



# What is a Competency Model?

## Examples How Employers Use Them

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

When engaging in discussions with business and HR leaders about solving workforce issues, one of the most common questions asked is, "What exactly is a competency model?" This inquiry is often followed by, "Do we need one?"

Avilar, as enthusiastic proponents of competencies and competency models, has observed the positive impact of focusing on employees' skills and competencies on business operations and company success. Therefore, the response to the second question is typically affirmative, "Yes, most likely."

This eBook offers a longer answer to the first question – and outlines how a competency model can help you better manage your employee skill sets.

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## What is a Competency Model?

The Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) first defines a [competency](#) as, "a knowledge, skill, ability or other characteristic (e.g., trait, mindset, attitude), commonly referred to as a KSAO, or a group of characteristics, which, when applied in the appropriate roles, help achieve desired results."

SHRM then defines the competency model as, "a collection of competencies that are needed for effective job performance. The individual KSAOs or combinations of KSAOs are the competencies, and the set of competencies is typically referred to as the competency model."

Think of a competency model as the specific set, or library, of skills, abilities, and requirements that your organization needs


for employees to successfully perform their jobs and roles at work. The model is meant to be fluid, and should be reviewed and updated at least annually to ensure that it represents the competencies that are most relevant to your business as your company and the market evolves.

## When to Use a Competency Model

Companies use competency models to inform a wide range of workforce initiatives and decisions, such as:

### **ONE: Recruitment and Hiring**

When job descriptions include specific skill and competency requirements, job applicants, recruiters, and hiring managers can more easily assess whether candidates are proficient at the needed skills.



Competency models can help identify applicants that are a best fit for the job requirements – and can identify specific skills gaps to address once applicants are hired.

### **TWO: Training and Development**

Companies with a learning culture make learning and development an ongoing part of the full [employee lifecycle](#) – so individuals keep up their skills, get rewarded for their success, and continue to advance in their careers.

*A competency model can power skills assessments to periodically assess the proficiencies of employees across a range of relevant skills, so the learning and development opportunities are targeted to the next steps in their jobs/careers.*

### **THREE: Succession Planning**

It's wise to plan ahead – way ahead – to ensure your next leaders (and the leaders behind them) are prepared to step up when it's their turn. As we've discussed in another blog post, a smart [succession planning](#) initiative will build a “portfolio of diverse leaders who have the skills to lead, a strong cultural fit, and the ability to shape and support your organization through its next stage of growth.”

*Since succession planning is usually a multi-year initiative, an updated and revised competency model can help ensure that your future leaders are building the skills they need to lead tomorrow's business.*

### **FOUR: Promotions**

Employee recognition and promotions should go to the employees who make valuable contributions – not just those who are the most visible or loudest.

## Common Uses for a Competency Model:

1. Recruitment and Hiring
2. Training and Development
3. Succession Planning
4. Promotions
5. Upskilling and Reskilling
6. Career Paths
7. Employee Retention

## Competency Model Examples:

1. National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST)
2. Occupational Information Network (O\*NET)
3. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
4. Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM)
5. Avilar Technologies

Competency models help to evaluate changes in skill proficiency, so those who are strengthening valuable skills are more easily identified and don't get overlooked.

### FIVE: Upskilling and Reskilling

To adapt to a changing world, you likely have some employees who need to build new skills to keep up with their profession ([upskilling](#)) and others who will need to build new skill sets to take on new or emerging roles (reskilling).

*Competency models – especially as they are updated to drop now-obsolete “[perishable](#)” skills and to add the skills and competencies needed for new technologies and roles – support important upskilling and reskilling initiatives by bringing into focus the targeted skills needed to succeed.*

### SIX: Careers Paths

**Career Paths.** Does your organization support [career paths](#), where employees and managers collaborate to map out a lateral or hierarchical path for an individual employee's growth and contributions? If so, employees and managers alike will want to track and assess progress toward the career goals – and identify appropriate development activities to build the next skills and experiences.

*A competency model helps employees self-assess their skills and competencies – what's improved, where they have proficiencies and strengths, and what's next – so they can home in on appropriate actions for their career progression.*

### SEVEN: Employee Retention

**Employee Retention.** One of the top reasons people change jobs is to pursue career progression. People want to learn and contribute. Especially in our [hybrid working world](#), one way to retain employees is to ensure that they have meaningful opportunities to grow.

*Competency models support transparency, so employees can see what their skill strengths are today, assess what skills are required for other interesting jobs at your company, and focus on building the skills they need to advance within your business.*

### Competency Model Examples

If you're looking for a competency model for your organization, there are numerous examples to choose from – or to adapt to your needs. There are also [multiple types of competency models](#). Some are designed to support the core competencies of an organization's entire workforce. Others are specialized for a job, function, or role. Here are just a few competency model examples.

**National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST).** The National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education (NICE) Workforce Framework for Cybersecurity ([NICE Framework](#)) – NIST Special Publication 800-181, revision 1 – “provides a set of building blocks for describing the tasks, knowledge, and skills that are needed to perform cybersecurity work performed by individuals and teams.”

**Occupational Information Network (O\*NET).** [O\\*NET](#) is “the nation's primary source of occupational information.” Its [O\\*NET Content Model](#) describes occupational knowledge, skills, and abilities required for work activities and tasks.





### Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

The federal government's OPM, for more than two decades, has been conducting studies using its Multipurpose Occupational Systems Analysis Inventory – Close-Ended (MOSAIC) methodology and [offers several competency models](#), including for cybersecurity, grants management, and IT program management.

### Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM).

The [SHRM Competency Model](#) is designed for all HR professionals, at each stage of one's career.

**Avilar Technologies.** We maintain an employee competency model with more than 350 skills clustered into more than 50 skill groups that can be used "as is" or customized for your organization.

## Benefits of Competency Modeling

There are many benefits of competency modeling. The right competency model can support an organization with:

**ONE:** Powering [skills assessments](#), so employees and leaders have the data and feedback they need for next steps.

**TWO:** Ensuring that employees have the skills they need to succeed in their jobs.

**THREE:** Developing the workforce skills your organization needs to thrive.

**FOUR:** Pinpointing and addressing skills gaps.

**FIVE:** Minimizing the [halo effect](#), so performance evaluations are based on skills and performance (not perceptions).

**SIX:** Strengthening diversity and [inclusion](#) initiatives.

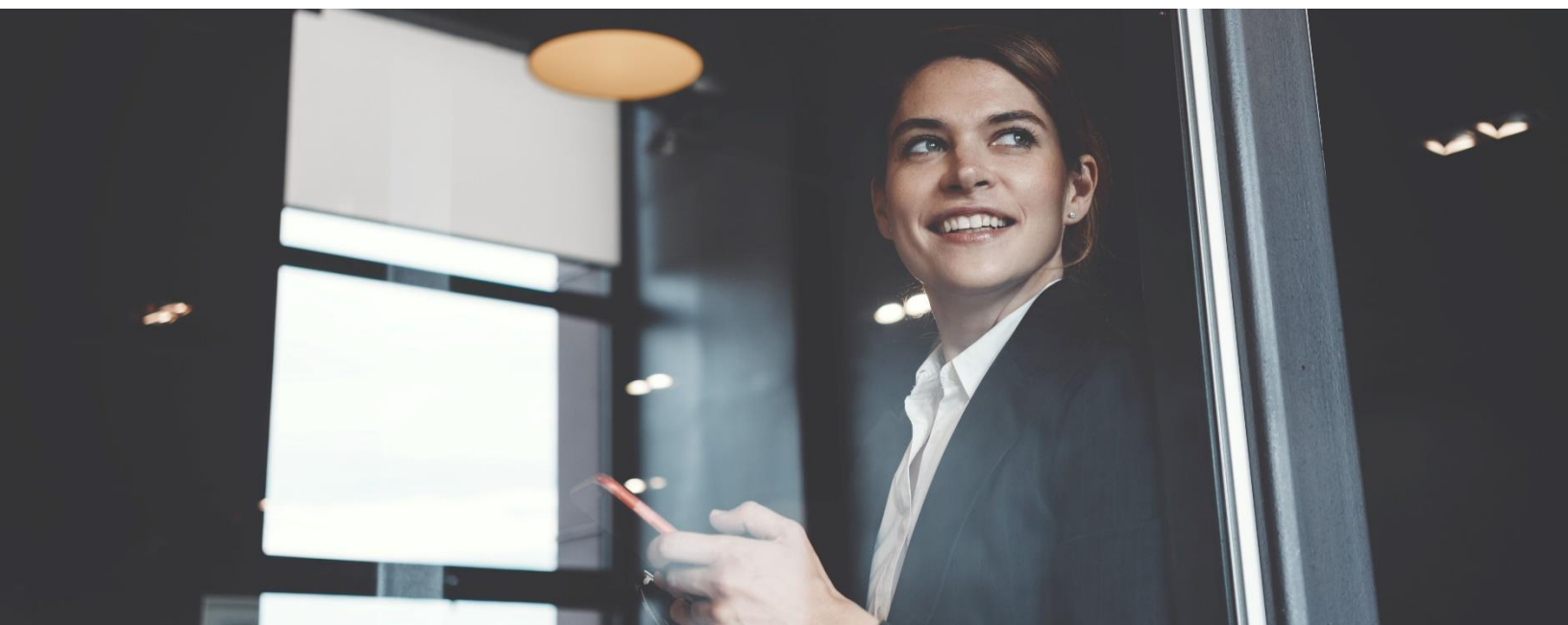
**SEVEN:** Sustaining a nimble workforce.

**EIGHT:** Aligning a workforce with strategic company goals.

**NINE:** Promoting self-sufficiency among team members.

Can a competency model help you better manage your employee skill sets? Do you need one? Yes, we believe so!

If your team is ready to introduce or revise a competency model, [contact us](#) to find out how Avilar's [WebMentor Skills™](#) competency management system may support your efforts.





## About Avilar

Avilar – The Competency Company™ is a leader in workforce development and planning with web-based competency management and learning solutions for corporations, government, and non-profit organizations. In 1997, Avilar pioneered its award-winning WebMentor™ product line and has built itself on the basis of superior customer service and highly adaptable product design.

Avilar consultants are recognized as industry thought leaders and have decades of experience in implementation and analysis. Let Avilar help you transform your organization from ordinary to extraordinary.

