

Archived Information

Learning Tracks

Overview

The Office of Management's Training and Development Group (OM/TDG) Learning Tracks Project is the result of three years of work on a multi-phase initiative. We designed the initiative to develop competency-based learning in the Department to support new strategic goals and improve organizational performance. As the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) stated in *Looking to the Future: Human Resources Competencies* (September 1999), "There is a recognition that the role of [the human resource management function] is moving from an emphasis on rules to a focus on results...Competencies are being used as a way to refocus the organization on what is really important and what it takes for the workforce to be successful."

The Learning Tracks Project, scheduled for completion in September 2002, will provide a competency-based training and development curricula for:

- Professional Development competencies (i.e., general skills that all staff members need);
- Technical Development competencies in three areas (to start): grants administration, financial management, and program evaluation; and
- Leader and Manager Development competencies (including pre-supervisors, supervisors, managers, and executives).

Each learning track will be Web-based and provide a curriculum guide for introductory, intermediate, and advanced-level training and development experiences. A short history of the initiatives to the Learning Tracks Project follows, along with a description and diagram of the learning tracks currently under development.

History

In 1999, OM/TDG selected the Department's grants management function for an initial competency development pilot project because this business function is essential to the Department's work. OM/TDG selected a contractor to assist in developing competencies for three staff roles related to grants management:

- Project/program management;
- Program monitoring; and
- Technical assistance.

The staff roles cut across several job classifications relevant to grants management, and the project focused on the GS 9-12 and GS 13-15 grade categories. All of the Department's



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Principal Offices except Federal Student Aid (FSA) participated in the pilot project. (At the time, FSA was developing its own competency model, which aligns closely with the grants administration and subsequent OM/TDG models).

OM/TDG identified competencies using three methods:

- Analysis of relevant documents, such as job descriptions;
- An informal e-mail survey of selected ED staff; and
- Focus groups.

Throughout the project, OM/TDG and its contractor analyzed dozens of documents, received information from more than 200 Departmental staff members and compiled data from all the collection methods into a series of tables listing about 300 competency elements.

After the focus groups and other data collection, OM/TDG developed and piloted self-assessments based on identified competencies in three principal offices. The competencies were further refined during the self-assessment pilots into the model depicted in the figure below (entitled *Department of Education: Grants Administration Competency Model*), and the number of competency elements was reduced to 188. During the self-assessment pilot process, Department staff members and managers suggested that the listed core competencies apply across all Department job roles, not just to grants administration. OM/TDG determined it could use the competency model as the basis for continued work about general core competencies across the Department.

With further refinement, competencies gained from the model became the basis for a Department-wide, Web-based, training and development needs-assessment survey. For the 21 competency areas listed below, the survey identified gaps between:

- Level of performance necessary to do one’s job well; and
- Level of performance at which staff members *consistently* performed the competency.

The assessment for each competency was self-reported by individual staff members, and reported by rating officials for their work groups.

Competency Areas Used in Department-wide Needs Assessment Survey	
Organizational Knowledge: Maintains and applies current understanding of departmental mission, strategic plan and goals.	Analysis: Analyzes documents or situations and interprets information to improve programs and achieve intended outcomes.
Content Knowledge: Maintains and applies work-related content knowledge in field of expertise.	Research: Conducts research using a variety of resources and technologies.
Legislative and Regulatory Knowledge: Understands and applies knowledge of the legislative and regulatory processes.	Reporting. Organizes and reports research and information to effectively support evaluation, recommendations, or other documents or presentations.



