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EPICA INITIATIVE - A STRATEGIC ALLIANCE BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE TO MAKE STUDENT COMPETENCES IN THE WORK FIELD MORE VISIBLE

Blog dels Estudis de Psicologia i Ciències de l'Educació de la UOC

The UOC (Open University of Catalonia) hosted the fourth international meeting of the EPICA Initiative H2020 project on 10 – 11 July 2019. This meeting focused on the Strategic Association for the co-design of an innovative and scalable ePortfolio ecosystem to improve the quality and visibility of skills. This effort is a new step in this strategic alliance between Africa and Europe to make the skills of students in the labour market more visible.

The first day's meeting, held at the UOC Tibidabo headquarters, welcomed the following participants: the ICDE (International Council for Open and Distance Education) - the project leaders; Lourdes Guàrdia, director of the UOC master's degree in Education and ICT (e -learning); Marcelo Maina, Professor of Psychology and Educational Sciences Studies; Albert Sangrà, Director of the UNESCO Chair in Education and Technology for Social Change; Federica Mancini, PhD in the PhD program on Information and Knowledge Society at the UOC.

Of course, representatives from the four African universities were also in attendance: the University of Makerere (Uganda), the University of Maseno (Kenya), the Open University of Tanzania and the University Virtual Africana (AVU); MyDocumenta, who have developed the ePortfolio; and ICWE, the German partner responsible for the dissemination of information about the project.

During this first day, Josep A. Planell, Rector of the UOC, and Dr. Bakary Diallo, Rector of the AVU, exchanged views on online education and the work done by the AVU on the African continent.

On the second day of the meeting, held at UOC's 22 @ headquarters, one of the sessions featured a discussion of the methodology to be applied during the pilots. Two other UOC researchers, Maite Fernandez and Marta Firestone, participated in the talks.

The EPICA Initiative is already halfway through its schedule, and the pedagogical, technological and legal requirements of the new platform based on the MyDocumenta ePortfolio have just been defined. Pilot scenarios are also being designed within the three African universities, as well as at the UOC. The pilot phase will begin in January 2020 and is expected to end in June. This first

Workday of the EPICA Initiative
partners at UOC headquarters

application of EPICA in the four Partner universities will involve between 400-600 students and around 15-20 teachers.

The project that improves the skills of African students

The **need to improve the quality and visibility of the recent-graduate's skills** in African universities is at the foundation of the EPICA Initiative project. The objective of this initiative is to give **visibility to the skills that are developed in each university** through an **innovative and scalable e-portfolio system** developed by MyDocumenta. Hence, the EPICA Initiative aims to reduce the gap between what graduates can contribute to the world of work and what companies are looking for. The methodology involves the process of **co-decision, adaptation, implementation and validation of a digital visual product in an innovative and scalable format** that showcases the competencies that have been developed throughout the students' university education.

The **EPICA ePortfolio is a digital learning dossier that presents a collection of evidence about a user's professional and personal skills and knowledge** beyond a traditional curriculum. The evidence constitutes proofs, records, or learning samples that can be presented in textual format, electronic files, images, multimedia files, blog entries, and links, etc. Thanks to its digital format, it can be updated quickly and can be linked to other applications and social networks.

Between Africa and Europe

A strategic association of international scope was created to implement EPICA. Its members are the University of Makerere (Uganda); the University of Maseno (Kenya); the Open University of Tanzania; the African Virtual University; the Open University of Catalonia; and the International Council for Open and Distance Education. Two SMEs are also involved: ICWE, an international media company with a focus on ICT for education, training and skills development across Africa, and MyDocumenta, which specialises in the development of the e-portfolio tool.

The overarching goal of this association is to facilitate students' reflection on their own learning, which in turn will lead to greater **awareness of training strategies and needs**.

The participation of African higher education institutions reflects the **resounding transformation that technology is driving in the continent**, where knowledge has become a key factor in growth and development. The great mismatch between the skills of young workers and what enterprises need in an emerging economy is universally recognised. Therefore, education must adapt to meet the demands of the job market and provide the skills and competencies necessary to foster growth of local economies.

