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Toward a Synthesis of HR Competency Models: The Common HR "Food Groups"

By Dave Ulrich, Wayne Brockbank, Mike Ulrich, and David Kryscynski

As businesses face unprecedented rates of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA),[1] business leaders increasingly recognize the importance of *talent* (workforce, competencies, skills, abilities), *leadership* (senior leader and leadership team), and *organization* (workplace, capability, culture, processes, systems) as sources of competitiveness. Competitors can readily copy access to capital, strategic intent, and operational efficiency but they have a more difficult time copying talent, leadership, and organizational practices.[2] As a result of this increased visibility, HR issues have received increased attention in the C-suite.[3]

As more is required of HR professionals, many outstanding professional groups are committed to helping HR professionals respond to the increased expectations. For example, through alliances and affiliation with the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA), over 90 countries have HR professional associations committed to improving the abilities of HR professionals. These associations sponsor research, publish insights, create professional networks, and offer conferences designed to help their members improve both professionally and personally.

In recent years, there has been a flurry of work on HR competencies: the knowledge, skills, and abilities required of HR professionals. Many HR associations, independent organizations, researchers and consultants have worked to define the competencies required for HR professionals. As the number of these competency models increases, the amount of confusion in the HR field about what is required to be an effective HR professional also increases.

Rather than compare and contrast the HR competency models and engage in a debate over which particular HR competency model is better, this article offers a synthesis of these competency models by proposing an umbrella concept about how to define competencies for HR professionals. We will begin by offering a metaphor from nutrition that frames how to comprehend competencies; we will then review some of the major HR competency efforts and offer an integration

of these diverse efforts; and we will conclude with choices that can be made to define and create more competent HR professionals. We offer this synthesis so that HR associations, consulting firms, and academic researchers can more effectively continue their important work in positioning HR professionals to add greater value to their organizations.

Nutrition Metaphor and HR Competencies

To move the discussion forward, we offer the following metaphor. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a mission to encourage healthy eating. To do so, the USDA has identified nutrition guidelines. These nutrition guidelines are based on "food groups" showing the types of food and how they should be eaten for good health. This work started in 1894 by Dr. Wilbur Olin Atwater as a farmers' bulletin.[4] In Atwater's 1902 publication titled *Principles of Nutrition and Nutritive Value of Food*, he advocated variety, proportionality and moderation; measuring calories; and an efficient, affordable diet that focused on nutrient-rich foods and less fat, sugar, and starch.[5] This original work has morphed dramatically over the last 100 years, but the essence is that there are "food groups" (ranging from 4 to 11 groups and now 5) that individuals should include as they prepare healthy meals. The current image for healthy eating includes five food groups (called Choose My Plate in Figure 1) and it offers recommended daily portions of each of these food groups.

Figure 1: Choose My Plate

ChooseMyPlate.gov
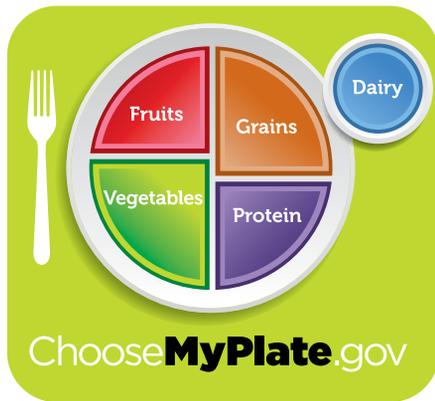
Physicians, nutritionists, and other health care professionals specify these food groups to create value relative to the physical well-being of individuals around the world. Because of different tastes, cultures, and environmental conditions, these core and basic food groups are combined to accommodate different tastes around the world. Few would quibble that food flavors in India, Brazil, U.K., Nigeria, U.S., Australia, and Germany differ. Yet, each of these unique country flavors draws on the basic elements of the food groups.

