Developing Proficiency in HR: Using Self-directed Learning to Achieve Success

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Learning Objectives

HR Competencies are critical for success today. This presentation provides a roadmap for HR professionals to help develop the behaviors necessary to be successful. At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Identify HR behavioral competencies and distinguish them from HR technical competencies.
- Demonstrate and apply self-directed learning techniques for developing HR behavioral competencies to be successful in business related tasks.
- State measurable goals for personal behavioral competency development in all aspects of business and HR.
- HR leaders, those who manage other HR professionals, will be able to coach other HR professionals in self-directed learning techniques for greater effectiveness in developing behavioral proficiencies in business related activities.
Introduction

- HR *competencies* are the key to success as an HR leader today.
- Often overlooked are the *behavioral competencies* needed beyond HR technical expertise.
- Behavioral competencies matter as much, if not more, to success in HR as you ascend to HR leadership roles.

- **How do you cultivate your behavioral competencies to develop proficiency in HR?**
What does it mean to be competent in HR?

- HR is not for the faint-hearted. It is a complex and critical function to the success of organizations.
- Competence in HR includes both technical and behavioral expertise.
  - Having skill and technical expertise in HR is a requirement and is the cost of entry into an HR role
  - Behavioral competencies though are also critical and are things that must be acquired over time and through learning and experience
- Over the years, there have been a number of different HR competency models that have been developed and shared with the profession. Included among these are:
  - Ulrich
  - Morrow
  - SHRM
Ulrich Model: An Evolution

Source: http://hrcs.rbl.net/
Ulrich Model: Most recent model - 2016

Source: http://hrcs.rbl.net/
Enterprise Competency Model - Morrow

![Diagram of Enterprise Competency Model]

SHRM Competency Model: Developed 2014

Source: http://shrm.org
SHRM Competency Model: 9 Competencies

- **Business Acumen** - The ability to understand and apply information to contribute to the organization’s strategic plan
- **Communication** - The ability to effectively exchange information with stakeholders
- **Consultation** - The ability to provide guidance to organizational stakeholders
- **Critical evaluation** - The ability to interpret information to make business decisions and recommendations
- **Ethical Practice** - The ability to integrate core values, integrity and accountability throughout all organizational and business practices
- **Global and Cultural Awareness** - The ability to value and consider the perspectives and background of all parties
- **HR Expertise** - The ability to apply the principles and practices of human resource management to contribute to the success of the business
- **Leadership and Navigation** - The ability to direct and contribute to initiatives and processes within the organization
- **Relationship Management** - The ability to manage interactions to provide service and to support the organization

For more detail see: [https://www.shrm.org/LearningAndCareer/competency-model/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.shrm.org/LearningAndCareer/competency-model/Pages/default.aspx)
So......

How do you develop your HR Behavioral Competencies?
How much into the weeds makes sense?
What are behavioral competencies?

- Behavioral competencies encompass knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions that distinguish *excellent performers*.

- Behavioral Competencies are *what you do* (applying your technical knowledge, skills, and ability) and *how you do it* (the consistent behaviors you demonstrate and choose to use).

- Competencies include all the related knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes that form a person’s job. This set of context-specific qualities is correlated with superior job performance and can be used as a standard against which to measure job performance as well as to develop, recruit, and hire employees.

- **HR competency development takes place over time.**
Have you ever thought......

- Why didn’t that meeting go better?
- Do I have the analysis that the president wants?
- Why can’t HR and Finance get along better?
- I wish I could be more like “X”, she’s always so masterful at negotiation.
Classroom vs. Self-directed Learning

- **Formal education** such as classroom learning - whether in a formal course or at a conference has many benefits. These include (but are not limited to):
  - Subject matter experts are available and provide insight to specific knowledge
  - Expert trainers can make subject matter engaging and interesting
  - Dedicated time out of the office to focus on learning needs