Workday of the EPICA Initiative team at 22 @ headquarters of the UOC

The results of the EPICA Initiative will support the following areas:

- **Universities** will develop and implement the new teaching and learning methodologies based on competencies to meet the growing demands of the market in terms of better-qualified workers.

- **Students and workers** will be able to give greater visibility and comparability to their skills and competencies developed in formal and non-formal education.

- **Entrepreneurs** and **companies** will be able to identify the candidates that best fit their needs.

In a word, the EPICA project involves the end-user communities throughout the process to ensure that the e-portfolio solution meets the requirements of the users and the market.

INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH : EDEPHONCE NGEMERA NFUKA

Edephonce Ngemera Nfuka

We hear a lot about the skills gap between university graduates and the labour market. What would you say are the main contributing factors that lead to this disparity?

Well, the skills gap between university graduates and the labour market is a daunting issue in our society. There are thousands of recent graduates ready to work, but business needs skills that these graduates never got. These graduates end up experiencing a difficult college-to-work transition, and in some cases, businesses are unable to find suitable candidates for their positions.

The main contributing factors that lead to the disparity of skills gaps between university graduates and the labour market, despite commendable higher education expansion and improvement, is the skills mismatch. This mismatch is in terms of inadequate general employability skills including communication skills, Teamwork skills, Problem-solving, Initiative and corporate skills, and Planning and organizational. Others include Learning skills, Digital fluency, and Self-management skills. Additionally, there is inadequacy provision of the required personal attributes that contribute to overall employability capabilities including commitment, adaptability, honesty and integrity, reliability, ability to deal with pressure, motivation, and cultural fit with the employing organization. This also applies to inadequacy provision of entrepreneurship skills across all fields that are necessary for contributing to their business creation thus stimulating the necessary economic dynamism to generate new jobs in the society.

Additionally, there is an issue of how educators and carrier guidance counselors are continually equipped with the current and future trends on social economic and technological development and contemporary career guidance. If both are handled and incorporated well and timely in the supply chain might further help to inform educational and career choices that are in line with available and foreseen job demand and labour market opportunities. For example, we now see the

Fourth Industry Revolution (4IR) coming along but how are we prepared as education institutions and the industry to produce and have the relevant expertise for this era.

Furthermore, there are issues of inadequate practice-focused teaching and learning that include practical training, industrial attachment and inviting experts from the industry to lecture in some field-oriented courses that may also add value in creating an employable graduate thus reducing disparity. Lastly, these disparities on the knowledge generated in the educational system and the skills demanded by employers have been fertilized in some cases by some unfavorable educational policies, reforms and or strategies right from the primary to tertiary levels. This is in terms of teaching and learning the infrastructure, resources, and competency-based pedagogical approaches put in place as well as associated monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

Therefore, the higher education curriculum and associated supporting mechanisms need to be responsive to the interests of employers and take a plan of action in line with all those factors that were mentioned here so as to equip graduates with the required and up-to-date employability skills. Efforts for the development of employability skills and attributes should be integrated within the curriculum. This situation can be improved and various studies indicate that having links and collaboration among educators, government and employers can help in determining knowledge, skills, and competencies required in the industry and developing appropriate policies, reforms, and strategies to minimize the disparities. This also applies to use of advancing technologies such as e-Portfolio that can capture, track and increase the visibility of the graduate achieved competencies to educators and employers. All these can provide graduates with the chance to maximize their potential, be for self-employment or being employed. The employer can also reduce the effect of skills gaps such as unnecessarily costly and time-consuming outsourcing, skills imports, short-term training, and co-coaching. Doing all of these interventions also contributes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) No. 8 on promoting in our societies inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all by 2030.

From your point of view, which academic fields, businesses or industries suffer the most because of this, especially in Tanzania?

I see academic fields, businesses or industries related to the need for higher customer care, communication skills and creativity such as hospitality industry suffering the most. This also applies to academic fields, businesses or industries related to the need of higher practical oriented, innovative and problem-solving skills such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) based industries like science and mathematics teachers for secondary school and medical doctors.

