

Utilizing the Core Competencies as a Supervisor: Recommendations from the Professional Development Committee

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During the 2018 Annual Meeting, there was a lot of focus and conversation about the newly unveiled AFA Core Competencies. Hopefully for many, that focus and conversation continues as members complete the Competency Assessment Worksheets and revisit and refine professional development plans. Since then, the Professional Development Committee has been using the Core Competencies to build out AFA's professional development strategy. Through our work, we have identified numerous ways the Core Competencies can and should be used by professionals in our field, including steps supervisors should be taking to make the best use of the Core Competencies in their work with staff.

Make Sure it's Being Used the Right Way

Supervisors should remind their staff there is a right and a wrong way to approach the exercise of self-assessment and creating a professional development plan. The Core Competencies Self-Assessment was not designed to compare professionals to one another, so it would be entirely inappropriate and inaccurate to use it this way. If you supervise more than one person or have staff with varying levels of experience, remind each of them the only appropriate comparison to make is to the demands of their current position; not to other people.

Determine What is Essential

The electronic version of the core competencies asked professionals to self-assess on all competencies. If you take the complete version in the Core Competencies Manual, however, there are two filters those using the self-assessment should keep in mind: (1) what is essential for the current or desired job and (2) what level are your own abilities? Work through the process to reconcile which competencies are essential, important, and peripheral to the role. If your institution or organization allows, use both documents as a supplement to or replacement for an employee's review or evaluation process.

Triangulate Results

Create opportunities to discuss the self-assessment and professional development plan together. Sometimes, people inaccurately self-assess either as ego preservation (intentional and conscious) or simply because they are unaware of their performance (unintentional and unconscious). One strategy to increase accuracy in the process and ensure you're giving employees meaningful feedback is to also complete the assessment for them and compare your

results. Supervisors should be prepared to offer feedback about areas where ratings differ. These conversations may be challenging, but remember, they help prioritize the professional development plan appropriately. We all have opportunities to grow. Even those who identify in the Practice or Proficiency ability in an area must identify how they maintain that proficiency.

Blend Individual & Team Planning

Help your team member(s) build a professional development plan that is a blend of individual work and team or shared priorities. What opportunities exist for staff to learn from or with one another? Remember, 20% of professional development opportunities should be from interactions and 70% from experiences. Does your department's model create silos or crossover between positions? In areas where there is crossover, what competencies become essential and should therefore become a shared priority?

Incorporate the Core Competencies into Your Employee Search Process

As your team grows or turns over, use the Core Competencies to write or update job descriptions. Which Core Competencies are essential to the position you're creating or launching a search for? Which are important and peripheral? Then, as you begin to look at candidates for the position, consider how you're evaluating their abilities in each of the competencies you outlined for the position. Evaluate your interview process. Are you able to assess a candidate's abilities within the domains of competency: (1) foundational knowledge and (2) professional skills? If not, develop new processes allowing you to meaningfully evaluate candidates.

Onboarding New Employees

As you complete your search and begin the onboarding process with a new employee, consider how you frame your first conversations. This is an opportunity for the two of you to align expectations about which competencies are essential, important, and peripheral to the role. These initial conversations can also help you understand the employee's aspirations and how they hope to grow in their ability level through this position. Rather than working through a checklist of requirements with a new staff member, turn onboarding into a developmental opportunity to create a plan the employee can build upon. Consider framing your onboarding process using the Professional Development Activity model, where 10% of onboarding is dedicated to instruction, 20% to interactions, and 70% to experiences. Don't forget onboarding isn't just the first few weeks or month of a new job; it's often the first 6 months to a year.

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