – The Future (Flexibility)
Respondent 1: I think what we simply need to continue to refine the tools and make sure it (competency model) stays current with business plans or business activities; one of the things I see that can happen with a competency model is if it doesn’t stay very current with the business plan it becomes stale or if not it doesn’t have application pretty quickly so current is very important; flexibility because sometimes roles do change even as the year starts.

Categories of Information

Category 39 – The Future (Matching People to Roles)

Respondent 6: Making sure we have the right people in the right roles.

Categories of Information

Category 40 – The Future (Renewing Competencies Based on the Way That Business and the World are Changing)

Respondent 7: The challenge is, on a more frequent basis, stepping back and renewing those competencies based on the way business and the world is changing.

Interview Question 9

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Summary

Participants shared their perspectives on the future. Seven Categories of Information emerged as follows: Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Will Become a More Common Practice, Technology, Increased Need for Leadership Skills and the Ability to Coach and Lead, Ability to Create a Diverse Workforce, Staying Current with Business Plans, Flexibility, Matching People to Roles, and Renewing Competencies Based on the Way that Business and the World are
Changing.

*Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Will Become a More Common Practice* – It (competencies and competency-based human resource management practices) will become much more of an everyday practice across the board because you minimize your risks while enhancing the upside, the potential you can hire.

*Technology* – Technology, web based information, and information sharing much more a need in the future.

*Increased Need for Leadership Skills and the Ability to Coach and Lead* – Leadership skills and the ability to coach and lead will become much more important as we go forward; you have to shape and change the workforce.

*Ability to Create a Diverse Workforce* – I think the ability to create a diverse workforce is going to be even more critical as it has in the past as demographics are changing.

*Staying Current with Business Plans* – I think what we simply need to continue to refine the tools and make sure it (competency model) stays current with business plans or business activities; one of the things I see that can happen with a competency model is if it doesn’t stay very current with the business plan it becomes stale or if not it doesn’t have application pretty quickly so current is very important; flexibility because sometimes roles do change even as the year starts.

*Flexibility* – I think what we simply need to continue to refine the tools and make sure it (competency model) stays current with business plans or business activities; one of the things I see that can happen with a competency model is if it doesn’t stay very
current with the business plan it becomes stale or if not it doesn’t have application pretty quickly so current is very important; flexibility because sometimes roles do change even as the year starts.

_Matching People to Roles_ – Making sure we have the right people in the right roles.

_Renewing Competencies Based on the Way That Business and the World are Changing_ – The challenge is, on a more frequent basis, stepping back and renewing those competencies based on the way business and the world is changing.

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 9, see also Table 13.

Table 13

Summary Listing

Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 9
What are the Perspectives on Competency Work?
Results from Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

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<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Future</td>
<td>Category 33 Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 34 Technology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Category 35 Increased Need for Leadership Skills and the Ability to Coach and Lead</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 36 Ability to Create a Diverse Workforce</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Research Question Number 3

What are the Lessons Learned about Competencies?

The third research question was designed to learn more about competencies and competency-based human resource management by identifying what others have learned in conducting competency work.

In working with competencies, it is important to learn about them and to be able to assist others in furthering their knowledge and understanding about the concepts. “Competencies encompass clusters of skills, knowledge, abilities, and behaviors required for people to succeed (Davis, Naughton, & Rothwell, 2004, para. 11).

In recent years, companies throughout North America have become concerned with employee results and specifically, with how some employees achieve outstanding results. The theory is that if companies can identify the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of their most successful employees, they can train other employees to acquire and apply these same attributes to yield better results (Dewey, 1997, para. 1).

Competency models provide in competency work a framework in which to showcase those competencies needed for a particular job. “A competency model can provide an important, and useful, tool to guide individual development” (Rothwell & Wellins, 2004,
Interview Question Number 10

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

The second interview question (Interview Question Number 10) from Telephone Interview Guide (1): Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and the second interview question (Interview Question Number 10) from Telephone Interview Guide (2): Thought Leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2 and are listed below. The findings for Interview Question 2 from each of the two Telephone Interview Guides immediately follows.

Interview Question Number 10

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

*Learning About Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices*

10. What have you learned about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices from your experience in working with them?

Interview Question Number 10

Thought Leaders

*Learning About Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices*

10. What have you learned about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices from your experience in working with them?

Interview Question Number 10

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders
Findings

Interview Question Number 10 from Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2) yielded eleven main Categories of Information. The Categories of Information which emerged are as follows: (1) Need to Know about Competencies, (2) Flexible, (3) Skills, (4) Differences in People, (5) Trust in the Data, (6) Skills Required, (7) Need for Continually Assessing and Developing People, (8) Consistent Approach, (9) Change, (10) Tests, (11) Additional Comments. These Categories of Information are referred to as Category 41, Category 42, Category 43, Category 44, Category 45, Category 46, Category 47, Category 48, Category 49, Category 50, and Category 51 respectively in the overall research study. Quotes from the participants serve as the foundational element of the emerged Categories of Information and are listed immediately below. For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 2, Interview Question Number 10, please also see Table 14.

Categories of Information

Category 41 – Lessons Learned (Need to Know about Competencies)

Respondent 9: Most people don’t know what competencies are. And so the lesson is so that you had better pretty competent yourself about what competencies are so you can explain them to other people.

Categories of Information

Category 42 – Lessons Learned (Flexible)

Respondent 9: Not everybody agrees on what that key formula of competencies is…so it’s got to be flexible.

Categories of Information
Category 43 – Lessons Learned (Skills)

Respondent 1: Greatly enhance your probability of success if you match skills to the task.

Respondent 1: Have also learned that you enrich the skills and deepen the performance of the company by continuing to develop and train people, and people can feel like they can grow in your company.

Categories of Information

Category 44 – Lessons Learned (Differences in People and Cultures)

Respondent 1: There are differences and cultures which have impacts on how people view their work, and you have to understand that when you are looking at competencies or work teams or how you want to produce work for the customer.

Categories of Information

Category 45 – Lessons Learned (Trust in the Data)

Respondent 1: Learned to trust the data, that the data is better, the facts are better than my intuition – the facts are as they speak. You get away from the personality but what you don’t get away from particularly in the interview process. But if you got an assessment model where you are can see what the core skills are, you can see and see pretty quickly if they are going to be successful in the company; it’s predictive, too.

Categories of Information

Category 46 – Lessons Learned (Skills Required)

Respondent 2: Need to be very upfront with people about what it takes to do a job and having a list of competencies and to be able to say this is what you need to be able to do this job is really helpful. So in many cases you get the right people in the job because
upfront they have a better idea of what it is about.

Categories of Information

Category 47 – Lessons Learned (Need for Continually Assessing and Developing People)

_Respondent 6:_ The major lesson is that people think they are already doing it because they assume if someone is already in the job then they must be competent. The assumption also is that if you are a professional and you are in a job that you will grow with the job. And you will adapt to the changing business need, and that’s not true either. So there is a need to continually assess and develop people.

Categories of Information

Category 48 – Lessons Learned (Consistent Approach)

_Respondent 7:_ Understanding what the core competencies are across the company are is critical and providing a consistent approach around performance assessment and aligning your training around those are important.

Categories of Information

Category 49 – Lessons Learned (Change)

_Respondent 7:_ Any time you change the competencies you have to be careful about what you change. The business result you get from that change has to be greater than the effort required to change them.

Categories of Information

Category 50 – Lessons Learning (Tests)

_Respondent 2:_ Needs to be an escape hatch to the competency list; it goes back to the issue about people who have a fear of testing.
Respondent 1: Avoid being overly scientific and be careful around the psychological piece of it. Cultures are different. Much more interested in skills or competencies and traits or abilities or the DNA of people. Try to look for people with value that can work within the culture. Team work means different things to different people. Learned to look at that. Learn to look at the person…do they have the skills to do the job in a superior way? Assessments can help you do that.