How does this metaphor inform the HR competency work? HR associations and organizations in different parts of the world are seeking to define competencies for their

respective HR professional audiences (see Table 1 for some examples). With the shared intent of improving the quality of HR professionals, each organization identifies seemingly unique competencies for their audience. This is like having

> One of the first large-scale applications of competencies to the work environment occurred during World War II; the United States Army Air Corps applied competency logic in selecting and training fighter pilots.

different flavors of food in different countries. While the food groups are the same, unique flavors differ based on how the food groups are combined along with spices and flavorings. In like manner, there are common domains of HR competencies from which HR associations may select and adapt based on their unique country, industry, or business circumstance. As these HR associations and organizations build their competency models, they can then make more informed choices about how to identify and implement their respective competency insights.

History and Overview of HR Competencies

The discussion of competencies for HR professionals is an extension of the general competency-based approach to building leaders. One of the first large-scale applications of competencies to the work environment occurred during World War II; the United States Army Air Corps applied competency logic in selecting and training fighter pilots. Following the war, a central figure in the Air Force's task force, John Flanagan, applied this approach on a large scale at the Delco-Remy division of General Motors.[6] This approach was advanced by David McClelland in 1973 in *Testing for Competencies*, and further developed by Richard Boyatzis, then of the McBer and Company consulting firm, in his work *The Competent Manager*.[7]

Personal competencies for HR professionals began across organizations in the 1970s with work by the Association for Talent Development (known at the time as the American Society for Training and Development, or ASTD), where Patricia McLagan documented the variety of possible roles for HR professionals and examined the detailed competencies of those involved in human resource development (coordinated integration of training, development, organizational development, and career development).[8] Since her work, a number of efforts have been pursued to define competencies for HR professionals as summarized in Table 1.

We are admittedly biased by our own involvement in the development and empirical evaluation of HR competency models, but our work with The University of Michigan, the RBL group and our global partners and colleagues has re-

Table 1. Summary of Illustrative HR Competency Work

Sponsor	Sample	Major finding
Towers Perrin with IBM, 1991[9]	Interviewed 3,000 line managers, consultants, HR managers	Line managers wanted HR more computer literate; consultants wanted HR to better manage change. Line managers wanted more HR influence.
University of Michigan and RBL Group (Dave Ulrich and Wayne Brockbank)[10]	Six rounds of HR competency studies from data by HR and line (sample size): 1987: 10,291 2002: 7,082 (with SHRM) 1992: 4,556 2007: 10,063 (with SHRM) 1997: 3,229 2012: 20,103	Most recent round (2012) showed competencies that predict personal effectiveness and business results in six areas: • Strategic positioner • Change champion • Credible activist • HR innovator and integrator • Capability builder • Information (technology) proponent
Arthur Yeung and the California Strategic HR Partnership, 1996	Interviews of senior HR leaders in 10 companies	Leadership, HR expertise, consulting, core competencies
Pat Wright and colleagues, with the HR Policy Association	CHRO focus 2009: 56 CHROs 2012: 143 CHROs 2010: 72 CHROs 2013: 128 CHROs 2011: 172 CHROs 2014: 213 CHROs	CHROs need skills in managing talent, cost, succession, and culture; also defined seven roles for HR: Strategic advisor to the executive team • Strategic advisor to the executive team • Talent strategist/architect • Counselor/confidante/coach to the executive team • Leader of the HR function • Liaison to the board to directors • Workforce sensor • Representative of the firm
Center for Effective Organizations (Ed Lawler and John Boudreau)[11]	Have done seven surveys studying the evolution of HR for 20 years from 1996 to 2015;[12] the first few in partnership with HRPS[13]	Highlighted how HR leaders allocate their time in administrative vs. strategic activities. They also show trends in HR more than specific competencies.[14] • Hero leadership to collective leadership • Sameness to segmentation • Intellectual property to agile co-creativity • Fatigue to sustainability • Employment value proposition to personal value proposition • Persuasion to education
Boston Consulting Group with World Federation of People Management[15]	Conduct studies every few years on HR trends, particularly in Europe; 2011 study included 2,039 executives; SHRM the North America partner on this	Four critical topics: • Managing talent • Transforming HR • Improving leadership • Strategic workforce planning Five critical HR skills: • HR business partner, • Restructuring organization • HR processes • Leadership development • Recruiting

Table 2: Overview of Proposed HR Domains (six food groups for HR)