What is an ePortfolio and how is it different from a CV or a graduate certificate?

An ePortfolio is a record or digital collection of student self-created artifacts associated with their courses and academic programs. It is also said to be a collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed by a user, usually on the web in which such electronic evidence may include input

text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks. An efficient ePortfolio provides an extensive view of student learning progress and corresponding didactic activities, which can be packaged in a way that can be assessed by the academic institution and made visible in a simplified way to employers.

The ePortfolio is different from a CV or a graduate certificate as the latter is a type of summary that is used to describe your skills, talent, and experiences in a compact and mostly textual version, graduate certificate just indicates the qualification and area you graduated-in, while the e-portfolio, provides a collection of your electronic evidence in terms of texts, files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks which give a tangible aspect to your work-related capability and experience.

How, in your opinion, does having an ePortfolio benefit a student and graduate?

ePortfolio benefit a student and graduate by displaying achievements while still studying or when has finished the program. With a student or graduate control on what and to whom can be displayed or shared, the achievement can be made visible to potential employer thus earned evidence-based competencies to be evaluated. Its benefit to a student is also providing a rich resource to learn about the achievement of important outcomes over time, make connections among disparate parts of the curriculum, and gaining insights leading to improvement, skill mastery and eventually competency achievement. Generally it offers to the students the platform to develop the online presence and showcase their competencies concerning employability capabilities to potential employers.

Who stands to benefit from receiving access to an ePortfolio, i.e. how will this be useful to employers?

Employers will also benefit from getting access to an ePortfolio given the fact that it generates evidence of the employability skills valued by graduate employers, including digital literacy, self-management, creativity and innovation, communication and problem solving, to name but a few. Providing this evidence and overall insight into graduate capabilities and employability may enhance the opportunity for graduate employers to source the best candidate thus high productivity in their organizations.

How has this idea been received by those who stand to benefit from it?

I see three types of beneficiaries who stand to benefit from e-Portfolio. The first one is students or graduates that see this as a tool to assist them in capturing, track their learning achievement and share competency-based evidence to potential employers. The second one is Employers who see this as a tool to assist them in reviewing graduates evidence and overall insight into graduate capabilities and employability and source the best candidate.

The third one is the educational institutions (lecturer & administrator) that among others, see this as a tool to assist them to implement a digitally-enabled competency-based approach through a

competency framework. With this framework, a student can register & visualize which competencies have already been achieved, thus providing the institutions with the possibility to assess students progress and view their achievement made.

Institutions also may specifically get the flexible and accessible digital mechanism of managing supervisions and collection of evidence when students are undertaking placements such as fields and teaching practice in varied places that otherwise were costly and taking a lot of time of supervisors from their working stations. With this ePortfolio, students can do self-blogging and collect a compilation of artefacts such as on-site videos, images, and reports while giving supervisors an ability to assess and evaluate their competence levels as they progress and finish with their fields or teaching practice.

Can you point to an instance where this idea has flourished before? What can we learn from those instances?

ePortfolios is becoming popular with students around the world as a tool to enhance learning, assist with personal career development and documenting graduate attributes or competencies that can help in describe a graduate better when searching for employment. An example of place where this idea has flourished before is Europe, North America and Australia where there a number of Universities using ePortfolio such as Federation University (https://eportfolios.federation.edu.au) that use it in advancing teaching and learning from students documenting and following up their progress to staff assessing students' progress and students/graduates sharing evidence-based competencies achievement to potential employees.

In Subsaharan Africa, there still seems to exist a paucity of empirical evidence on the use of ePortfolio mainly in South Africa. Central University of Technology (CUT) and Stellenbosch University (SU) are good examples of South African higher learning institutions that provide students with ePortfolio. Lectures can share and critique the information provided by students on the ePortfolio by collaboratively giving them constructive feedback regarding the quality and authenticity of the evidence that they produce. Students also use the ePortfolio to showcase their skills and abilities to prospective employers. For instance, while at CUT the staff members of the peer mentorship program and the careers office support students in compiling and managing their ePortfolio, at SU the ePortfolio concept is applied within the context of teacher training and in the faculty of economic and management sciences. As such, implementation of the ePortfolio concept the associated empirical evidence indicates that its use is not widespread in Subsaharan Africa and cases reported are experienced in single courses and or as pilot studies while it is critical to students learning achievement and visibility to employers.