Respondent 2: It (competencies) takes a lot of subjectivity out about jobs where there should not be subjectivity.

Interview Question 10

Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

Summary

Participants shared their perspectives on competency identification, modeling, and assessment. Five Categories of information emerged as follows: Need to Know about Competencies, Flexible, Skills, Differences in People, Trust in the Data, Skills Required, Need for Continually Assessing and Developing People, Consistent Approach, Change, Tests, Additional Comments.

Need to Know about Competencies – Most people don’t know what competencies are. And so the lesson is so that you had better pretty competent yourself about what competencies are so you can explain them to other people.”

Flexible – Not everybody agrees on what that key formula of competencies is…so it’s got to be flexible.

Skills – Greatly enhance your probability of success if you match skills to the
task. Have also learned that you enrich the skills and deepen the performance of the company by continuing to develop and train people, and people can feel like they can grow in your company.

Differences in People – There are differences and cultures which have impacts on how people view their work, and you have to understand that when you are looking at competencies or work teams or how you want to produce work for the customer.

Trust in the Data – Learned to trust the data, that the data is better, the facts are better than my intuition – the facts are as they speak. You get away from the personality but what you don’t get away from particularly in the interview process. But if you got an assessment model where you are can see what the core skills are, you can see and see pretty quickly if they are going to be successful in the company; it’s predictive, too.

Skills Required – Need to be very upfront with people about what it takes to do a job and having a list of competencies and to be able to say this is what you need to be able to do this job is really helpful. So in many cases you get the right people in the job because upfront they have a better idea of what it is about.

Need for Continually Assessing and Developing People The major lesson is that people think they are already doing it because they assume if someone is already in the job then they must be competent. The assumption also is that if you are a professional and you are in a job that you will grow with the job. And you will adapt to the changing business need, and that’s not true either. So there is a need to continually assess and develop people.

Consistent Approach – Understanding what the core competencies are across the company are is critical and providing a consistent approach around performance
assessment and aligning your training around those are important.

*Change* – Any time you **change the competencies** you have to be careful about **what you change**. The business result you get from **that change has to be greater than the effort required to change them**.

*Tests* – Needs to be **an escape hatch to the competency list**; it goes back to the issue about people who have a fear of testing.

*Additional Comments* – **Avoid being overly scientific** and be careful around the psychological piece of it. Cultures are different. Much more interested in skills or competencies and traits or abilities or the DNA of people. Try to look for people with value that can work within the culture. Team work means different things to different people. Learned to look at that. Learn to look at the person…do they have the skills to do the job in a superior way? **Assessments** can help you do that.

For a summary listing of the Categories of Information, Research Question Number 3, Interview Question Number 10, see also Table 14 below.

Table 14

**Summary Listing**

**Research Question Number 3, Interview Question Number 10**

What are the Lessons Learned about Competencies

Results from Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and Thought Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Topic</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lessons Learned</td>
<td>Category 41 Need to Know about Competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 42 Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 43 Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 44 Differences in People</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes

Thematic analysis is a way of seeing. Often what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events, or situation. To others if they agree with the insight, the insight appears almost magical. If they are empowered by the insight, it appears visionary. If they disagree with the insight, it appears delusionary. Observation precedes understanding. Recognizing an important moment (seeing) precedes encoding it (seeing it as something), which in turn precedes interpretation. Thematic analysis moves you through these three phases of inquiry (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 1).

The Categories of Information listed in Table 15 below highlight the emerged themes by Interview Question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Number</th>
<th>Categories of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Question Topic: Competencies</td>
<td>Categories of Information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Category 1  Behaviors
Category 2  Core Competencies
Category 3  Performers
Category 4  Performance
Category 5  Results

Interview Question Topic: Competency Identification, Modeling, and Assessment

Category 6  Consulting Firms
Category 7  Competency Study
Category 8  Competency Model
Category 9  External Benchmarks
Category 10  Assessments

Interview Question Topic: Human Resource Processes or Functions (Applications)

Category 11  Recruitment, Selection and Placement
Category 12  Succession Planning
Category 13  Retention

Interview Question Topic: Issues and Challenges

Category 14  Defining What is Meant by the Term Competency
Category 15  Determining the Right Competencies
Category 16  Change
Category 17  Skills
Category 18  Agreement on Core Competencies

Interview Question Topic: Global Practices

Category 19  Differences
Category 20  Similarities
Category 21  Consistent Applications Across the Globe

**Interview Question Topic: Practices Other than Competency-Based**

Category 22  Historically-Based

**Interview Question Topic: Human Resource Needs and Challenges**

Category 23  Skills
Category 24  Competency Models
Category 25  Serving as a Strategic Business Partner

**Interview Question Topic: Business Needs and Challenges**

Category 26  Revenue Growth
Category 27  Productivity
Category 28  Volatility
Category 29  Skilled Workforce
Category 30  Selecting Competencies for the Future
Category 31  Methods of Practice
Category 32  Impact of Competencies

**Interview Question Topic: The Future**

Category 33  Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Will Become a More Common Practice
Category 35  Increased Need for Leadership Skills and the Ability to Coach and Lead
Category 34  Technology
Category 36  Ability to Create a Diverse Workforce
Chapter Summary

The findings for this research study were presented in this chapter. A profile of the participants was provided as well as demographic information. A summary of the procedures involved with the research study was covered, and the research questions were listed. The interview findings from the responses to ten interview questions were addressed. There were 51 Categories of Information that were discovered in the analysis.
of the responses to the questions. Partial quotes from participants were offered to indicate the practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners of thought leaders. The themes and Interview Questions were indicated.
CHAPTER 5

Study Overview, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the study, offer conclusions, suggest recommendations, and summarize the study.

Study Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe competencies and competency-based human resource management (CBHRM) practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders. The key characteristics of competencies, critical components of competency work, applications, topics related to working with competencies, results, and lessons learned were identified, explored, and described.

While there have been a number of studies about competencies and studies about competency-based human resource management, this research study explored practices as well as perspectives. Historical perspectives were presented with an emphasis on the work of five Harvard psychologists including William James: The Field of Psychology, Gordon W. Allport: Personality Psychology, Henry A. Murray: Psychogenic Needs, Robert W. White: The Concept of Competence, and David C. McClelland: The Concept of Competencies. Definitions of terms associated with competencies and competency-based human resource management were listed. Background information about America’s foremost companies was provided along with a listing of the industries and the fastest growing private companies in America; a discussion about thought leaders was included.

The researcher applied a qualitative approach in methodology to this elite research
study with a small quantitative component.

Ten questions were asked in telephone interviews with participants. Many interviews (some were in-depth interviews) were conducted, and ten of those interviews with senior leaders/practitioners were analyzed in this paper along with four interviews of thought leaders in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management. Fifty-one Categories of Information were discovered in an analysis of the responses to the telephone interviews. This data provided answers to the three research questions.

Discussion of the Three Research Questions

This section offers a discussion of the conclusions of the study based on the three research questions associated with the study. For each of the research questions, the responses related to questions are discussed.

Research Question Number 1

What are the perspectives on the characteristics of competencies?

Research Question Number 1 is focused on the identification of characteristics of competencies. In an introductory essay in a special issue of *The Journal of Management Development* dedicated to updating the understanding of competencies, Boyatzis wrote the following:

Today, almost every organization with more than 300 people uses some form of competency-based human resource management. Major consulting companies, such as The Hay Group, Development Dimensions International, and Personnel Decisions Incorporated and thousands of small consulting firms and independent consultants have become worldwide practitioners of competency assessment and development. And yet, the academic and applied research literature has trailed application. This
has resulted in continued skepticism on the part of many academics and some professionals, and less guidance to practitioners from on-going research than is helpful. Some of this is due to the observation that many of the competency validation studies have been done by consultants who have little patience for the laborious process of documenting and getting the results published (2008, para. 1).