- **Self-directed learning** has many benefits and the distinct advantage of allowing HR professionals the flexibility to learn any time, anywhere, and at a pace and focus that is meaningful to the individual.
  - It is development that the individual selects and brings about by his or her own efforts using any method in any circumstance at any time (Gibbons, 2002)
  - It can stop or start based upon other demands and can be as front-and-center or in the background as one wishes.
To be an effective self-taught learner, you need to:

- Define what needs to be learned
- Know how to access and evaluate information
- Be aware of your limitations
- Accept frustration and confusion as part of the process
- Keep an open mind to other points of view
- Collect data on your own performance through self-observation and feedback

Self-Directed Activities Applied to HR

- *Set the technical HR competency aside.* Assume for a moment that you will develop and maintain your HR technical knowledge by attending conferences and courses as you have always done.

- Assess where you are with respect to your own proficiency on each of the *behavioral competencies*.

- Identify where you need to be with respect to each of the behavioral competencies given your position and career aspirations
  - Where do the gaps exist?

**COACHING TIP:** As an HR Leader; help and direct your staff to do self-assessments of their behavioral competencies - it’s important for both you and your team.
Self-assessment: Where to start?

- **Questions to assist with self-assessment**: use paper or a tablet and answer *(or at least think about)* these questions honestly.
  - What have been my biggest career successes?
  - What are my overarching strengths?
  - What are some of my specific talents relative to my career to date?
  - What are my biggest areas for improvement?
  - Where might I see my greatest opportunities?
  - Have I gotten feedback to suggest I need development?
  - What type of learner am I?
  - Am I satisfied with my career?
  - Am I comfortable with self-directed learning?
  - How quickly do I want to ascend to a top HR role? Do I want to ascend to a top role?
  - Have I thought enough about where I want to be and what I need to do to get there?
  - Has my career moved at a pace at which I want it to move?

*Source: Adapted from Table 2.1 in *Developing Proficiency in HR: 7 Self-Directed Activities for HR Professionals*, Debra J. Cohen, 2016, SHRM Publishing*
Self-Assessment Exercise

- Assessing your HR Behavioral Proficiency
  - Assessment Exercise handout will be given to all session participants
  - Assessment Exercise - will also be available at www.DebCohenLLC.com

- Directions
  - Be realistic as to the extent to which you effectively engage in these behaviors
  - Be as honest and accurate as possible
  - Do not answer in terms of how you would like to behave, but rather, as you realistically do behave
  - We all have a range of behavior - please answer in terms of what is typical for you
  - Use all the numbers on the scale and realize that all 5s or all 3s is probably not accurate or realistic - be thoughtful about your range of behaviors.

**COACHING TIP:** Encourage your staff to take this self-assessment and then follow-up with a development conversation.
Self-assessment and Gap Analysis

- Identify one or two competencies that are critical to you now and for which you will benefit from development.
  - Reassess periodically which competencies to focus on
- Drill down into these two competencies to see where your proficiencies lie and where there may be gaps.
  - Proficiency may change depending upon the position, assignment or project
- Prioritize your current needs based upon where you are in your position and/or in your career.
  - Don’t bite off too much to chew!
- Make a plan to be self-directed with respect to those competencies

COACHING TIP: If you see common themes or needs among your staff, consider bringing in a consultant or trainer to help your team as a whole.
Why wait for a class, seminar or conference?

- Maximize your learning every day.
- Practice in a non-threatening and engaging way.
- Invest in yourself a little bit - often
- Focus on your gap areas in a way that is not onerous
- Plan your own learning and tailor it to your needs
- Embrace the notion that learning is all around us

Following are some self-directed learning activities you can start right away!
Self-directed Learning Activities

- Case Study
- Networking
- Portfolio
- Purposeful Discussion
- Purposeful Observation
- Role Playing
- Volunteering

Source: Developing Proficiency in HR: 7 Self-Directed Activities for HR Professionals, Debra J. Cohen, 2016, SHRM Publishing
What kind of a *role model* do you want to be?
Self-directed Learning Activities

- **Case Studies** - The case study method can help HR professionals develop their analytical and problem-solving skills by presenting a story or a case, real or fictitious, about people, organizations, or situations that have been faced.