What do you think are the most crucial coming steps that need to be negotiated for a successful implementation of EPICA's strategy, such as overcoming technological requirements, increasing the visibility of the initiative, improving funding, etc.?

Apart from the ongoing implementation to integrate ePortfolio with local LMS platforms at the three Universities by SSO, six months ePortfolio pilot to start in January 2020 and the participation in different events for more EPICA visibility, the most crucial coming steps that need to be worked out further for a successful implementation of EPICA's strategy are mainly having cost-effective technological requirements, a sustainable business model, and the funding for the initial implementation. EPICA Project which is 'Strategic Partnership for the co-design of an innovative and scalable ePortfolio ecosystem to improve the quality and visibility of skills' aims at contributing to modernizing the educational and training systems of selected universities in Sub-Saharan countries i.e. Open University of Tanzania (Tanzania), Makerere University (Uganda), and Maseno University (Kenya) and thereafter others in Sub-Sahara Africa.

On having a sustainable business model to be used during the initial implementation of e-Portfolio the strategy is to adopt the model in which the Universities will only outsource the specialized technical support from My Documenta -MYD (e-portfolio main developer) and Universities using their internally developed capacity during EPICA project will provide the rest i.e. teacher training, development of specific materials and user support.

Finally regarding initial implementation of ePortfolio in the first three Universities after EPICA project has ended the strategy is preparation of proposal in the course of finalizing the ongoing project that can be submitted within these Universities to explore opportunities availed internally such as using a certain percentage of tuition fees for e-portfolio and out there for example to International Facility for Funding Education (IFFeD) for post-secondary funding that among others supports institutions championing e-portfolio.

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WHAT COUNTS AS LEARNING: OPEN DIGITAL BADGES FOR NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The Digital Media + Learning Research Hub Report Series on Connected Learning

By: Sheryl Grant

Open digital badges have gained traction since 2011 because they meet needs that are not currently being met, not only for learners ranging from kindergarden through college, but for lifelong learners transitioning from one career to another, or for employees staying current on top of their careers. The patchwork way our learning is currently recognized means that many of our abilities are unevenly recognized or not recognized at all. A veteran who is expert in military

logistics must go back to school to get credentials demonstrating proficiency when her skills may surpass what required courses offer. For many learners, acquiring traditional credentials has become more important than the competency, mastery, and proficiency they are intended to represent.

There are legions of people who acquire skills, abilities, and knowledge outside classroom walls who lack the necessary credentials to verify what they know and can do. Students who are highly competent or proficient in skills not taught or assessed in schools lack a standardized way to demonstrate their abilities to others. Employees struggling to shift careers after their companies are downsized can face insurmountable obstacles returning to school as adult learners, and without credentials to communicate their knowledge and skills find themselves unemployed or working in low-paying, unskilled jobs. Many learners have abilities, skills, or qualities that are graded or recognized in traditional classroom settings, but evidence of those strengths disappear into databases and stacks of papers, or accumulate in portfolios that are unwieldy to navigate.

Other learners may acquire some of their most valuable skills online through open educational resources, or through libraries, museums, and after-school programs, and then cobble together résumés based largely on self-promotion. An emerging practice among employers and college admission officers is to use search results and social media sites to comb for clues about prospective candidates. The sum effect is that traditional credentials recognize a narrow spectrum of the full learning pathways many of us chart in our lives. Traditional credentials legitimize certain types of learning, often favoring certain types of learners, subjects, and assessments, and that means a tremendous amount of learning is not being recognized, a juggernaut that open digital badges can address. However, despite the potential for badges to recognize this expanded landscape of learning, designing relevant and impactful badge systems is a considerable challenge.

