



The CERN Competency Model, a roadmap for CERN Staff

By P. Cenci

The CERN Competency Model (CCM) – a framework defining the competencies that “drive performance and lead to excellence” – is a remarkable initiative of the Human Resources (HR) Department at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, introduced in November 2010 and approved by Management as part of the laboratory HR strategy.

A team consisting of Human Resources Advisors from each Department and a representative of the Staff Association has been appointed to discuss contents and implementation of the CCM across any organizational process related to the management of HR.

What are competencies? Competencies are the characteristics that allow persons to do the job they have been assigned. More precisely, competencies may be described as knowledge, skills and behaviours that individuals demonstrate in carrying out a given task.

Among many others, two main types of competencies, both needed, characterize the way of making work at CERN: technical and behavioural. The CCM consists of both of them.

Technical competencies are simply identified from the main domains of expertise that CERN needs. Examples include physics, electrical and mechanical engineering and information technology. Behavioural competencies have been identified as the way in which work is carried out, i.e. those aspects of each own behaviour which can have a positive or negative impact on how a task is fulfilled.

CERN's behavioural competencies are supported by the Organization's values and include both core competencies applicable to all staff members – e.g. accountability, managing oneself, achieving results, communicating, solving problems, learning and sharing knowledge, building relationships, working in teams and in the interest of the Organization, flexibility – and leadership competencies – e.g., bringing the best out of people, setting directions, etc.

The CCM is a reference document with the main aim of developing consistency and coherence throughout all organizational processes, HR-related.

The introduction of a competency model is a significant step towards harmonizing career management and driving performance and continuous development of staff by means of the definition of well-identified and clear criteria. It is about providing staff with the guidance to be able to perform a given job or carry out a particular role using a combination of

competencies. It encourages everybody to develop not only the technical competencies, but also the soft skills: it's not just what persons do that counts, but also how they do it, in line with the Organization's core values. By using a single reference model, a common language will be created which will serve as a roadmap for staff and will contribute to increased global transparency: the competency model will provide the reference framework and the common language with which to discuss performance, affecting any HR process.

The sample of indicators supporting each competency will help to understand what are the types of behaviour that are valued by the Organization. A new scheme of merit, performance appraisal and recognition will be developed, in order to improve the personnel motivation at any level and role. This means that, at the end of each annual exercise, the results of everybody work objectives will be expressed in terms of "what?" (achievements) and "how?" (competencies demonstrated or needing further development). There will be no rating of competencies during the performance appraisal, and the overall performance rating (particularly meritorious, meritorious and non-meritorious) will remain unchanged.

The CCM will have an impact not only on the performance appraisal but also on many other HR activities. The behavioural competencies will replace the various criteria currently in place, such as: selection criteria used during recruitment; assessment criteria for performance used in the middle and at the end of the probation period or during the limited duration to indefinite contract process; criteria used in the career path guide during promotion exercises.

The modifications to Recruitment Processes, Indefinite contract award and Performance appraisal have been implemented since 2011. At a later stage the adoption of CCM will be launched for other HR processes such as: Promotions, Learning & Development, Internal Mobility, Succession Planning and Manpower planning.

CERN staff members will surely gain from the Competency Model, whether through a clearer understanding of the level of each one current competencies or the needs for further development, the expectations and effective or ineffective behaviours. In addition to the harmonization of processes, the awareness – and moreover the development – of competencies will also ultimately contribute towards the effectiveness and productivity of the Organization as a whole.

Further information is available from: <https://hr-info.web.cern.ch/hr-info/competencies.asp>
