

The 21st Century Recreation/Activity Professional

Part III

All Aboard the Competency Train!

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Competency

The ability to do something successfully or efficiently.

~ Wikipedia.com

The capability to apply or use a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform "critical work functions" or tasks in a defined work setting.

~ Merriam Webster Dictionary

As a former elementary school principal, administrator and teacher, accountability and individual team member's competency levels were top priorities throughout each school year. Team members, including administrators, received year-round competency-driven training in order to demonstrate comprehension of the required skills and essential understandings, thus ensuring that each person *could and would* deliver these proven and successful learning strategies to staff and students. All team members' performance evaluations included data from the current year's testing results. Competency was and still is at the top of the list in the education world! Likewise in today's ever-expanding healthcare world, competence encompasses critical knowledge, skills, abilities, and traits. These essential tools and understandings are learned through pre-service education, in-service training, and work experience.

This article addresses three separate competency models from leading organizations and then proposes a path for Recreation/Activity Professionals to follow with regards to competency models.

The first model for us as Recreation/Activity Professionals to examine comes from Utica College's Master of Science in Healthcare Administration

program. (Utica, New York, 2020). This model directly correlates with the national Healthcare Leadership Alliance (HLA) identifying five core competencies/skills needed by today's healthcare professionals:

- **Communication**

The ability to listen, write and effectively present information.

- **Leadership**

The ability to demonstrate class, character and practicing what you preach.

- **Professionalism**

The ability to model an accountable/ethical demeanor within the workforce.

- **Knowledge**

The ability to have a thorough understanding of the healthcare system; new policies, procedures and federal guidelines and regulations.

- **Business Skills**

The ability to apply the knowledge gained to lead the specific department/area of operation to organizational excellence. {6}

Furthermore, there are many organizations, nationwide, that credit a variety of competencies deemed important for all team members to know and have as part of their working toolbox. *Strengthscape.com* offers three specific competency levels for the Recreation/Activity Professional to review:

- Core Competencies
- Cross-functional Competencies
- Functional Competencies



I. Core Competencies

Core Competencies are in direct relation with strategic organization capabilities, thus are extremely useful for team members to express, reinforce and reward themselves with the organizational values. These competencies are as follows:

- **Decision making**

The ability to make sound judgments; enabling team members to take their decisions after collecting and analyzing data and pertinent information to the persons they serve.

- **Teamwork**

The ability to interact effectively with fellow team members and put healthcare community's goals above their own.

- **Work standards**

The ability to set and maintain high-performance work standards.

- **Reliability**

The ability to assume, own and take responsibility for individual performance standards.

- **Motivation**

The ability to display enthusiasm and energy throughout all assignments.

- Adaptability

The ability to be flexible in all work assignments and healthcare community needs.

- Problem-solving

The ability to analyze problems and gather relevant, useful information.

- Integrity

The ability to follow and stand up for company policies and procedures.

- Communication

The ability to express personal thoughts and ideas freely in a clear, concise manner.

- Planning and Organization

The ability to plan and organize work responsibilities and tasks for achieving objectives.

II. Cross-functional competencies

Cross-functional competencies are required for a number of jobs across many functions and departments. Key examples include computer user skills and budgeting. Through cross-functional competencies, there are plenty of benefits including but not limited to, increasing team proficiency, promotion of teamwork, reduction of time and cost and boosting team loyalty.

III. Functional competencies

These competencies are the skills that professionals are required to use on a daily or regular basis.

Team training and risk/data analysis are some of the examples that fall under this specific competency. It is also important to know that these competencies are job-specific driving quality results and assured performances for different positions. {4}

Finally, the University of Nebraska, Lincoln advances the following competency model:

Competency

The combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes that contribute to enhanced employee performance and ultimately result in organizational success.

Here are their *Components of Competencies*:

- **Knowledge** is the cognizance of facts, truths and principles gained from formal training and experience. Application and sharing of one's knowledge base is critical to individual and organizational success.
- A **skill** is a developed proficiency or dexterity in mental operations or physical processes that is often acquired through specialized training; the execution of these skills results in successful performance.
- **Ability** is the power or aptitude to perform physical or mental activities that are often affiliated with a particular profession. Although organizations may be adept at measuring results, skills and knowledge regarding one's performance, they are often remiss in recognizing employees' abilities or aptitudes, especially those outside of the traditional job design.
- **Individual attributes** are properties, qualities or characteristics of individuals that reflect one's unique personal makeup. Individual attributes are viewed as genetically developed or acquired from one's accumulated life experiences. Although personal characteristics are the most subjective of the components, a growing, significant body of

research links specific personality traits to successful individual and organizational performance. {5}



Pertinent Reflections for Today's Recreation/Activity Professional

CMS 483.24 Quality of Life

F679 ~ Activities Meet Interest/Need of Each Resident

F680 ~ Qualifications of Activity Professional

§483.24(c) (1) The facility must provide, based on the comprehensive assessment and care plan and the preferences of each resident, an ongoing program to support residents in their choice of activities, both facility-sponsored group and individual activities and independent activities, designed to meet the interests of and support the ***physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being of each resident, encouraging both independence and interaction in the community.***

Definition

“Activities” refer to any endeavor, other than routine ADLs, in which a resident participates that is intended to enhance her/his sense of well-being and to promote or enhance physical, cognitive, and emotional health.