We know from research in other disciplines such as human-computer interaction and technology mediated social participation that for every Facebook, Wikipedia, or Twitter, there are many more technological platforms that fail. "For all the public and corporate enthusiasm and the proclamations of utopian visionaries, the reality is that many sites fail to retain participants, tagging initiatives go quiet, and online communities become ghost towns" (Preece & Shneiderman, 2009).

Of course, even long-established systems and institutions can fail, particularly those that cease to be relevant, including traditional institutions of learning. This is perhaps the crux of badge system design — identifying what is relevant and meaningful to learners while adapting and preserving our institutions of learning. To be relevant is to have a connection with the subject or issue. A badge system that mimics traditional systems without making any changes to underlying practices will have little transformative impact on learning, engagement, assessment, and opportunities. It may be technically functional, but will lack relevance to learners in other ways that no amount of technology can fix.

Badges for learning do not make learners become engaged if they are otherwise wholly disconnected. "Turning badges on" does not create an instant easy solution to learner engagement. They may create a meaningful bridge between content and learning, however, and help learners develop a sense of personal reward, confidence, and connection to the learning process. This doesn't happen in a vacuum, though. Trainers, teachers, and peers can't be separated from the process and must be incorporated into an overall strategy.

– American Graduate badge system

Relevance can be embodied in the learning content itself, or be manifest in both social and human systems. A privilege or opportunity associated with badges may define a system's relevance. Learning experiences that are socially engaging and interest-based can make the system relevant. Conversely, a badge system is irrelevant if it is built on assumptions that learners have universal access to technology, particularly systems that are designed to serve populations who do not.

Perhaps most significantly for schools and universities, relevance may be defined by the degree to which students can customize their learning pathways so they are less tethered to more rigid scaffolds. The purpose of the following chapters is to think about the social, academic, and technological relevance that defines badge systems, and the opportunities they can create for the next generation of learners.

The full American Graduate's Digital Badges: Lessons Learned project Q&A is available online: http:// www.hastac.org/wiki/project-qa-american-graduate-lets-make-it-happen

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DEVELOPING A COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Linking Company Objectives and Personal Performance

You're probably familiar with the phrase "what gets measured gets done." Defining and measuring effectiveness – especially the performance of workers – is a critical part of your job as a manager.

The question is: how do you define the skills, behaviours, and attitudes that workers need to perform their roles effectively? How do you know they're qualified for the job? In other words, how do you know what to measure?

Some people think formal education is a reliable measure. Others believe more in on-the-job training, and years of experience. Others might argue that personal characteristics hold the key to effective work behavior.

All of these are important, but none seems sufficient to describe an ideal set of behaviors and traits needed for any particular role. Nor do they guarantee that individuals will perform to the standards and levels required by the organization.

A more complete way of approaching this is to link individual performance to the goals of the business. To do this, many companies use "competencies." These are the integrated knowledge, skills, judgment, and attributes that people need to perform a job effectively. By having a defined set of competencies for each role in your business, it shows workers the kind of behaviors the organization values, and which it requires to help achieve its objectives. Not only can your team members work more effectively and achieve their potential, but there are many business benefits to be had from linking personal performance with corporate goals and values.

Defining which competencies are necessary for success in your organization can help you do the following:

- Ensure that your people demonstrate sufficient expertise.

- Recruit and select new staff more effectively.

- Evaluate performance more effectively.

- Identify skill and competency gaps more efficiently.

- Provide more customized training and professional development.

- Plan sufficiently for succession.

- Make change management processes work more efficiently.

How can you define the set of practices needed for effective performance? You can do this by adding a competency framework to your talent management program. By collecting and combining competency information, you can create a standardized approach to performance that's clear and accessible to everyone in the company. The framework outlines specifically what people need to do to be effective in their roles, and it clearly establishes how their roles relate to organizational goals and success.

This article outlines the steps you need to take to develop a competency framework in your organization.

Design Principles of a Competency Framework

A competency framework defines the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed for people within an organization. Each individual role will have its own set of competencies needed to perform the job effectively. To develop this framework, you need to have an in-depth understanding of the roles within your business. To do this, you can take a few different approaches:

- Use a pre-set list of common, standard competencies, and then customize it to the specific needs of your organization.