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Competency Areas Used in Department-wide Needs Assessment Survey	
Technology Knowledge: Understands and employs a range of technology solutions to communicate, store and manage information.	Planning and Organizing: Uses effective planning processes to develop work priorities, goals and activities, and to accomplish results.
Work Process Implementation: Effectively implements appropriate phases of key work processes.	Implementation: Manages workload for efficient implementation.
Conversational Speaking: Uses suitable language and grammar to communicate appropriately for an intended audience in conversations.	Building Partnerships: Builds partnerships, coalitions and networks across organizational boundaries.
Presentations: Uses appropriate language and communicates persuasively in meetings and presentations.	Leadership: Demonstrates leadership knowledge and ability through personal behaviors and interpersonal relationships.
Listening: Uses active listening skills to ensure understanding of others' intended messages.	Teamwork: Demonstrates teamwork knowledge and ability through personal behaviors and interpersonal relationships.
Writing: Uses correct grammar, punctuation and language skills to clearly, succinctly, and persuasively communicate ideas in writing appropriate for an intended audience.	Customer Service: Demonstrates customer service knowledge and ability through personal behaviors and interpersonal relationships.
Evaluation and Measurement: Evaluates and measures progress, programs and performance using a variety of evaluation and measurement techniques.	Personal Characteristics: Demonstrates effective personal characteristics that contribute to achieving work-related objectives.
Judgment and Decision-Making: Uses disciplined thought processes and employs good judgment when making decisions.	

The decision to begin the Learning Tracks Project was based on the results of the needs assessment survey (and the statements throughout the competency development and self-assessment initiatives that staff members and managers desired a clear curriculum plan for staff development). At the same time, the Department's *Management Improvement Team* and other change management initiatives were beginning. Based on the findings of the *Management Improvement Team, Blueprint for Management Excellence, Strategic Plan*, and other Departmental initiatives, the competencies were refined further and the Learning Tracks Project was expanded to include a broad range of competency-based training and development curricula, aligned with Departmental priorities and major business lines, as described below.

Learning Tracks Project Description

The graphic below, entitled *Learning Tracks Diagram*, lays out the format for learning tracks in three categories.

- Professional Development competencies (i.e., general skills that all staff members need) including two learning tracks:
 - business
 - communication



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- Technical Development competencies include learning tracks in three areas: (1) grants administration, (2) financial management, and (3) program evaluation. Other technical competency areas, including those already developed in information technology and student financial assistance, can be added to the planned learning tracks curriculum over time.
- Leader and Manager Development competencies (including for pre-supervisors, supervisors, managers, and executives) include five learning tracks based on the OPM executive core qualifications: (1) leading people, (2) leading change, (3) results driven, (4) business acumen, and (5) building coalitions/communication.

The Professional Development and Technical Development learning tracks will provide curriculum at three levels: (1) *introductory*, equivalent to GS 5-11, (2) *intermediate*, equivalent to GS 12-13, and (3) *advanced*, equivalent to GS 14-15 and SES. For the Professional Development learning track, all professional staff members would take courses in *each* competency area in the business *and* communication tracks. For the Technical Development learning track, staff members, with their supervisors, would select one of more technical tracks or competency areas based on individual job requirements.

The Leader and Management Development learning track is designed to better prepare supervisors and managers to perform their roles in the Department. Managers would select staff members, based on professional and technical development, to begin or progress in the track. The track will provide curriculum at four levels:

- Pre-supervisor
- First-time supervisor
- Manager
- Executive

For each learning track, OM/TDG has identified competency areas. The competency areas are listed below each learning track in the *Learning Tracks Diagram*. For each competency area, OM/TDG has identified core competencies for which curriculum will be provided. For example, the results orientation and accountability competency area (in the business learning track) includes the following core competencies¹:

- Goal setting and achievement
- Quality management
- Customer service
- Managing for results
- Internal controls
- Stewardship

The competency areas and core competencies were derived from:

- Past competency model work in OM/TDG and FSA, and

¹ A complete list of the draft core competencies is provided in *Learning Tracks Draft Content Overview*, which can be obtained from OM/TDG.



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- Priorities and goals set forth in various Departmental change management initiatives including the *Blueprint for Management Excellence* and the *Strategic Plan*.

In addition, OM/TDG reviewed competency models from other organizations, both public and private, to ensure that no critical elements were missing from the Learning Tracks Project model.

OM/TDG is currently identifying specific, competency-based, learning objectives for each core competency at each curriculum level (i.e., introductory, intermediate, and advanced). A document providing the:

- Competency areas,
- Core competencies, and
- Competency-based learning objectives for each learning track will be provided to Principal Office staff for their review and comments.