	Michigan, RBL, and many global partners over the six rounds[23] HR competency studies					
	Round 1 1987	Round 2 1992	Round 3 1997	Round 4 2002	Round 5 2007	Round 6 2012
Total respondents	10,291	4,556	3,229	7,082	10,063	20,023
Business units	1,200	441	678	692	413	635
Associate raters	8,884	3,805	2,565	5,890	8,414	17,385
HR participants	1,407	751	664	1,192	1,671	2,638
[1] Business	Business Knowledge	Business knowledge	Business knowledge	Business knowledge	Business ally	[1] Strategic Positioner
				Strategic contribution	Strategic architect	
[2] Human Resources tools	HR delivery	HR delivery	HR delivery	HR delivery	Talent manager & organization designer	[2] HR Innovator & Integrator
[3] HR Information, Analysis, Operations				HR technology	Operational executor	[3] Technology or information Proponent
[4] Change	Change	Change	Change	Change and culture were combined into strategic contribution	Culture and change steward	[4] Change champion
[5] Organization and Culture			Culture			[5] Organization Capability builder
[6] Personal		Personal credibility	Personal credibility	Personal credibility	Credible activist	[6] Credible activist

Sponsor	Sample	Major finding	
Deloitte[16]	40 colleagues within Deloitte in 2011	• Business: commercial awareness, business acumen • HR: employee relations, HR expertise • Consulting: trusted advisor, influence	
SHRM[17]	1989: ASPA built learning system with Golle and Holmes[18]	The foundation of the learning system for HR professionals.	
	1990: Tom Lawson,[19] 20 CEOs and 50 HR interviews	Building management abilities in leadership, influence, business, and technology	
	1998: Steve Schoonover, 300 interviews in 21 companies in conjunction with SHRM	• Core competencies • Level-specific competencies	• Role-specific competencies
	2002: 7,082 (with Michigan and RBL group, Dave Ulrich and Wayne Brockbank[20])	• Business knowledge • HR delivery • Strategic contributions	• HR technology • Personal credibility
	2007: 10,063 (with Michigan and RBL group, Dave Ulrich and Wayne Brockbank[21])	• Talent manager and organization designer • Culture and change steward • Strategic architect	• Operational executor • Business ally • Credible activist
	2013–2015: Did 111 focus groups, surveyed 640 CHROs and 32,124 SHRM members and HR professionals from 33 countries	Identified nine competency categories, and created a Body of Competency and Knowledge: • Communication • Relationship management • Ethical practice • HR expertise (HR knowledge) • Business acumen	• Critical evaluation • Global and cultural effectiveness • Leadership and navigation • Consultation
Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) map[22]	Generated after an in-depth investigation involving detailed interviews with HR directors across all main economic sectors and scores of senior professionals and academics.	Identified 10 professional areas and four bands for HR's professional map: • Organizational design • Organizational development • Resourcing and talent planning • Learning and talent development • Performance and rewards	• Employee engagement • Employee relations • service delivery • Information

sulted in broad global exposure: four books, dozens of refereed journal articles and dissertations, and dozens more magazines and other publicans in the popular press. As we examine the history of this long running Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS) over six rounds that span more than 30 years, we see six key domains of HR competencies emerge that seem common across the broad range of competency models. These domains are summarized in Table 2 and discussed in detail below.

As is summarized in Table 2, six core HR competency categories emerge from the six rounds of our competency research. These constitute the basic food groups of the HR profession that have the greatest impact on personal and business performance.

▪ **Business.** This category includes core knowledge of business. To be optimally effective HR professionals must have knowledge of internal business operations such as finance, IT, accounting, supply chain management, firm portfolio considerations, order fulfillment cycles, service requirements, marketing techniques, distribution channels and operations management. They also need to have knowledge of external realities such as customer buying criteria, market segmentation, capital markets, global financial developments and global demographic trends. They should understand how these integrate into and are executed through the firm's value chain. For HR professionals to be fully competent in the business domain, they must also be able to apply this knowledge to the formulation and implementation of business strategy.

▪ **Human resource tools, practices, and processes.** Competence in this domain entails the ability to design and utilize the basic HR tools such as recruitment, succession planning, job rotation, outplacement, performance management, reward mechanisms, classroom training, and on the job development.