- Use outside consultants to develop the framework for you.

- Create a general organizational framework, and use it as the basis for other frameworks as needed.

Developing a competency framework can take considerable effort. To make sure the framework is actually used as needed, it's important to make it relevant to the people who'll be using it – and so they can take ownership of it.

The following three principles are critical when designing a competency framework:

1. **Involve the people doing the work**– These frameworks should not be developed solely by HR people, who don't always know what each job actually involves. Nor should they be left to managers, who don't always understand exactly what each member of their staff does every day. To understand a role fully, you have to go to the source – the person doing the job – as well as getting a variety of other inputs into what makes someone successful in that job.

2. **Communicate**– People tend to get nervous about performance issues. Let them know why you're developing the framework, how it will be created, and how you'll use it. The more you communicate in advance, the easier your implementation will be.

3. **Use relevant competencies**– Ensure that the competencies you include apply to all roles covered by the framework. If you include irrelevant competencies, people will probably have a hard time relating to the framework in general. For example, if you created a framework to cover the whole organization, then financial management would not be included unless every worker had to demonstrate that skill. However, a framework covering management roles would almost certainly involve the financial management competency.

Developing the Framework

There are four main steps in the competency framework development process. Each steps has key actions that will encourage people to accept and use the final product.

Step One: Prepare

- **Define the purpose**– Before you start analyzing jobs, and figuring out what each role needs for success, make sure you look at the purpose for creating the framework. How you plan to use it will impact whom you involve in preparing it, and how you determine its scope. For example, a framework for filling a job vacancy will be very specific, whereas a framework for evaluating compensation will need to cover a wide range of roles.

- **Create a competency framework team**– Include people from all areas of your business that will use the framework. Where possible, aim to represent the diversity of your organization. It's also important to think about long-term needs, so that you can keep the framework updated and relevant.

Step Two: Collect Information

This is the main part of the framework. Generally, the better the data you collect, the more accurate your framework will be. For this reason, it's a good idea to consider which techniques you'll use to collect information about the roles, and the work involved in each one. You may want to use the following:

- **Observe**– Watch people while they're performing their roles. This is especially useful for jobs that involve hands-on labor that you can physically observe.

- **Interview people**– Talk to every person individually, choose a sample of people to interview, or conduct a group interview. You may also want to interview the supervisor of the job you're assessing. This helps you learn what a wide variety of people believe is needed for the role's success.

- **Create a questionnaire**– A survey is an efficient way to gather data. Spend time making sure you ask the right questions, and consider the issues of reliability and validity. If you prefer, there are standardized job analysis questionnaires you can buy, rather than attempting to create your own.

- **Analyze the work**– Which behaviors are used to perform the jobs covered by the framework? You may want to consider the following:

  - Business plans, strategies, and objectives.

  - Organizational principles.

  - Job descriptions.

  - Regulatory or other compliance issues.

  - Predictions for the future of the organization or industry.

  - Customer and supplier requirements.

Job analysis that includes a variety of techniques and considerations will give you the most comprehensive and accurate results. If you create a framework for the entire organization, make sure you use a sample of roles from across the company. This will help you capture the widest range of competencies that are still relevant to the whole business.

- As you gather information about each role, record what you learn in separate behavioral statements. For example, if you learn that Paul from accounting is involved in bookkeeping, you might break that down into these behavioral statements: handles petty cash, maintains floats, pays vendors according to policy, and analyzes cash books each month. You might find that other roles also have similar tasks – and therefore bookkeeping will be a competency within that framework.

- When you move on to Step Three, you'll be organizing the information into larger competencies, so it helps if you can analyze and group your raw data effectively.

Step Three: Build the Framework

This stage involves grouping all of the behaviors and skill sets into competencies. Follow these steps to help you with this task:

- **Group the statements**– Ask your team members to read through the behavior statements, and group them into piles. The goal is to have three or four piles at first – for instance, manual skills, decision-making and judgment skills, and interpersonal skills.