In the same essay, Boyatzis (2008) suggests the following definition:

A competency is defined as a capability or ability. It is a set of related but different sets of behavior organized around an underlying construct, which we call the “intent”. The behaviors are alternate manifestations of the intent as appropriate in various situations of times (para. 3).

Two interview questions, one for the senior human resource leaders/practitioners of and one for the thought leaders were linked to Research Question Number 1. Responses included discussions of competencies in terms of behaviors. In particular, behaviors of best-in-class (excellent or superior) performers. The discussions also included the importance of being able to define those behaviors. One respondent indicated that the source of the behavior is irrelevant.

Core competencies were also discussed in terms of responses about competencies. Core competencies were generally discussed in ways which implied core skills or knowledge, and some respondents talked about core competencies across the board or going across the entire company. Additionally, core competencies (as in individual core competencies) were mentioned as being related to one’s temperament and motives and being difficult to change.

The term, performer, was discussed as it related to what average performers do as
opposed to outstanding performers. Performance was also discussed both in terms of an individual’s performance as well as the collective performance of an organization as in world class performance.

**Research Question Number 2**

*What are the Perspectives of Competency Work?*

Research Question Number 2 is focused on competency work. Interview Questions Number 2 through 9 for both senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders are linked to Research Question Number 2. The topics covered included competency identification, modeling, and assessment; applications; issues and challenges; global practices, practices other than competency-based; human resource needs and challenges; business needs and challenges; and the future.

In terms of competency work itself, external consultants were frequently mentioned by respondents. Other terms for external consultants included outside firms and outside consultancy. External consultants were mentioned in the context of conducting assessments in the company, conducting a competency study, and validating studies. Competency models were mentioned as were external benchmarks and assessments.

Various applications were discussed. In the areas of recruitment, selection, and placement, shortening the hiring time and improving the retention rate because of doing a better job at selecting the individual was mentioned; fairly extensive screening process for competencies is mentioned as are different kinds of screens and tests. Competencies are also mentioned in terms of saving money and saving individual anguish by not putting people into jobs for which they are not suited or qualified. The ability to get the right people into the right jobs at the right time was mentioned as was the use of
behavioral interviews.

Succession planning was mentioned in terms of looking at supply and demand relative to competencies, and improving the retention rate was also discussed.

Change was a major issue amongst the respondents. Amongst the topics related to change are how quickly the roles can change; how quickly the competition changes so that the business model must be changed; the need for the tool to be current and the importance of keeping the competencies current; as businesses change, certain competencies need to change, the cost of change; people resist change, if multiple systems are linked to competencies, then multiple changes have to occur.

In the area of issues and challenges, one major issue was skills. The following topics centered around the issues and challenges associated with change: how to go about finding specific bundles of skills; having a difficult time in finding people who are a good fit with a competency profile; having the right competencies in the right places; and creating a balance in developing competencies and how people then take the competencies and translate them into business results. Another issue and challenge discussed was that of gaining agreement on core competencies.

Responses regarding global practices were varied. Some responses indicated that practices varied globally for a number of reasons including different laws, different history, and different cultures while other responses indicated that the practices were the same and consistent regardless of location.

Skills were noted as a human resource need and challenge; skills were seen as a typical, everyday challenge; competencies were viewed as a plus in terms of this challenges as one respondent indicated that assessments and competency models assist in
the hiring of a better workforce. Competency models becoming outdated was also viewed as a challenge as was being a strategic partner with business unit leaders.

Business needs and challenges included responses in a number of areas including revenue growth, productivity, and volatility. A major business need and challenge discussed by a number of respondents was that of maintaining a skilled workforce – finding the right people to hire and then having the ability to develop talent rapidly. Another business need and challenge was the topic of selecting competencies for the future. Additionally, the ability to collaborate across cultures and time zones was also perceived as a business need and challenge. The impact of competencies was noted in areas such as revenue growth, productivity, and volatility.

In terms of the future, competencies were seen as becoming more of an everyday practice across the board. Technology, web-based information, and information sharing were seen as being in greater need in the future. Leadership skills and the ability to coach and lead were also seen as important for the future in order to be able to shape and lead the workforce. The ability to create a diverse workforce, staying current with the business plan, ensuring the right people are in the role roles, and renewing competencies more frequently in keeping with the way business and the world is changing.

Research Question Number 3

What are the lessons learned about competencies?

Responses about lessons learned about competencies were quite varied. In the area of skills, one response indicated that the probability of success is greatly enhanced if skills are matched to the tasks, and another response suggested that you enrich the skills
and deepen the performance of the company by continuing to develop and train people and thus, people can feel like they can grow with your company. Differences in people and differences in culture have an impact how people view their work. Another lesson learned was learning to trust the data; that is more accurate than intuition, and it’s predictive. The importance of having people know the skills required by having a list of competencies was another lesson learned.

One response to the lessons learned question was that people thinking that because they are in a job they are competent and another assumption is that if you are a professional you will grow with the job and adapt to the changing business need. As these are just assumptions and not necessarily true, there is a need to continually assess and develop people. Another lesson learned is related to the importance of understanding about the core competencies across the company and having a consistent approach for performance assessment and aligning training around the core competencies. Ensuring that the business result gained from changing competencies is greater than the effort that is required to change them was another lesson learned. Having an escape hatch from a competency list was also indicated as a lesson learned about the fear of testing. Avoiding being overly scientific and learning to look at the person and finding out if they have the skills to do the job in a superior way were other responses with assessments indicated as being a valuable tool in determining the skill level. Another response indicated that competencies remove a lot of subjectivity about jobs.

**Summary of Observations of the Researcher/Interviewer**

The Interviewer/Researcher made a number of observations during the course of the research study. Some of the observations are as follows: (1) In conducting an
research study with elites, it is critical that the Interviewer/Researcher have a high level of knowledge about the topic, particularly a topic with terms that have various meanings; (2) A high level of knowledge on the topic in an elite study will serve the Interviewer/Researcher well in terms of probing, follow-ups, or simply answering questions; (3) A critical skill of an Interviewer/Researcher in conducting telephone interviews is the ability to put the Interviewee at ease and at a level of comfort during the interview, (4) In a telephone interview, the Interviewee sometimes needs reassurance that the Interviewer/Researcher is still on the other end of the telephone throughout the course of the Interview, (5) The Interviewer/Researcher should be prepared for any type of response, (6) The Interviewer/Researcher should be prepared for what to do if the answer given doesn’t match the question, (7) The Interviewer/Researcher should be prepared for what to say at the end of the response to each question, (8) The Interviewer/Researcher should be prepared for the unknown when conducting an interview, (9) The Interviewer/Researcher should be prepared and realize that no matter the amount of preparation that terms may need clarification such as the term “organization”. In this research study, the Interviewer/Researcher discovered that many of the Interviewees think of the term “organization” as referring to the HR organization as opposed to the overall organization or company or entire business, and (10) In interviewing elites, the Interviewer/Researcher should be prepared that the Interviewees may have very strong opinions about the topic in which they have a high level of knowledge. The Interviewer/Researcher must keep in mind, that the practices and perspectives can vary vastly amongst Interviewees.

Study Conclusions

The conclusions of this research study are based on the responses to the interview
questions.

1. Practices and perspectives on competencies and competency-based human resource management vary but certain topics such as change, skills, business plans, core competencies, external consultants, and behaviors of superior performers are recurrent themes in competency work.

2. There are many issues and challenges with competencies and competency-based human resource management; competencies can have a positive impact on human resource needs and challenges as well as business needs and challenges.

3. The topic of future implications and lessons learned can produce responses rich in detail and of value when studying competencies and competency-based practices.

