Contemplating Competencies: An Interview With an Expert

An Interview with Avilar's CEO - Tom Grobicki

This interview covers what Tom's seeing in the world of workforce competencies such as - What's happening? What's next? Any best practices from companies that are doing it well? Here's what he had to say.

How are organizations putting workforce competencies to work today?

Companies still use competencies to understand employees' weaknesses to develop and support a training plan with resources to close the gap. Competencies are also being used to improve hiring decisions.

Increasingly, we're seeing companies use competencies to implement their strategic plans. They're already tracking technology and regulation changes in the industry, monitoring merger and acquisition activity, and anticipating changes such as a future wave of retirees leaving the company. By viewing competencies across their workforce, they better understand how prepared they are for the longer term.

"It's best to understand where potential holes exist and to know what's needed in one, three, five, and even 10 years down the road."

❓ What's working for companies? What's not?

💡 One thing that's working is an increased understanding among workforce development professionals of how competencies can benefit their companies. There are also many resources online to help these professionals find good competency models.

Too often, companies aren't assigning the right resources or setting the right expectations when implementing competency management. Workforce is a strategic issue. To unleash the strategic power of competencies, the programs need strategic support and visibility – with skilled project managers, accessible subject matter experts, and expert stakeholder communications.

"Companies often don't treat competency projects as strategically important, but they should."

❓ If you could wave a magic wand to remove program implementation obstacles, what would that look like?

💡 I'd like to see more organizations using a competency model that's already available, instead of starting from scratch. While we don't yet have standards built around competency models, open source models like O*NET, or NICE for health practitioners, can save companies a great deal of time and effort.

I'd also like to see a shift in the dialogue. The most successful programs are tied to strategic goals. Yet HR and workforce development professionals aren't all used to quantifying the positive impact of HR programs. By shifting the conversation from, "we can help employees better understand their jobs," to "this will improve sales by 10 percent," upper management will perk up and are more likely to engage.

When introducing competency management systems for the first time, research repeatedly shows a 10 to 20 percent increase in productivity across disciplines.

What trends make you optimistic about the future of competencies?

The availability of competency management systems like our own product, that come with pre-developed libraries of competencies and interface to publicly available models, is helping companies get their projects started more quickly and with better results.

The use of data analytics with competencies is another positive trend that allows organizations to see how the use of competencies is improving their organization. It gives them a better ROI picture and allows upper management to see the benefits of the projects.

"We are increasingly seeing higher-level managers requesting competency management because they've heard it can help them improve their bottom line."

What advice do you have for organizations who want to do more?

Tie workforce optimization efforts to solving strategic business goals. We've worked with car companies looking to improve car repairs in their dealer network, companies needing to understand and comply with new industry regulations, and many that need to align their workforce with evolving technologies. Every industry experiences change. If companies don't manage those changes well, they suffer – loss of profit, confusion, loss of revenue…. The suffering is different for every company.

Start by asking detailed questions about the company's problems, misunderstandings, or workforce issues. Identify the kinds of data that would be useful in addressing those pain points. Then, look for an appropriate competency system to help collect the data and measure results.

"If you aren't sure how to start, hire a company that can walk you through these steps."

--Tom Grobicki – CEO and
Competency Expert

? **Any additional last thoughts?**

Implementing a competency project is all about expectations and results. It's tempting to try to tackle a big, comprehensive project. Or to get distracted by trying to address a perceived weakness that doesn't really matter. It's easy to get stuck down a rabbit hole.

"My advice? Start a project that will address one important result quickly. Then, build on that success."

Thank you, Tom!

About Avilar

If you're preparing to implement – or improve – your competency management program, contact us about Avilar's competency management consultation and solutions. We believe that a competency management method is one of the most effective ways to develop a workforce and deliver results. Our flagship WebMentor™ product line, introduced in 1998, includes a complete suite of affordable, easy-to-use, and full-featured competency development and management tools.

Avilar is a recipient of the Excellence in E-Learning for Customer Satisfaction Award from Brandon Hall Group and eLearning Magazine, and has been cited by Training Magazine as a top "price-to-value" provider. Avilar blends leading human capital management and business intelligence professionals with our state-of-the-art workforce management system to solve the complex issues facing managers in the globalized business arena.

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