▪ **HR information systems, analytics, and architecture.** Emerging as a centrally important HR competency is the involvement of HR professionals in the broad field of information management. Three levels of such involvement may be differentiated. At the most basic level, HR professionals should be able to leverage the human resource information system to track talent, enable em-

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ployees to manage their benefits, enable supervisors to access real time employee performance and other related data, and to provide on-line basic training programs. They must also be able to apply predictive analytics to answer important HR questions such as: What factors predict the likelihood of key talent leaving? What factors predict the kind of leaders who are most likely to optimize key talent? What percent of your workforce create 90 percent of the value, who are they, what do they do and what motivates them? Finally, to optimize their contributions in this arena HR professionals should also be able to work with firm leaders to architect the flow of critical competitive information from the outside in, to disseminate important market information and ensure its effective utilization in executive decision making.

▪ **Change.** Competent HR professionals must manage the paradox of providing institutional stability while concurrently facilitating institutional innovation, flexibility and adaptability. They mobilize leadership in initiating change while building the institutional infrastructures that help to ensure the sustainability of change efforts.

▪ **Organization and Culture.** This competency domain mandates that HR professionals not only can ensure outstanding individual talent but that they also help to create and sustain competitive, high performance organizations. Organization consists of more than structural configurations of horizontal and vertical and differentiation and integration. Organization is also the culture of how people think and behave together in ways that are required and perceived by the realities of the competitive market place including customers, competitors, and owners.

▪ **Personal.** To be effective, HR professionals must have personal credibility. Personal credibility is built on a foundation of having strong relationships with key leaders, of communicating clearly through both written and verbal media, of having absolute integrity, and of having rigorous discipline in achieving agreed upon objectives.

As mentioned above, these six competency domains are not only an accurate summary of our research, they also represent the categories which provide order, structure, and integration for most other competency models. This integration is shown in Table 3. From this vantage point

we also suggest that these six domains are the basic food groups of the HR profession. How these domains are emphasized and adapted will vary across national, industrial, and organizational contexts.

Choices for defining HR Competencies: 7 Questions to Guide the Creation of a Specific HR Competency Model

Creating an HR competency model requires making a series of choices about how to approach, define, use, and deploy the model. We have identified seven key questions to help guide HR associations, organizations, and researchers in tailoring the six basic HR domains to their particular settings.

Research Approach

Creating an HR competency model can use HR competencies as either a stand-alone variable or as an independent variable that predicts business and other outcomes. As indicated above, most often HR competencies are answers to the question "what are the competencies of the HR professional"? These are descriptive statements which describe the current state of HR competencies. This is like asking "what are the five food groups?" Another option is to show the impact of the HR competencies on an important variety of organization outcomes. Builders of HR competencies might consider three alternative outcomes:

▪ **Business results.** Which, if any, HR competencies impact business performance?

▪ **Individual job performance.** Will more competent HR professionals be better able to do their job? (If such is the desired outcome, then data might be analyzed to define the competencies for a particular task, role, or job.)[31]

▪ **Personal effectiveness of the HR professional.** How will specific competencies of HR professionals influence whether or not they are seen as being competent by their internal associates?

Focusing on business outcomes is more like asking, "How much from each food group should you eat to maintain good health?" It should be clear that both questions are critically important. We must both define the food groups and determine how to best use the food groups. Similarly, we must both define the competencies of HR professionals and continually refine our models by evaluating the effectiveness of those competencies for the performance dimensions we care most about. This leads to our first guiding question:

Guiding Question 1: Do you intend to have a descriptive model or a prescriptive model of HR competencies? If prescriptive, what are the outcomes you care most about?