Implications of the Study

Based on the findings of this research study and the conclusions of the study, there are implications for companies applying competencies in their human resource systems. Keeping competencies updated and matched to business plans is a costly endeavor but a critical one; resistance to change in terms of changing competencies can be an issue and a challenge for those working with competencies and leading competency efforts. A skilled workforce is a major challenge and issue in today’s world of work, and it presents needs and challenges for human resources and the business. Agreement on core competencies, particularly those going across the entire organization, is a critical component in competency work and for the success of the business. External consultants offer tremendous knowledge and skills and research abilities as it relates to competency work, though at a cost, and can assist in various ways such as in conducting competency studies, assessments, and validation efforts.
Study Recommendations

This section of the chapter is focused on recommendations. Recommendations are indicated below.

Recommendations for Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners

Based on the findings of the study, there are recommendations for the Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners, and those recommendations are as follows:
Continue to learn about competencies and their characteristics and encourage that learning in others; note the importance of the behaviors of exemplary performers; place an emphasis on the selection of core competencies and note the importance of gaining a consensus about the selection, particularly those that go across the board; have those updated to keep current with business plans and models; continue to gain an understanding of differences in people and cultures and in understanding the impact of change; keep competency work current and reflective of changing business plans or models; continue to learn about the relationship between revenue growth, productivity, and volatility and the potential impact of competencies; and continue to place an emphasis on continuous and targeted development as it relates to specific business results as well as continuous assessment.

Recommendations for Thought Leaders

Based on the findings of the study, there are recommendations for Thought Leaders, and those recommendations are as follows: Place a greater emphasis on competencies themselves and their characteristics; continue to discuss the importance of the selection of core competencies, particularly those that go across the board, and the importance of gaining a consensus about selected core competencies; continue to think about and
provide thought leadership on the various aspects of change as it relates to competencies and competency work and the importance of maintaining current competencies reflective of changing business plans and models and the changing business environment as well as ways to work in the present yet identify and predict competencies needed for future work; place a continued and increased emphasis on thought leadership as it relates to workforce shortages and the challenges of maintaining a skilled workforce; offer thought leadership on creating a greater connection between the development of competencies and translating that development to producing specific business results; and continue to provide thought leadership on meeting the challenges of competency work and ways to meet changing human resource needs and challenges as well as changing business needs and challenges; and provide suggestions for ways to explore and capture the lessons learned about competency work to further enhance work in the field.

Further Research

Additional research is recommended on the topic of competencies, the body of knowledge for the competency field, and elite studies and elite interviewing.

Study Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe competencies and competency-based human resource management (CBHRM) practices and perspectives of senior human resource leaders/practitioners and thought leaders. The key characteristics of competencies, critical components of competency work, applications, topics related to working with competencies, results, the future, and lessons learned were identified, explored, and described.

A discussion of historical perspectives and the conceptual framework associated with
the study was provided. The work of five Harvard psychologists as it related to this study were explored. A qualitative approach to the methodology was applied. Taped interviews were conducted with Senior Human Resource Leaders/Practitioners and thought leaders. Ten multi-part interview questions were asked, and the data was analyzed to produce categories of information and themes. A study overview, conclusions, and recommendations were provided. The need for further research about competencies and various aspects of competency work was noted.
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APPENDIX A

Criteria for Eligibility for Thought Leaders
Criteria for Eligibility as a Thought Leader in the Area of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management

Guidelines as criteria for eligibility as a subject matter expert and/or thought leader in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices are as follows:

**Researcher**

The individual has demonstrated significant knowledge of competency-based human resource management practices by leading and/or conducting research of the field.

**Author**

The individual has demonstrated significant knowledge of competency-based human resource management practices through written and published work on the subject.

**Practitioner**

The individual has demonstrated significant knowledge of competency-based human resource management practices as a practitioner in the field.

**Consultant**

The individual has demonstrated significant knowledge of competency-based human resource management practices as a consultant in the field.

**Scholar**

The individual has demonstrated significant knowledge of competency-based human resource management practices as a scholar of the field.

**Academic Professional**

The individual has demonstrated significant knowledge of competency-based human resource management practices as a professional in an academic setting.

**Educator**

The individual has an educational background in a related field.

**Speaker**

The individual has demonstrated significant knowledge of competency-based human resource management practices by speaking professionally on the subject or a related.
APPENDIX B

Invitations to Participate and Accompanying Information
Dear

I am writing this letter from my home in [insert city] to invite you to participate in a telephone interview in conjunction with my doctoral research and dissertation. You may find the study very interesting.

Currently, I am studying competencies and competency-based human resource management practices. There are two parts to my overall research study. One is focused on the perspectives of key human resource leaders in the FORTUNE 500, FORTUNE 501 – 1000, and the Inc. 500 companies. For the other, I am interested in gathering the perspectives of national and international subject matter experts in the field. I am very excited about the research study, and I hope you will be, too. It holds much promise to potentially be an informative study of the field. While the emphasis of my research is clearly on competency-based human resource management practices, other current and emerging human resource practices are also being explored.

As a key leader in one of America’s foremost organizations, your thoughts on human resource management practices are very important. I respectfully and wholeheartedly invite you to participate. Your feedback is very valuable to the success of this research study.

Your comments are strictly confidential. Participation is completely voluntary. The interview is brief, only ten questions. The telephone interview will take approximately thirty to forty minutes, perhaps less or just a little more. The rewards are great! By participating, you will receive an executive summary. You will also be eligible for a drawing of several prizes. A detailed presentation will be available upon request. Your comments will enrich the research study immensely. In addition, you will be assisting me in my pursuit of a goal of earning a degree in the field.

The results of the study may offer tremendous potential for your organization by providing valuable insight into the human resource management practices and business challenges of leading organizations in America as well as globally and may also offer other possibilities for further review and research.
Your participation will contribute greatly to this study. I have included an information sheet, a participation form, two consent forms, and a stamped envelope. If you would like to indicate your interest in participating in the study on the enclosed participation form, please do so and kindly return to me or simply send me a brief e-mail. Otherwise, I will be following up in the next several weeks to ascertain your interest in participating. If you are interested in participating in this research study, please also sign one consent form and return by mail or fax. Please note that the interview can be scheduled at a time most convenient for you. I look forward to hopefully speaking with you in the near future. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Deborah Jo Stern, Ph.D. Candidate
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania
Workforce Education and Development
Learning and Performance Systems
Concentration: Human Resource Development/
Organization Development

Enclosures: 5
Dear

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Currently, I am studying competencies and competency-based human resource management practices. There are two parts to my overall research study. One is focused on the perspectives of key human resource leaders in the FORTUNE 500, FORTUNE 501–1000, and the Inc. 500 companies. For the other, I am interested in gathering the perspectives of national and international subject matter experts in the field. I am very excited about the research study, and I hope you will be, too. It holds much promise to potentially be an informative study of the field. While the emphasis of my research is clearly on competency-based human resource management practices, other current and emerging human resource practices are also being explored.

As someone very knowledgeable about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices, your thoughts on the subject are very important. I respectfully and wholeheartedly invite you to participate. Your feedback is very valuable to the success of this research study.

Your comments are strictly confidential. Participation is completely voluntary. The interview is brief, only ten questions. The telephone interview will take approximately thirty to forty minutes, perhaps less or just a little more. The rewards are great! By participating, you will receive an executive summary. You will also be eligible for a drawing of several prizes. A detailed presentation will be available upon request. Your comments will enrich the research study immensely. In addition, you will be assisting me in my pursuit of a goal of earning a degree in the field.