- **Create subgroups**– Break down each of the larger piles into subcategories of related behaviors. Typically, there will be three or four subgroupings for each larger category. This provides the basic structure of the competency framework.

- **Refine the subgroups**– For each of the larger categories, define the subgroups even further. Ask yourself why and how the behaviors relate, or don't relate, to one another, and revise your groupings as necessary.

- **Identify and name the competencies**– Ask your team to identify a specific competency to represent each of the smaller subgroups of behaviors. Then they can also name the larger category.

- Here's an example of groupings and subgroupings for general management competencies:

  - Supervising and leading teams.

    - Provide ongoing direction and support to staff.

    - Take initiative to provide direction.

    - Communicate direction to staff.

    - Monitor performance of staff.

    - Motivate staff.

    - Develop succession plan.

- Ensure that company standards are met.

○ Recruiting and staffing.

- Prepare job descriptions and role specifications.

- Participate in selection interviews.

- Identify individuals' training needs.

- Implement disciplinary and grievance procedures.

- Ensure that legal obligations are met.

- Develop staff contracts.

- Develop salary scales and compensation packages.

- Develop personnel management procedures.

- Make sure staff resources meet organizational needs.

○ Training and development.

- Deliver training to junior staff.

- Deliver training to senior staff.

- Identify training needs.

- Support personal development.

- Develop training materials and methodology.

○ Managing projects/programs

- Prepare detailed operational plans.

- Manage financial and human resources.

- Monitor overall performance against objectives.

- Write reports, project proposals, and amendments.

- Understand external funding environment.

- Develop project/program strategy.

You may need to add levels for each competency. This is particularly useful when using the framework for compensation or performance reviews. To do so, take each competency, and divide the related behaviors into measurement scales according to complexity, responsibility, scope, or other relevant criteria. These levels may already exist if you have job grading in place.

- **Validate and revise the competencies as necessary – For each item, ask these questions:**

  - Is this behavior demonstrated by people who perform the work most effectively? In other words, are people who don't demonstrate this behavior ineffective in the role?

  - Is this behavior relevant and necessary for effective work performance?

These questions are often asked in the form of a survey. It's important to look for consensus among the people doing the job, as well as areas where there's little agreement. Also, look for possible issues with language, or the way the competencies are described, and refine those as well.

Step Four: Implement

As you roll out the finalized competency framework, remember the principle of communication that we mentioned earlier. To help get buy-in from members of staff at all levels of the organization, it's important to explain to them why the framework was developed, and how you'd like it to be used. Discuss how it will be updated, and which procedures you've put in place to accommodate changes.

Here are some tips for implementing the framework:

- **Link to business objectives**– Make connections between individual competencies and organizational goals and values as much as possible.

- **Reward the competencies**– Check that your policies and practices support and reward the competencies identified.

- **Provide coaching and training**– Make sure there's adequate coaching and training available. People need to know that their efforts will be supported.

- **Keep it simple**– Make the framework as simple as possible. You want the document to be used, not filed away and forgotten.

- **Communicate**– Most importantly, treat the implementation as you would any other change initiative. The more open and honest you are throughout the process, the better the end result – and the better the chances of the project achieving your objectives.

Key Points

Creating a competency framework is an effective method to assess, maintain, and monitor the knowledge, skills, and attributes of people in your organization. The framework allows you to measure current competency levels to make sure your staff members have the expertise needed to add value to the business. It also helps managers make informed decisions about talent recruitment, retention, and succession strategies. And, by identifying the specific behaviors and skills needed for each role, it enables you to budget and plan for the training and development your company really needs.

The process of creating a competency framework is long and complex. To ensure a successful outcome, involve people actually doing carrying out the roles to evaluate real jobs, and describe real behaviors. The increased level of understanding and linkage between individual roles and organizational performance makes the effort well worth it.

By the Mind Tools Team

This site teaches you the skills you need for a happy and successful career; and this is just one of many tools and resources that you'll find at Mind Tools.

EPICA Initiative Consortium Members

To learn more about **EPICA Initiative co-funded by the** H2020 Programme of the European Union, and the purposes that underpin it, please browse our website: http://epica-initiative.africa.

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