These include, but are not limited to, activities that promote ***self-esteem, pleasure, comfort, education, creativity, success, and independence.*** {3}

So, where do we begin? First, we must begin to brainstorm about the topic of competency. Then we must delve into current research and development looking at efficient and effective competency programs and models that might fit our individual department. The Activity Director, along with the entire Activity Team, must then begin to look in-depth at the following:

Accountability

- *The Activity Department accepts full responsibility for their actions and decisions and demonstrates commitment to accomplish work in an ethical, efficient and cost-effective manner.*

Adaptability

- *The Activity Department adjusts planned work by gathering relevant information and applying critical thinking to address multiple demands and competing priorities in an ever-changing healthcare environment.*

Communication

- *The Activity Department effectively conveys information and expresses thoughts and facts. Each team member demonstrates effective use of listening skills and displays openness to other team members' ideas and thoughts.*

Resident/Quality Focus

- *The Activity Department anticipates, monitors and meets the needs of residents and responds to them in an appropriate manner. Each individual demonstrates a personal commitment to identify residents' apparent and underlying needs and continually seeks to provide the highest Quality of Life service to all.*

Inclusiveness

- *The Activity Department fosters respect for all residents and points of view. They interact appropriately with all members of the healthcare community, visitors, business and community partners without regard to individual characteristics. Each Activity Team member demonstrates a personal commitment to create a hospitable and welcoming environment.*

Leadership

- *The Activity Department communicates the community's vision in ways that gain the support of others. They carefully mentor, motivate and guide others toward the established goals.*

Occupational Knowledge/Technology Orientation

- *Each team member demonstrates the appropriate level of proficiency in the principles and practices of the Activity Profession. They demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement, to include understanding and application of current trends and technology that support the healthcare's vision and goals.*

Team Focus

- *Each Activity Team Member works cooperatively and effectively with others to achieve common goals. They participate in building a group identity characterized by pride, trust and commitment.*

Furthermore, we must take a serious look at how does our team learn best? Peer-to-peer learning works well with some teams; however, remember that “one size does not fit all”! Possibilities for verifying each team member’s competency levels should include, but not limited to:

- Pre/Post tests
- Daily evidence of work-related functions
- Case Studies
- Mock Surveys

Lastly, the construction of each individual Activity Department's Competency Plan must reflect and include these components:

- Competencies that are unique, specific and have meaning to our department
- Utilization of the healthcare community's assessments
- QAPI results
- Working backwards from the healthcare community's last federal survey

From 2016 through present day, we as Recreation/Activity Professionals have been charged to adapt, refine and fulfill the following CMS federal expectations:

- Resident Rights
- Behavioral Health
- QAPI
- Facility Assessments
- Person-Centered Care Planning
- Infection Control
- Compliance and Ethics
- And...**Staff Competency**

Surveyors are on the "look out" for these critical areas of service. We as Quality of Life Champions must meet and rise above their expectations. Let's begin by taking those first steps. No other department within our *healthcare walls* knows the duties, responsibilities and skills that we perform each and every day. We are the masters of Quality of Life services. My hope for each and every one of us is continual learning and gleaning as many proven skills and strategies that will effectively move our profession to greater heights. The below-listed quote is from a book that I recently read. May we never seem "permanent" in our ways!



*“But he was there again the next morning, and the next. He became a regular, always there when I arrived at the train stop at eight forty-five. We took different trains. Usually mine came first, and I’d watch him as I left. In this way he came to seem like a **permanent** fixture of the train stop, as though he lived there.” (Revised)*

~ Bonnaffons, Amy; *The Regrets*; Little, Brown and Company; 2020 {1}

References

- {1} Bonnaffons, Amy; *The Regrets*; Little, Brown and Company; 2020
- {2} Campbell, Patrick; Cooley, Tracy; Kuebrich, Ellen; McKnight’s Webinar ~ Competency is Critical; October 2019
- {3}Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; www.cms.gov; 2020
- {4}Strengthscape.com; 2020
- {5}University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Core Competencies; 2020
- {6}Utica College; Master of Science in Healthcare Administration; Utica, New York; 2020
- {7}Wright, Donna; *The Ultimate Guide to Competency Assessment in Healthcare*, Third Edition; 2005

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