The results of the study may offer tremendous potential for further review and research in providing valuable insight into human resource management practices and business challenges of leading organizations in America and globally.
Your participation will contribute greatly to this study. I have included an information sheet, a participation form, two consent forms, and a stamped envelope. If you would like to indicate your interest in participating in the study on the enclosed participation form, please do so and kindly return to me or simply send me a brief e-mail. Otherwise, I will be following up in the next several weeks to ascertain your interest in participating. If you are interested in participating in this research study, please also sign one consent form and return by mail or fax. Please note that the interview can be scheduled at a time most convenient for you. I look forward to hopefully speaking with you in the near future. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Deborah Jo Stern, Ph.D. Candidate
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania
Workforce Education and Development
Learning and Performance Systems
Concentration: Human Resource Development/
Organization Development

Enclosures: 5
Information Sheet
A Study of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices

By Deborah Jo Stern, Ph.D. Candidate
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania
Workforce Education and Development, Learning and Performance Systems
Concentration: Human Resource Development/Organization Development

Problem Statement

Competencies and competency-based human resource management have gained considerable momentum in recent years. There are many ways to describe and define competencies as well as other closely related terms. Perhaps competencies are the knowledge, skills, and other personal traits that individuals use in various appropriate ways to achieve successful job performance and attain desired results. Human resource management practices are the functions and processes that focus on the human component in organization performance. Competency-based human resource management practices are those that have competencies as a foundation and common thread in their daily application.

Researchers, human resource practitioners, consultants, scholars and academic professionals, authors, and others have studied and continue to study competencies and competency-based human resource management. Studies cover many topics and subtopics within the complexity of competencies and competency-based human resource management and have been conducted throughout organizations of various sizes representing numerous industries and are local, regional, national, or international in scope.

This research study of the perspectives of key human resource leaders of the Fortune 500, Fortune 501-1000, and the Inc. 500 companies and international and national subject matter experts and thought leaders in the field seeks to explore competencies and competency-based human resource management and examine the current state of practices for competency-based human resource management as well as other current and emerging human resource practices. Practices related to competencies and competency-based human resource management as well as perspectives of key human resource leaders and subject matter experts will perhaps offer a greater understanding of some of the approaches being applied to meet the challenges of organizations today as well as those emerging now and for future consideration.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study is to explore competencies as well as describe and compare competency-based human resource management practices. A secondary purpose of the study is to build on the foundation of knowledge about the field from earlier studies and, in doing so, develop further groundwork for future research studies about
competencies and competency-based human resource management as well as closely related topics.

Participation

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Participants must be 18 years of age or older. The survey is brief. There are only ten questions; however, each question has a number of sections. The telephone interview is anticipated to last approximately thirty to forty minutes, perhaps less or just a little more. The interviews will be tape recorded in order to obtain the exact wording of your perspectives on the subject, rather than rewording your comments and perhaps misinterpreting the essence of your meaning. You may refuse to answer a question, ask that the tape recorder be turned off, or end the interview. You may request a transcript of the interview. Participants will receive an executive summary of the research results.

Confidentiality

All information related to you and your practices in the field or your organization and its practices are completely confidential. The audio-tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office, and I will have the only access to the tapes. The interview tapes will be transcribed. The actual tapes will be destroyed on December 20, 2010. All or part of the answers will be used, however, in a published dissertation and available for future research use.

Deborah Jo Stern • [insert address] • [insert city, state, and zip code]
Telephone: [insert telephone number] • E-Mail: [insert E-Mail address]
Participation Form

A Study of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management

Date

____________________________________________________

Name

________________________________________________________________________

Title

________________________________________________________________________

Organization

________________________________________________________________________

Address

________________________________________________________________________

City _________________________ State ____________________ Zip Code ________

Country

________________________________________________________________________

E-Mail Address

________________________________________________________________________

Telephone Number ____________________________ Fax Number _______________

___ Yes, I am interested in participating in this research study about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.

Here is the best way to arrange an appointment with me for the interview:

___ Please contact me directly at this number ________________________________

___ Please contact me by e-mail. My e-mail address is _________________________
___ Please contact __________________________ at this number ________________

___ Please contact __________________________ at this e-mail address __________

___ Other
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Additional Comments
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

___ No, I am unable to participate in this research study, but I appreciate the invitation.

Please return to: [insert address, city, state, zip code]
Thank You!

Deborah Jo Stern • [insert address] • [insert city, state, and zip code]  
Telephone: [insert telephone number] • E-Mail: [insert E-Mail address]
INVESTIGATOR’S COPY – INFORMED CONSENT FORM

FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
PROJECT TITLE: A Study of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices

Your voluntary participation in the research involves the following conditions:

1. You must be 18 years of age or older.
2. You may decide not to answer a question or end the interview at any time.
3. During audio-recording, you may ask that the interviewer turn off the machine permanently or periodically.
4. Your name and the name of your organization are confidential, will be safeguarded at all times, and will not be used in any results that are published.
5. The audio-tape will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Deborah Jo King Stern’s home office, and she will have the only access to the tape. The interview tape will be transcribed. The actual tape will be destroyed on December 20, 2010.
6. Any part or all of my answers will be published in a dissertation and may be published in journal articles and other types of references so that others may study the research.
7. As a participant in the interview, you will receive an executive summary of the research results. You may also request a presentation.
8. Participants are eligible to participate in a prize drawing. There are ten prizes; one prize in each of ten categories. Each participant may select one category. The prizes, gift set accessories, are as follows: A Gift Set for Fun on the Golf Course, A Gift Set for Fun on the Tennis Courts, A Gift Set for Fun in Horseback Riding, A Gift Set for Fun with Cooking in the Kitchen, A Gift Set for Fun in the Sun or Shade at the Beach or Pool, A Gift Set for Fun in a Winter Wonderland of Snow, A Gift Set for Artistic Enjoyment in Drawing and Painting, A Gift Set for Listening Enjoyment with Music, A Gift Set for Reading with Books, and A Gift Set for Fun with Photography. Each prize has a value of less than $100.00.

________________________________________________________________________
Name

________________________________________________________________________
Signature

________________________________________________________________________
Title

________________________________________________________________________
Organization

________________________________________________________________________
Street Address

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City
**Purpose of the Study:** The primary purpose of the study is to explore competencies and describe and compare competency-based human resource management practices. A secondary purpose of this study is to build on the foundation of knowledge about the field from earlier studies and, in doing so, develop further groundwork for future research studies about competencies, competency-based human resource management practices, and related subjects.

**Procedures:** You will be asked ten questions, one question at a time, about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.

**Anticipated Time of the Interview:** Thirty to forty minutes

**Please complete and return this form to Deborah Jo Stern, [insert street address, city, state, zip code]**

**Researcher/Interviewer:** Deborah Jo Stern, Ph.D. Candidate, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, Workforce Education and Development, Learning and Performance Systems; Concentration: Human Resource Development and Organization Development. Contact Information: Deborah Jo Stern, [insert street address, city, state, zip code]; Telephone: [insert telephone number]; E-Mail: [insert E-Mail address]

**Advisor:** William J. Rothwell, Ph.D., Professor, Workforce Education and Development, Learning and Performance Systems, The Pennsylvania State University, 310B Keller Building, University Park, PA 16802, Telephone: 814-863-2581, E-Mail: wjr9@psu.edu
PARTICIPANTS’ COPY – INFORMED CONSENT FORM

FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
PROJECT TITLE: A Study of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices

Your voluntary participation in the research involves the following conditions:

1. You must be 18 years of age or older.
2. You may decide not to answer a question or end the interview at any time.
3. During audio-recording, you may ask that the interviewer turn off the machine permanently or periodically.
4. Your name and the name of your organization are confidential, will be safeguarded at all times, and will not be used in any results that are published.
5. The audio-tape will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Deborah Jo King Stern’s home office, and she will have the only access to the tape. The interview tape will be transcribed. The actual tape will be destroyed on December 20, 2010.
6. Any part or all of my answers will be published in a dissertation and may be published in journal articles and other types of references so that others may study the research.
7. As a participant in the interview, you will receive an executive summary of the research results. You may also request a presentation be given.
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Signature

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Title

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Organization

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Street Address

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Purpose of the Study: The primary purpose of the study is to explore competencies and describe and compare competency-based human resource management practices. A secondary purpose of this study is to build on the foundation of knowledge about the field from earlier studies and, in doing so, develop further groundwork for future research studies about competencies, competency-based human resource management practices, and related subjects.

Procedures: You will be asked ten questions, one question at a time, about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.