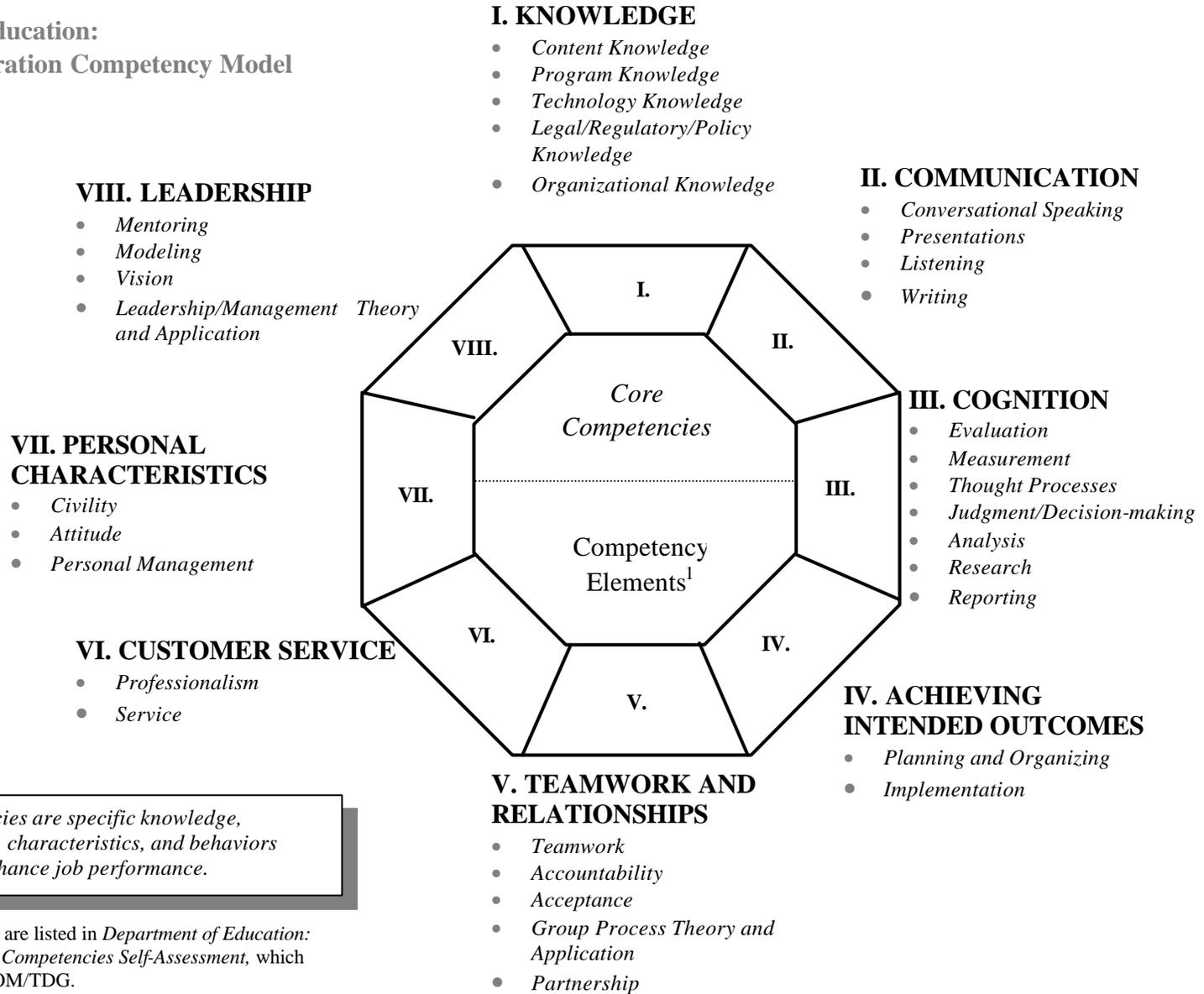
Based on the Principal Office review, we will revise the competency document. Then OM/TDG will identify a curriculum of specific learning opportunities for staff members to obtain the competencies they require. Curricula will be identified for each core competency, at each curriculum level. The learning opportunities will encompass a broad range of learning modes, from courses, to e-learning, to mentoring, job aids, and others. We will provide the full content of all of the learning tracks curricula to staff in Web-based format. In addition, we will tie the learning tracks directly into the OM/TDG course registration system and to staff members' Individual Development Plans (IDP).