Research Methodology

Creating a useful HR competency model requires determining which research methods fit the issues that are most critical in the development of your particular competency model. Any empirical validation of a competency model requires clear tradeoffs. A single study cannot do all things

Table 3: Integration of HR competencies into 6 HR domains

	Core HR domains					
HR Association	**Business**	**Personal**	**HR Tools, Practices and Processes**	**HR Information System and Analytics**	**Change**	**Organization and Culture**
SHRM[24]	• Business acumen	• Ethical practice • Leadership and navigation	• HR expertise	• Communication • Critical evaluation	• Relationship management • Consultation	• Global and cultural effectiveness
CIPD			• Resourcing and talent planning • Learning and talent development • Performance and rewards • Employee engagement • Employee relations	• Service delivery	• Information	• Organization design • Organization development
Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) (model of excellence)	• Business driven • Strategic architect • Future oriented	• Ethical and credible activist • Critical thinker • Courageous • Understand and care	• Workforce designer • Expert practitioner • Solutions driven		• Change leader • Influencer • Collaborative • Resolver of issues	• Organizational capability • Culture leader
National Human Resource Development (NHRD) (HR compass)	• Strategic thinking and alignment • Business knowledge • Financial perspective	• Personal credibility • Service orientation	• Recruitment • Performance management • Talent management • Compensation and benefits • Employee rights and labor law		• Execution excellence • Change orientation • Networking management	• Managing culture and design
Asociación Mexicana en Dirección de Recursos Humanos (AMEDIRH) Pedro Borda Hartmann (studies in 100 companies in Mexico)[25]		• Self-awareness • Synthesis • Formulation • coaching			• Collaboration • Knowledge management	• Innovative culture
Illustrative companies						
BAE Systems			• Enabling employee engagement • Talent management • HR planning • Enabling performance management • Remuneration and benefits • Delivery of HR solutions			• Organization development
GE	• Business partner	• Personal attributes	• HR effectiveness			• Organization effectiveness champion
Hershey	• Business acumen		• Talent management	• Process excellence	• Impact and influence	• Organization diagnosis and change
WD 40[26]	• Know the business	• Become trusted advisor		• Support decisions with analytics	• Be business psychologists • Teach people to take action	
Other studies or reports						
Boston Consulting Group	• HR business partner		• Managing talent • Improving leadership • Recruiting • HR processes			• Restructuring organization
Deloitte	• Commercial awareness • Business acumen	• Trusted advisor	• HR expertise • Employee relations		• Influence	
Dick Antoine[27]		• Credibility with line leaders • Providing counsel	• Offering solutions		• Change agent • Managing influence	
Alan May from Boeing[28]		• Intellectual curiosity • Empathy • Courage • Dynamic range • Grit		• Simplicity		
Schuler and Jackson[29]	• Business competency	• Leadership and managerial competencies	• Professional and technical competencies		• Change and knowledge management	
Joyce Westerdahl, Oracle[30]	• Building business acumen		• Making right HR technology choices	• Having data driven mindset	• Leveraging ideas to move faster	

at once and still be practical and executable. Some of these methodological issues include:

- **What you measure.** A study may examine individual behaviors, attitudes, situational judgements, performance outcomes, or some limited combination of each of these.
- **Whose perspective matters most.** A study could leverage self-assessments by HR professionals or observer assessments of HR professionals (e.g. 360 evaluations).
- **The frequency of evaluation.** A study could examine one point in time to develop a snapshot of the field and profession, or could examine multiple points over time to explore an evolving model.
- **Analytical techniques.** A study could leverage descriptive qualitative data to examine competencies or quantitative data with statistical analysis.

Guiding Question 2: What methodological choices will you make? Will the results be reliable, valid, and generalizable? Will they give you the results that you desire?

Purpose of the HR Competency Model

It is obvious that the HR competency model is meant to improve the quality of HR professionals. Some of this improvement might come within a company so that HR can better attract, screen, assess, develop, and manage the

> For either personal, organizational, regional or professional (certification) development, HR competencies need to be modified over time to reflect changing business requirements.

careers of their HR professionals. Some of HR improvement may be broader than a single organization. The focus might be elevating the value added of the community of HR professionals within an industry, city, state, or country.

Clearly defined competencies aid HR professional certification. Certification has clearly become a major topic for HR associations around the world. Certification has different implications based on different career stages. For early HR entrants, certification is like a license that validates their ability to practice the craft (like an attorney passing the bar or psychologist being licensed). But the licensing does not ensure one's ability to practice the profession at a high level of quality and results. Thus, proficiency certification generally indicates the quality of HR professionals in being able to perform the jobs they are assigned.