Anticipated Time of the Interview: Thirty to forty minutes

Please retain this copy of the consent form for your records.


Advisor: William J. Rothwell, Ph.D., Professor, Workforce Education and Development, Learning and Performance Systems, The Pennsylvania State University, 310B Keller Building, University Park, PA 16802, Telephone: 814-863-2581, E-Mail: wjr9@psu.edu
PRIZE DRAWING SHEET

A Fun to Do Drawing

That completes the interview questions. There is one additional item, however. As I mentioned in the introductory letter and invitation to participate in this research study on competencies and competency-based human resource management practices, participants in the research study are eligible to win one prize in a drawing of ten prizes. Please indicate your preference for one of the ten prizes from the following list of prizes so that your name will be in the drawing. You will be notified by telephone and/or mail if you are a winner. The drawing will be held at the completion of the research study. Here’s the listing:

___________ A Gift Set For Fun On The Golf Course!
___________ A Gift Set For Fun On The Tennis Courts!
___________ A Gift Set For Fun In Horseback Riding On The Trails!
___________ A Gift Set For Fun With Cooking In The Kitchen!
___________ A Gift Set For Fun In The Sun Or Shade At The Beach Or Pool!
___________ A Gift Set For Fun In A Winter Wonderland Of Snow!
___________ A Gift Set For Artistic Enjoyment In Drawing And Painting!
___________ A Gift Set For Listening Enjoyment With Music!
___________ A Gift Set For Reading Enjoyment With Books!
___________ A Gift Set For Run With Photography!

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APPENDIX C

Telephone Interview Guides (1) and (2)
An Introduction

I would like to begin this interview by providing you with a very brief introduction to the research study. As the information sheet in the materials that I sent you indicated, this research study is being conducted in conjunction with my doctoral research at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. I am a student in Workforce Education and Development, Learning and Performance Systems, and my emphasis is Human Resource Development and Organization Development.

I selected competencies and competency-based human resource management as the topic for my research. Next, I conducted a literature review on the topic. I then chose the key human resource leaders of the FORTUNE 500, FORTUNE 501 – 1000, and the Inc. 500 as well as subject matter experts/thought leaders in the field to invite as participants in the study.

Then, I developed criteria for eligibility for the subject matter experts/thought leaders and identified individuals from the literature review who are knowledgeable about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices and who met the criteria that I developed.

I compiled preliminary research questions and preliminary survey questions. I also began a literature review of the FORTUNE 500, FORTUNE 501 – 1000, and the Inc. 500 companies, reading about the companies and their businesses, their business practices as well as their human resource practices. In addition, I also conducted a review of the literature of various other topics related to conducting research studies so as to assist with the study preparation. Upon completing classes at Penn State, I passed a comprehensive exam and continued the background research for my study and began preparing for the study itself. I conducted pre – and post tests concerning my interview questions and procedures. The interview guide for the groups are different but they do, I think, complement each other. I then finalized the materials and began the study. I continue to read about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices as well as read about those companies and practices in my study groups.

As indicated on the information sheet I sent you, the research study seeks to explore competencies as well as describe and compare competency-based human resource management practices. I am interested in collecting your perspectives as someone knowledgeable about the topic. While the emphasis of my research study is clearly on competency-based human resource management practices, other current and emerging human resource practices are being explored.

As also indicated on the materials that I sent you, participation in this research study is completely voluntary. The interview consists of a series of questions. There are only ten
questions; however, each question has a number of sections. The telephone interview is anticipated to last approximately thirty to forty minutes, perhaps less or just a little more. The interviews, as indicated on the consent form, will be tape recorded in order to obtain the exact wording of your perspectives on the subject, rather than rewording your comments and perhaps misinterpreting the essence of your meaning. You may refuse to answer a question, ask that the tape recorder be turned off, or end the interview. You may request a transcript of the interview.

All information related to you and your practices in the field or your organization and its practices are completely confidential. I am the only person with access to the taped interviews. Upon completion of the transcription of your interview, the tape recordings will be destroyed. All or part of the answers will be used, however, in a published dissertation and available for future research use.

I very much appreciate your participation in this research study. I have your signed consent form. Do you have any questions before we begin, and I turn the tape recorder on?

Okay, let’s get started.

Identification Code

Phone Number

Interview Date and Starting Time

Please let me know if I am speaking too softly or too loudly or too fast or too slow.
GETTING STARTED

Before I begin the interview questions on competencies and competency-based human resource management practices, I would like to obtain some background information.

**Background Information**

A. What is your current title?

B. Do you have a specialization in the field of human resources?

C. If so, what is your specialization?

D. Do you have a specialization within the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management?

E. If so, what is your specialization?

F. How many years of experience do you have in the field of human resources?

G. How many years of experience do you have in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management?

H. Are any of the HR processes or functions in your organization competency-based?

I. What industry is your organization?

J. What is the number of employees in your organization?

K. Does your organization have employees working in a country or countries other than the United States?

*Thank you so much for the background information.*
Interview Questions

Now, here are the interview questions on competencies and competency-based human resource management practices. You will be asked ten questions, one question at a time. Each question has a number of sections. I will first ask a question and then I will read each section of that question, one section at a time. The interview is anticipated to last thirty to forty minutes, perhaps less or just a little more.

So that I can make sure we cover each of the questions, how much time have you allotted for this interview?
QUESTION NUMBER 1

Competencies

Let’s begin by talking about competencies for a few moments.

There are many definitions of competencies. For example, perhaps competencies are the knowledge, skills, and other personal traits that individuals use in various appropriate ways to achieve successful job performance and attain desired results. Competencies are perhaps seen as behaviors, too. There are also many ways to describe competencies, and there are many kinds of competencies such as leadership competencies. In addition, there are different approaches to competencies such as core competencies. As it relates to competencies, how do you define and describe competencies, what are your perspectives about them, and what do you find interesting or noteworthy about competencies?

Now let’s divide the question into several sections.

A. How do you define competencies?

B. How do you describe competencies?

C. What are your perspectives about (your thoughts on) competencies?

D. What do you find interesting or noteworthy about competencies?

Thank you for your answers. Let’s move on now to Question Number 2 which is focused on Competency Identification, Modeling and Competency Assessment.
QUESTION NUMBER 2

Competency Identification, Modeling and Assessment

There are many methods of identifying competencies, developing competency models and conducting competency assessments. Could you very briefly describe the methods that your organization uses in identifying competencies, developing competency models, and conducting competency assessments?

2A. Competency identification?
2B. Developing competency models?
2C. Conducting competency assessments?

Thanks for your comments on Question Number 2. And now, onto Question Number 3, which is focused on Human Resource Processes or Functions.
QUESTION NUMBER 3

Human Resource Processes or Functions

Competencies can be used in human resource management processes or functions in a number of ways. I will read a list of human resource management processes or functions in a moment. As I go through the list, please indicate whether or not the process or function is competency-based in your organization. At the end of this list, please select one process or function from the list and very briefly describe from your experiences as an example showcasing how competencies can be applied in that process or function along with the business result(s) or possible business result(s) that can be achieved.

3A. Recruitment, Selection, and Placement: Competency-Based
3B. Recruitment, Selection, and Placement: Not Competency-Based
3C. Orientation of New Employees: Competency-Based
3D. Orientation of New Employees: Not Competency-Based
3E. Training: Competency-Based
3F. Training: Not Competency-Based
3G. Individual Career Development of Non Leaders: Competency-Based
3H. Individual Career Development of Non Leaders: Not Competency-Based
3I. Development of Leaders: Competency-Based
3J. Development of Leaders: Not Competency-Based
3K. Succession Planning: Competency-Based
3L. Succession Planning: Not Competency-Based
3M. Incentives, Rewards, and Compensation: Competency-Based
3N. Incentives, Rewards, and Compensation: Not Competency-Based
3O. Managing Day-to-Day Performance: Competency-Based
3P. Managing Day-to-Day Performance: Not Competency-Based
3Q. Human Resource Planning: Competency-Based
3R. Human Resource Planning: Not Competency-Based
3S. Other Human Resource Processes or Functions that are Competency-Based
3T. Other Human Resource Processes or Functions that are Not Competency-Based
3U. Could you please select any one of the processes or functions and describe briefly how competencies are used in your organization and the business result(s) or possible business result(s)?

