An Update and Conversation on Core Competencies for Quality Service in the Profession

Brian F. French
Washington State University

Bill Field
Purdue University
Building a Team

A Thought Experiment

• Think of your favorite Sports team

• Think of the team as a **unit** and as individual **players** that make up the unit

• Describe to yourself why the unit is successful?

• Describe to yourself why a given player is successful?
Who uses competencies?

We all do - implicitly or explicitly

- Building a youth soccer team
  - Which players do I want?
- Teacher performance
  - Which class should my child be in?
- Medical care
  - Which Dr. do I choose?

- Sports Teams have qualities they rate players given qualities needed
- States define competencies of teacher and principals
- Medical Doctors have competencies defined for practice

And we all are not perfect…we can gain competencies over time….which is needed as the landscape of our work matures.
What are Competencies?

• Characteristic of a member of a unit (school, office, restaurant kitchen) that contributes to successful performance in the assigned role and to the achievement of the unit’s results.
  – These include knowledge, skills, and abilities
  – And other “non-cognitive” characteristics:
    • values, motivation, initiative, and self-control.
Why care about competencies?

• Competencies are an essential tool--
  – Identify capabilities, attitudes, and attributes needed to meet staffing needs (current and future) as priorities and strategies shift within a unit (e.g., school, organization)
  – Focus development efforts for persons to eliminate the gap between capabilities needed and those available.

• The goal is to make a strong, efficient, and sustainable unit
Consider two levels of Competencies

• **Unit level**
  – Organizational competencies can include process improvement, teamwork, performance measurement, values, project management, new ways of thinking or performing, knowledge management, etc.
  – These are built, in part, on individuals having the competency or related competencies.

• **Person level**
  – Person competencies can include technical skills specific to the position and “people” skills critical to a healthy environment (e.g., motivation, approachable, commitment, ethical).
  – These are built, in part, on values by the larger units and support and through what the person enters the unit with (e.g., desire to succeed).
Take-home message

• Competencies matter for many areas
  – Accounts
  – Teachers
  – Doctors
  – Parents
  – Welders

• AgrAbility is working on what are the essential competencies we need in our offices to be successful units over time. Especially as the landscape of our work changes.
Motivation for the work at NTW

• Requests from SRAPS for assistance in developing appropriate job descriptions for AgrAbility positions
• Better align the training provided by the NAP with the skills needed by new and current SRAPS’ staff.
• Contribute to the development of an online graduate course that could be used for professional development and as part of a formal graduate program of study.
Many reasons cited in 2015

- AgrAbility Program has matured in 25 years; are commonalities in the knowledge and skills needed to be effective serving the needs of AgrAbility clientele.
- Client expectations have increased; “no harm to client” attitude.
- Concern over professional liability has increased.
- Need to align the training needs of the AgrAbility staff and the training provided by the NAP through the NTW.
- Some AgrAbility staff are involved in graduate level education that could benefit from an online graduate course relevant to their role as an AgrAbility service provider.
Update on Criteria

• Core criteria:
  – A valid driver’s license and the ability to travel
  – Willingness to submit to a criminal background check
  – Demonstrated mastery of the primary language of the AgrAbility clientele being served
  – Understand and being able to explain the scope and limitations of authorized AgrAbility services
  – Identify and list the primary sources of AgrAbility client-related solutions and demonstrate how to access them
  – Explain the importance of maintaining client confidentiality and protecting the professional/client relationship
Update at the organizational level

• Being able to effectively assess the needs of AgrAbility clients.
• Communicate to clients the key resources currently available.
• Understand the signs that indicate the need to refer AgrAbility clients to appropriate professionals for assistance.
• Having the capacity to identify and network with related organizations to provide comprehensive AgrAbility client services.
Update at the personnel level

• Interpersonal skills demonstrated in the ability to relate to AgrAbility clientele and their families, and other professionals.

• Communication skills demonstrated in the ability to be an active listener.

• Technical understanding of basic agricultural practices in the area being served and the culture in the community.
What is needed now?

Guiding Questions:

– Do we have the essential list of competencies for our units to be successful in serving our population?

– What aspects of the work environment (personnel and unit level) are missing from the overview?
  • What aspects do you think are not understandable?
  • What aspects are location specific?

– What barriers exist to adaption of competencies?
  • What strategies can you think of to overcome barriers?
Review the proposed syllabus

Dr. Field will distribute copies of this, provide background, and discuss the proposed syllabus.