- **Networking** - Networking is both an art and a science. It has the overall purpose of building professional relationships - and can be done with learning in mind.

- **Portfolio** - A portfolio is a tangible collection of items that demonstrate what you know and what you're able to do. A portfolio can help identify where you have gaps and where you have strengths.

- **Role-Play** - Role-playing is a learning activity that involves changing your behavior or assuming a role for the purpose of learning or teaching something new.

*Source: Developing Proficiency in HR: 7 Self-Directed Activities for HR Professionals, Debra J. Cohen, 2016, SHRM Publishing*
Self-directed Learning Activities

- **Purposeful Discussion** - The Socratic method is often thought of as a form of teaching or as a teaching tactic. Purposeful discussion can lead to learning and understanding which behaviors are successful in which circumstances and which may be less successful.

- **Purposeful Observation** - Observation involves careful watching or listening. The art of observation can be formal or informal and is driven by someone's own volition. Observation involves taking note of certain facts or behaviors and recognizing patterns.

- **Volunteering** - Volunteering is well known for skill development, and is often intended to promote improvement in an individual's quality of life due to the altruistic nature of the activity.

*Source: Developing Proficiency in HR: 7 Self-Directed Activities for HR Professionals, Debra J. Cohen, 2016, SHRM Publishing*
An example: Role Play Template

As an individual, you can create simple, but effective Role Play scenarios for yourself that can be executed alone or with a partner.

- Behavioral Competency
- Objective
- Scenario
- Materials
- Environment
- Roles
- Conducting the Role Play
- Debrief

**COACHING TIP:** HR Leaders can create role plays that your team works on together to strengthen your collective skills and how you’re perceived.

**Source:** Adapted from *Developing Proficiency in HR: 7 Self-Directed Activities for HR Professionals*, Debra J. Cohen, 2016, SHRM Publishing
An example: Role Play - Budget Meeting

- **Behavioral Competency:** Critical Evaluation
- **Objective:** To be more evidence-based in my next budget meeting with the CFO
- **Scenario:** Pre-annual budget review consultation meeting with CFO
- **Materials:** PPT deck showing recruitment, turnover and engagement data
- **Environment:** (someone playing a) CFO behind desk with an air of stiffness
- **Roles:** You are the HR Director/VP and a colleague or friend, plays the CFO
- **Conducting the Role Play:** CFO’s role is to push back on you about why you need the budget you’ve requested and how you’ve interpreted your data. Agree to get in your respective roles and not deviate from the plan.
- **Debrief:** Discuss what you did well and where you could use improvement. Honestly discuss the strengths and opportunities in your ‘performance’
How do you use these self-directed learning activities?

- Learning and change for adult professionals best occur through experience and reflection.
- Experiential activities place people directly within a concrete situation and allows them to apply what they are learning in a more effective way.
- As HR practitioners, we need to be active partners in learning and developing or strengthening new behaviors.
  - Activities that engage individuals in actual, ongoing work can serve as a powerful mechanism for behavior change.
  - Reflection on an experience can yield wisdom and insight.
- Activities designed for HR practitioners to incorporate into everyday activities so learning and development are a natural extension of your activities rather than an added burden.
Conclusion: Set Priorities and State Clear Goals

- Identify 1 or 2 competencies and specific proficiencies for each that you wish to improve.
- Prioritize the areas for learning - realize you can’t do everything at once
- Set both short and long term (measurable) goals for improving your proficiency
- Plan to evaluate your progress at regular intervals
- Re-evaluate your priorities and goals on a regular basis to ensure that your needs and learning plans are in alignment.
- Do not assume that competencies previously focused on do not need to be considered again in the future.

COACHING TIP: As HR Leaders, we should be pushing our staff and teams to continuously develop our HR behavioral competencies - beyond HR expertise.
Questions?

Thank you!

► **Resources:**

► **SHRM Competency Model:**
  https://www.shrm.org/learningandcareer/competency-model

► **Self-assessment Exercises and Articles on Self-directed Learning:**
  www.DebCohenLLC.com