Thanks you so much for your perspectives on Question Number 3. Let’s go now to Question Number 4 which is about issues and challenges in working with competencies.
QUESTION NUMBER 4

Issues and Challenges in Working with Competencies

There are many issues in working with competencies. For instance, there are challenges and sometimes barriers associated with competency-based human resource management practices. For example, identifying and developing competencies with a future orientation is sometimes seen as a challenge or a barrier and so is creating a competency strategy or executing one. Training employees to use competency-based human resource management practices, embracing the language of competencies, management or employee support as well as financial support, and commitment of time are other challenges sometimes encountered. Those are just a few of the issues (that are noted in a literature review), and those are focused on challenges or barriers. There are other issues and other challenges or barriers as well. In your opinion, what are the key issues and challenges related to competencies and competency-based human resource management practices, and what suggestions do you have for most effectively meeting the challenges associated with the issues?

4A. What are the key issues and challenges related to competencies and competency-based human resource management practices?

4B. What suggestions do you have for most effectively meeting the challenges associated with the issues?

Thanks for those comments on Question Number 4. Let's move on to Question Number 5 now. It is about International Perspectives.
QUESTION NUMBER 5

An International Perspective

Are there similarities and differences in your organization’s use of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally (if applicable), and if so, please describe.

5A. _____ Yes, there are similarities in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5B. Please describe the similarities.

5C. _____ No, there are not any similarities in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.

5D. _____ Yes, there are differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5E. Please describe the differences.

5F. _____ No, there are not any differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5G. _____ Not applicable

Thanks for those thoughts on Question Number 5. Now for Question 6 which is about other methods and approaches to human resource management practices other than competency-based.
QUESTION NUMBER 6

Other Methods and Approaches to Human Resource Management Practices if Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices are Not Used

Could you very briefly describe a human resource process or function that is not competency-based in your organization?

Thank you. Now, here is Question 7. It is about human resource challenges and the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.
QUESTION NUMBER 7

Human Resource Needs and Challenges and the Impact of Competencies

Would you very briefly describe one of the following: (A) the greatest human resource need(s) in your organization, (B) the greatest human resource challenge(s) in your organization, (C) the greatest human resource need(s) that you see in the business world today, (D) the great human resource challenge(s) that you see in the business world today, (E) the great human resource need(s) that you anticipate in the future, (F) the greatest human resource challenge(s) that you anticipate in the future; and would you please very briefly describe the following: (G) what do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on human resource needs and challenges today, and (H) what do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on human resource needs and challenges in the future:

7A. The greatest human resource need(s) in your organization

7B. The greatest human resource challenge(s) in your organization

7C. The greatest human resource need(s) that you see in the business world today

7D. The greatest human resource challenge(s) that you see in the business world today

7E. The greatest human resource need(s) that you anticipate in the future

7F. The greatest human resource challenge(s) that you see in the future

Would you please very briefly describe the following?

7G. What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges of today?

7H. What do you consider will be the potential impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges anticipated in the future?

Thanks so much. Now here’s Question Number 8 which is about business needs and challenges and the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.
QUESTION NUMBER 8

Business Needs and Challenges and the Impact of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices

Would you please very briefly describe one of the following: (A) the greatest business need(s) in your organization, (B) the greatest business challenge(s) in your organization, (C) the greatest business need(s) that you see in the business world today, (D) the greatest business challenge(s) that you see in the business world today, (E) the greatest business need(s) that you anticipate in the future, (F) the greatest business challenge(s) that you anticipate in the future, and would you please very briefly describe the following: (G) what do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges today, and (H) what do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges in the future?

8A. The greatest business need(s) in your organization

8B. The greatest business challenge(s) in your organization

8C. The greatest business need(s) that you see in the business world today

8D. The greatest business challenge(s) that you see in the business world today

8E. The greatest business need(s) that you anticipate in the future

8F. The greatest business challenge(s) that you anticipate in the future

Would you please very briefly describe the following?

8G. What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges today?

8H. What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges in the future?

Okay, thank you. Let’s move on to Question Number 9 now which is about the future direction of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.
QUESTION NUMBER 9

The Future

What do you anticipate will be the future direction in your organization in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management or generally in the field of human resources in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management, and what suggestions do you have for enhancing or improving it?

9A. Future direction in your organization in the area of competencies and competency-based human resources

9B. Future direction in the field of competencies and competency-based human resources

9C. Suggestions for enhancing or improving it (the field of human resources in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management)

And finally, Question Number 10 which is about what you have learned from your experience with competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.
QUESTION NUMBER 10

Learning About Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices

What have you learned about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices from your experience in working with them? (And what I mean by this is being the key HR leader that you are and with your experience could you share the one or two major lessons that you have learned from your experiences)

*Thank you so much!*
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Those are the 10 interview questions; however, do you have any additional comments about competencies or competency-based human resource management practices? (that I perhaps did not cover in my questions).

Thank you!

Interview Date and Ending Time
An Introduction

I would like to begin this interview by providing you with a very brief introduction to the research study. As the information sheet in the materials that I sent you indicated, this research study is being conducted in conjunction with my doctoral research at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. I am a student in Workforce Education and Development, Learning and Performance Systems, and my emphasis is Human Resource Development and Organization Development.

I selected competencies and competency-based human resource management as the topic for my research. Next, I conducted a literature review on the topic. I then chose the key human resource leaders of the FORTUNE 500, FORTUNE 501 – 1000, and the Inc. 500 as well as subject matter experts/thought leaders in the field to invite as participants in the study.

Then, I developed criteria for eligibility for the subject matter experts/thought leaders and identified individuals from the literature review who are knowledgeable about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices and who met the criteria that I developed.

I compiled preliminary research questions and preliminary survey questions. I also began a literature review of the FORTUNE 500, FORTUNE 501 – 1000, and the Inc. 500 companies, reading about the companies and their businesses, their business practices as well as their human resource practices. In addition, I also conducted a review of the literature of various other topics related to conducting research studies so as to assist with the study preparation. Upon completing classes at Penn State, I passed a comprehensive exam and continued the background research for my study and began preparing for the study itself. I conducted pre – and post tests concerning my interview questions and procedures. The interview guide for the groups are different but they do, I think, complement each other. I then finalized the materials and began the study. I continue to read about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices as well as read about those companies and practices in my study groups.

As indicated on the information sheet I sent you, the research study seeks to explore competencies as well as describe and compare competency-based human resource management practices. I am interested in collecting your perspectives as someone knowledgeable about the topic. While the emphasis of my research study is clearly on competency-based human resource management practices, other current and emerging human resource practices are being explored.
As also indicated on the materials that I sent you, participation in this research study is completely voluntary. The interview consists of a series of questions. There are only ten questions; however, each question has a number of sections. The telephone interview is anticipated to last approximately thirty to forty minutes, perhaps less or just a little more. The interviews, as indicated on the consent form, will be tape recorded in order to obtain the exact wording of your perspectives on the subject, rather than rewording your comments and perhaps misinterpreting the essence of your meaning. You may refuse to answer a question, ask that the tape recorder be turned off, or end the interview. You may request a transcript of the interview.

All information related to you and your practices in the field or your organization and its practices are completely confidential. I am the only person with access to the taped interviews. Upon completion of the transcription of your interview, the tape recordings will be destroyed. All or part of the answers will be used, however, in a published dissertation and available for future research use.

I very much appreciate your participation in this research study. I have your signed consent form. Do you have any questions before we begin, and I turn the tape recorder on?