Proficiency may also be assessed for the professional through granular assessments of which HR competencies apply in which setting (size of company, level of HR, role of HR, experience in HR, business strategy, organization culture, government laws and so forth). Finally at the mastery level, HR competencies may define someone who is a "Fellow"

or truly advanced in his or her career. For example, Peter Wilson, CEO of AHRI (Australian Human Resource Institute), reviews the importance of differentiating competencies by career level and shows how AHRI validates competency mastery for very seasoned and senior HR leaders.

For either personal, organizational, regional or professional (certification) development, HR competencies need to be modified over time to reflect changing business requirements. The food groups have evolved with new science and research. The core domains of HR should also evolve with new research. In our studies, we found that many core domains have held rather steady over 25 years. However, new core domains continue to evolve and emerge (e.g. the importance of defining culture from the outside in and the role of HR in designing the flow of information) as do some of the specific behaviors

With this in mind, it may be premature to have an effectiveness standard for all effective HR professionals. Standards define what is expected; HR competencies form an index against which HR professionals perform. For example, consider the *Economist*'s Big Mac index, which measures the cost of a Big Mac in various countries in terms of its difference from the average Big Mac price in the United States. It doesn't try to tell you how much a Big Mac should cost—instead, it is a crude but useful assessment of the cost of living around the world.

An HR competencies index guides HR professionals on how to improve. When a rating agency like Moody's or S&P downgrades a company, it is not saying the company did or did not meet financial reporting requirements (GAAP). It is offering an opinion about the firm's ability to repay loans in the future. Likewise, HR competency models may help HR professionals and others better define and deliver value to their company. HR competencies are not some form of HR professional GAAP—this is not an attempt to codify all HR professionals in the same way. Such an HR standard would be nearly impossible because HR effectiveness is inevitably both personally subjective and contingent on the unique needs of the company. Defining a single HR standard would be like defining the perfect basketball player. Both Michael Jordan and Bill Russell were enormously successful, but they had very different skills, played in different eras, and had different roles on their teams. Likewise, it is silly to ask who was or is the best leader—Bill Gates, Richard Branson, Indra Nooyi, Ratan Tata, Carlos Ghosn, Warren Buffett, Zhang Ruixin, Steve Jobs, Larry Page, Oprah Winfrey, or Jack Welch. In fact, each was very successful using unique skills appropriate for the circumstance.

Guiding Question 3. Why are we doing the HR competency work? To upgrade HR professionals? To define the effective HR professional? To certify the HR professional?

Scale and Scope

As corporations seek to expand their production and distribution capabilities, HR professionals frequently find their careers crossing national boundaries. The specific competencies that are useful in one national setting may be relatively less useful in another. Likewise competencies may vary based on the requirements of different industries. In the same

vein, the competencies that are relevant in one division of a company may be less relevant in a different division. This may especially be true in highly diversified firms. Thus as research is applied to identify relevant competency models for different contextual conditions, we may consider what competencies the local markets require, what competencies are required for potentially different business models, what competencies are required across different geographical regions, and so forth. As indicated earlier, just as food groups may vary depending on local food availability and nutritional

> ...just as food groups may vary depending on local food availability and nutritional requirements, HR competencies may require adaptation to different geographical locations and business demands.

requirements, HR competencies may require adaptation to different geographical locations and business demands.

Guiding Question 4. What is the scope of our HR competency research? The individual HR professional? A specific business model? A specific organization? A specific country? The truly global HR profession?

General vs. Tailored HR Competencies
In developing competency models, we must also determine whether we are exploring competencies at the highest level (e.g. the food groups) or at a lower level of analysis (e.g. how the foods apply specifically in some contexts).

- How might competencies vary by firm size? HR competencies may vary depending on whether or not the firm is a small office, home office, small, medium, or large enterprise.
- How might competencies vary by role? Competencies may vary depending on whether the professional is in a corporate office, a service center, center of excellence, an embedded generalist, or an administrative specialist.
- How might competencies vary by function? It is easily conceivable that competencies may vary depending on if the professional is in training, staffing, compensation, performance management, or communications. Likewise, necessary HR competencies will likely vary between business functions (e.g., manufacturing and accounting).
- How might competencies vary by career stage? An HR professional at the apprentice or learner stage may require different competencies from an individual contributor, a manager integrator, or a director strategist.
- How might competencies vary by company culture? The competencies that are required for a monopolistic bureaucracy will be different from those in a fast moving competitive high tech firm.
- How might competencies vary by career history? HR pro-

fessionals who have been lifetime HR professionals may need to focus on different competencies than individuals who are at advanced career stages and who have recently moved into HR.