OM/TDG will continue to work with the Human Resources Group (HRG) and others to ensure that the learning tracks reflect competencies used in recruiting and performance appraisal. The intention is to align all human resource systems and practices into an integrated process designed to recruit, develop, and ensure top-level performance from each staff member in all competencies required for the Department to excel both in the present and the future.



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Department of Education: Grants Administration Competency Model



Competencies are specific knowledge, skills, abilities, characteristics, and behaviors that enhance job performance.

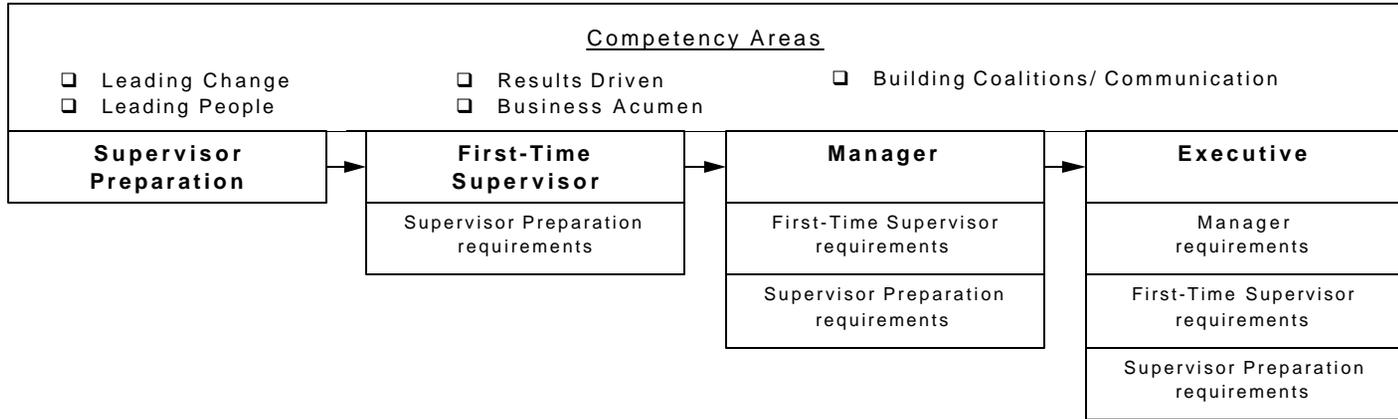
¹Competency elements are listed in *Department of Education: Grants Administration Competencies Self-Assessment*, which can be obtained from OM/TDG.



Learning Tracks Diagram

Leader and Manager Development

Managers select staff members, based on professional and technical development, to begin or progress in tracks.



Technical Development

Staff members, with supervisors, select one or more technical tracks or competency areas based on individual job requirements.

Financial Management	Grants Management	Research and Evaluation	Others Currently Available	Others TBD
<u>Competency Areas</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Systems <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Controls <input type="checkbox"/> Business Processes <input type="checkbox"/> Contracts	<u>Competency Areas</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Grants Administration <input type="checkbox"/> Grants Monitoring and Technical Assistance	<u>Competency Areas</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Program Evaluation <input type="checkbox"/> Performance Measurement <input type="checkbox"/> Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information Technology Student Financial Assistance 	

Professional Development

All professional staff members take courses in *each* competency area of the General Business *and* Communication tracks

Business	Communication
<u>Competency Areas</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Analytic Thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Results Orientation and Accountability <input type="checkbox"/> Self Management <input type="checkbox"/> Project Management <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Technology Use	<u>Competency Areas</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Dialogue <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations <input type="checkbox"/> Listening <input type="checkbox"/> Writing