Okay, let’s get started.

**Identification Code**

_____________________________________________________

**Phone Number**

_____________________________________________________

**Interview Date and Starting Time**

_____________________________________________________

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Please let me know if I am speaking too softly or too loudly or too fast or too slow.
GETTING STARTED

Before I begin the interview questions on competencies and competency-based human resource management practices, I would like to obtain some background information.

Background Information

A. What is your current title?

B. Do you have a specialization in the field of human resources?

C. If so, what is your specialization?

D. Do you have a specialization within the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management?

E. If so, what is your specialization?

F. How many years of experience do you have in the field of human resources?

G. How many years of experience do you have in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management?

H. In what roles have you worked with competencies and competency-based human resource management?

Thank you so much for the background information.
Interview Questions

Now, here are the interview questions on competencies and competency-based human resource management practices. You will be asked ten questions, one question at a time. Each question has a number of sections. I will first ask a question and then I will read each section of that question, one section at a time. The interview is anticipated to last thirty to forty minutes, perhaps less or just a little more.

So that I can make sure we cover each of the questions, how much time have you allotted for this interview?
QUESTION NUMBER 1

Competencies

Let’s begin by talking about competencies for a few moments.

There are many definitions of competencies. For example, perhaps competencies are the knowledge, skills, and other personal traits that individuals use in various appropriate ways to achieve successful job performance and attain desired results. Competencies are perhaps seen as behaviors, too. There are also many ways to describe competencies, and there are many kinds of competencies such as leadership competencies. In addition, there are different approaches to competencies such as core competencies. As it relates to competencies, how do you define and describe competencies, what are your perspectives about them, and what do you find interesting or noteworthy about competencies?

Now let’s divide the question into several sections.

1A. How do you define competencies?

1B. How do you describe competencies?

1C. What are your perspectives about (your thoughts on) competencies?

1D. What do you find interesting or noteworthy about competencies?

Thank you for your answers. Let’s move on now to Question Number 2 which is focused on Competency Identification, Modeling and Competency Assessment.
QUESTION NUMBER 2

Competency Identification, Modeling and Assessment

There are many methods of identifying competencies, developing competency models and conducting competency assessments. Behavioral event interviews, three hundred sixty-degree assessments, and assessment centers are some examples. What do you consider are the most effective approaches for the following:

2A. Competency identification?

2B. Developing competency models?

2C. Conducting competency assessments?

Thanks for your comments on Question Number 2. And now, onto Question Number 3, which is focused on Human Resource Processes or Functions.
QUESTION NUMBER 3

Human Resource Processes or Functions

Competencies can be used in human resource management processes or functions in a number of ways. I will read a list of human resource management processes or functions in a moment. From that list, please select one and describe from your experiences how competencies can most effectively be applied in that particular process or function along with the business result or results that can be achieved.

3A. Recruitment, Selection, and Placement
3B. Orientation of New Employees
3C. Training
3D. Individual Career Development of Non Leaders
3E. Development of Leaders
3F. Succession Planning
3G. Incentives, Rewards, and Compensation
3H. Managing Day-to-Day Performance
3I. Human Resource Planning
3J. Other Human Resource Management Processes or Functions

Thanks you so much for your perspectives on Question Number 3. Let’s go now to Question Number 4 which is about issues and challenges in working with competencies.
QUESTION NUMBER 4

Issues and Challenges in Working with Competencies

There are many issues in working with competencies. For instance, there are challenges and sometimes barriers associated with competency-based human resource management practices. For example, identifying and developing competencies with a future orientation is sometimes seen as a challenge or a barrier and so is creating a competency strategy or executing one. Training employees to use competency-based human resource management practices, embracing the language of competencies, management or employee support as well as financial support, and commitment of time are other challenges sometimes encountered. Those are just a few of the issues (that are noted in a literature review), and those are focused on challenges or barriers. There are other issues and other challenges or barriers as well. In your opinion, what are the key issues related to competencies and competency-based human resource management practices, and what suggestions do you have for most effectively meeting the challenges associated with the issues?

4A. What are the key issues and challenges related to competencies and competency-based human resource management practices?

4B. What suggestions do you have for most effectively meeting the challenges associated with the issues?

Thanks for those comments on Question Number 4. Let’s move on to Question Number 5 now. It is about International Perspectives.
QUESTION NUMBER 5

An International Perspective

In your opinion and from your experiences in the field (if applicable), are there similarities and the differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally? If so, please describe.

5A. _____ Yes, there are similarities in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5B. Please describe the similarities.

5C. _____ No, there are not any similarities in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.

5D. _____ Yes, there are differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

5E. Please describe the differences.

5F. _____ No, there are not any differences in competencies and competency-based human resource management practices globally.

G. _____ Not applicable.

Thanks for those thoughts on Question Number 5. Now for Question 6 which is about other methods and approaches to human resource management practices other than competency-based.
QUESTION NUMBER 6

Other Methods and Approaches to Human Resource Management Practices if Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices are Not Used

In considering your experiences in the field, what are some of the other methods of approaching the processes and functions of human resource management you have encountered other than those with competencies or competency-based human resource management practices?

Thank you. Now, here is Question 7. It is about human resource challenges and the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.
QUESTION NUMBER 7

Human Resource Needs and Challenges and the Impact of Competencies

What do you consider to be the great human resource need(s) or challenge(s) of today and those you anticipate in the future, and what do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on those challenges and the potential impact for those challenges anticipated in the future?

7A.  What do you consider to be the greatest human resource need(s) of today?

7B.  What do you consider to be the great human resource challenges(s) of today?

7C.  What do you consider to be the greatest human resource need(s) in the future?

7D.  What do you anticipate will be the great human resource challenges in the future?

7E.  What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges of today?

7F.  What do you consider will be the potential impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges anticipated in the future?

Thanks so much. Now here’s Question Number 8 which is about business needs and challenges and the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.
QUESTION NUMBER 8

Business Needs and Challenges and the Impact of Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices

What do you consider to be the greatest business needs and challenges of today and those you anticipate in the future, and what do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on those challenges and the potential impact for those anticipated in the future?

8A. What do you consider to be the great business needs(s) of today?

8B. What do you anticipate will be the great business challenges in the future?

8C. What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges of today?

8D. What do you consider will be the potential impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices on human resource challenges anticipated in the future?

8E. What do you consider is the impact of competencies of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges today?

8F. What do you consider is the impact of competencies and competency-based human resource management on business needs and challenges in the future?

Okay, thank you. Let's move on to Question Number 9 now which is about the future direction of competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.
QUESTION NUMBER 9

The Future

What do you anticipate will be the future direction in the field of human resources within the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management, and what suggestions do you have for enhancing or improving it?

9A. Future direction in the field of human resources within the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management

9B. Suggestions for enhancing or improving the field of human resources in the area of competencies and competency-based human resource management

And finally, Question Number 10 which is about what you have learned from your experience with competencies and competency-based human resource management practices.
QUESTION NUMBER 10

Learning About Competencies and Competency-Based Human Resource Management Practices

What have you learned about competencies and competency-based human resource management practices from your years of experience in working with them? And what I mean by this is being the well known figure with competencies and competency-based human resource management practices that you are, could you share the one or two major lessons that you have learned from your experiences

*Thank you so much!*
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Those are the 10 interview questions; however, do you have any additional comments about competencies or competency-based human resource management practices? (that I perhaps did not cover in my questions).

Thank you!

Interview Date and Ending Time

________________________________________________________________________
Vita
Deborah Jo Stern

A native of Louisville, Kentucky, Deborah Jo received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Bellarmine University located in her home town. She later attained a Master of Science degree in Human Services Administration from Misericordia University, Dallas, Pennsylvania. Deborah Jo has experience serving as a senior level executive in the healthcare field. As a doctoral student, she has contributed to both publications and projects. Currently, she is developing a website (ALadyofHonor.com) about competencies and other related topics.