Guiding Question 5. What are the granular or contextual dimensions that affect HR competencies?

Who Does HR Work?
One of the conundrums of HR competency assessment is that HR professionals have an impact on what and how HR work is done, but so do line managers. Sometimes, line managers and the organization cultures they perpetuate help or hinder the ability of HR professionals to do their work. In many knowledge-based businesses line managers will assume a larger role in HR decisions. For example, an academic department chair is unlikely to relinquish hiring authority to an HR professional. If line managers are not accountable for good HR work (around talent, leadership, and capability), it severely hinders what HR professionals can do. At the other extreme, a very effective line manager can overshadow a weaker HR professional. The extent to which HR versus line management holds primary responsibility for specific HR work may have a significant impact on the HR competency model.

Guiding Question 6. How do we manage the roles of HR versus line managers in defining and delivering HR competencies?

Who Creates the HR Competency Model?
A final issue is "who should have accountability for competency model development"? As competency models are developed, several options are available ranging from academics, practicing HR professionals, consultants, and professional organizations. These different types of developers bring different strengths to the table. Researchers likely leverage rigorous data and methods but may not be in tune with practical HR business needs. Practicing HR professionals bring significant domain expertise but may at times be limited by their focused experience in HR with limited exposure outside of HR. Consultants bring a combination of breadth and context but may have incentives to sell their findings rather than benefit the field more broadly. Lastly, HR professional organizations bring a strong commitment to the HR professionals in their target audience and in their region. Each of these different players brings strengths to the table, but each also brings risks in generating and creating the most broadly applicable and/or context appropriate model.

Research Question 7. To whom will we turn for creating our HR competency model?

Conclusion and Future Opportunity
The answer to the substantial question, "What do I have to be, know, and do to be an HR professional who delivers personal and business value?" requires a set of detailed decisions before finding an answer. This question requires partnerships among HR professional associations around the world,

> ...HR professionals can be both architects who design and deliver and anthropologists who anticipate requirements for talent, leadership, and capability.

focusing on outcomes of HR skills, aligning competencies to current and future business conditions, tailoring competencies to specific situations, and identifying the competencies that matter most for business performance.

There is a value of the "food groups" logic for HR. The six domains proposed in this paper capture the major categories for HR competencies. We have also raised seven sets of choices and questions that should be addressed to make conscious choices about developing and using HR competencies.

Why do competencies for HR professionals matter? Like many others, we are passionate and optimistic about the future of HR. First, HR is not about HR, but about delivering sustainable business results. When asked to define "the biggest challenge in work today?" too many HR professionals focus on HR practices like talent acquisition, learning, training, compensation, or building the HR organization. HR's biggest challenge should be the business' biggest challenge. Business leaders who are seeking to deliver profitable growth through geographic expansion, customer intimacy, product innovation, or efficiency increasingly recognize that HR issues are central to their success. In our work, we have linked HR work with customer and shareholder value.[32] HR competencies matter because when HR professionals master these competencies, they help deliver business results.

Second, we are increasingly clear about the unique outcomes HR professionals deliver to increase business results: individual talent, leadership, and organization capabilities. To accomplish any business agenda, HR professionals can be both architects who design and deliver and anthropologists who anticipate requirements for talent, leadership, and capability. With this focus, HR professionals know what to discuss and deliver to business discussions. In building talent, HR professionals help individuals discover and achieve their personal growth mindset through their organization work. In building organizations, HR professionals build institutions that deliver and shape societal value. In building leadership, HR professionals ensure a continuity for future success.

Finally, as the bar for HR value is raised by connecting to business outcomes and by delivering talent, leadership, and capability, HR professionals have enormous opportunities for impact. When we can better define the competencies to respond to these opportunities, HR delivers enormous value. ■

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