



Competency Dictionary  
For HR Roles (AS Employees)  
In the Public Service of Nova Scotia

February 2007

*Success Through HR Professionals*

Three competencies have been identified by government's HR Community as being critical to being successful in an HR role and to help achieve the HR Community's vision.

- Client Orientation
- Change Leadership
- Effective Interactive Communication

In addition to these three HR leadership competencies, three additional leadership competencies have been identified for the HR Community's Support Group (AS employees).

- Decisiveness
- Relationship Building
- Self Confidence / Courage of Convictions

Definitions for all six (6) competencies that apply to the HR Support Group are included in this dictionary.

### **Definition of Competency**

A competency is any observable and/or measurable knowledge, skill, ability or behaviour that contributes to successful job performance.

There are two major components to a competency -- the definition and the scale. The definition explains what the competency means. This provides a common language that everyone in the organization can understand the same way. Each competency also has associated levels of proficiency, which are described as a scale. The scale is descriptive in that it lays out a behaviour pattern for each level. It is incremental and additive, which means that any one level is inclusive of all preceding levels. For example, a level 'C' includes the behaviours described in levels 'A' and 'B'. The scale begins with passive behaviour at level one and activity gradually increases from levels two to four or five. The progression of this scale is provided with the definition.

---

## ***Client Orientation***

---

Client Orientation involves developing and maintaining strong relationships with clients. Focuses one's efforts on discovering and meeting the client's needs, while balancing against the government's key business and strategic priorities. Clients may be broadly defined, including internal "customers" or "clients", as well as the public.

### **A. Maintains Clear Communication**

- Follows through, when asked, on client inquiries, requests and/or complaints in a friendly, cheerful manner.
- Keeps client informed about progress of projects
- Provides clients with timely, effective information/products and services.
- Asks questions of clients to maintain clear communication regarding mutual and realistic expectations, desires, or needs for improvement and monitors client satisfaction.

### **B. Takes Personal Responsibility for Correcting Problems**

- Takes personal responsibility for correcting client service problems promptly and undefensively; responds to a client's concern and ensures that the client is aware of what actions are being taken.
- Explains the rationale for decisions/outcomes to the client.
- Works co-operatively with other departments/agencies to meet client needs.

### **C. Acts to Make Things Better for the Client**

- States candidly what can be done to meet client needs, offering innovative/creative solutions to problems, explains rationale for decisions/outcomes.
- Meets and strives to exceed client expectations.
- Makes self fully available, especially when client is going through a critical period. (e.g., spends extra time and effort with client when the client needs it)

### **D. Addresses Underlying Client Needs**

- Understands the client's business issues and/or seeks information about the real underlying needs of the client, beyond those expressed initially.
- Adds value by taking action beyond normal expectations. Demonstrates a "client first" orientation by working to remove barriers and identifying new/creative approaches to providing top-notch client service.
- May commit to doing (or having others do) additional work/research in order to solve a client's problem or meet their need(s).

### **E. Uses a Long-Term Perspective/Acts as a Trusted Advisor**

- Becomes involved in client's decision-making process, while remaining objective and impartial and upholding the ethical principles of the Government.
- Builds an independent opinion on client needs, problems, or opportunities and possibilities for implementation and may act on this opinion (e.g., recommends approaches which are new and different from those requested by the client).

---

## ***Change Leadership***

---

Change Leadership is the ability to energize and alert groups to the need for specific changes in the way things are done. People with this competency willingly embrace and champion change. They take advantage of every opportunity to explain their vision of the future to others and gain their buy-in.

### **A. Fosters Understanding of Change**

- Effectively manages own personal resistance or reaction to change.
- Shares own understanding of change with others.

### **B. Fosters Acceptance of and Commitment to Change**

- Involves others in planning for and implementing change, and in so doing gains buy-in for change.
- Helps others deal with their resistance to change.
- Communicates to colleagues, staff and/or clients why change is needed, the benefits of change, what is at stake, and how the change will impact employees and clients.

### **C. Manages Change**

- Translates organizational change strategies into specific and practical goals, processes, and time frames.
- Develops and implements strategies to transition from the current to future situation.
- Develops contingency plans for major resistance and/or unforeseen issues in implementing change.

### **D. Leads Change**

- Communicates a clear, compelling vision of what the change will accomplish.
- Ensures ongoing communication strategies are in place to facilitate understanding and commitment to change.
- Generates momentum and genuine enthusiasm for change.
- Spearheads the development and implementation of change strategies, developing or adjusting organizational systems to facilitate the change and employee or client transition.
- Reinforces the change message with own actions and attitudes.
- Publicly recognizes individuals who are demonstrating behaviours consistent with the "new organization".

---

## ***Effective Interactive Communication***

---

Effective Interactive Communication implies the ability to transmit and receive information clearly and communicate effectively to others by considering their points of view in order to respond appropriately. It includes using tact and diplomacy in all communications as well as the ability to convey ideas and information, both orally and in writing, in a way that brings understanding to the target audience.

### **A. Pays Attention to the Communication of Others**

- Pays attention to the communication of others (individuals or groups)
- Actively listens to people and asks probing questions to gain a broader understanding of the issue or question at hand
- Listens attentively to others and encourages others to express their own views

### **B. Checks Understanding and Clarifying**

- Seeks to ensure that factual messages are clearly understood, useful and timely
- Correctly interprets non-verbal clues
- Is receptive and responds in ways that communicate clear understanding
- Clearly presents information or provides explanations so that it is easily understood
- Careful to remain factual in providing information to various sources to avoid negative repercussions (e.g. when taking on a representational role or when dealing with the media)

### **C. Adapts Language to the Audience**

- Clarifies complex concepts/proposals in terms that are appropriate for the audience
- Adapts style, mode and tone based on the audience/client reactions and the issues being addressed
- Understands the sensitivities surrounding different individuals and adapts language, tone, style and content of communications appropriately
- Responds appropriately to on-the-spot questions even when specific responses have not been crafted beforehand

### **D. Communicates for Maximum Results**

- Understands the underlying needs, interests, issues and motivations of others
- Interprets complex and possibly contradictory or competing signals/messages
- Optimizes communications to achieve desired results (e.g., through the use of mediation, counseling, group facilitation, and/or media relations)
- Considers the purpose of communications (e.g., to build rapport, move a situation along, put people at ease) as well as other key factors (e.g., the needs and feelings of the target audience, the impact of the message on the audience, confidentiality) in deciding what to communicate and how to deliver the message

---

## ***Decisiveness***

---

Decisiveness is the ability to make decisions based on analysis of the information presented in the face of ambiguous or conflicting situations, or when there is an associated risk.

### **A. Makes Relatively Uncomplicated, “Safe” Decisions**

- Makes and implements decisions where necessary information is available and stakeholders share compatible objectives.
- Gets the information needed to make effective decisions.

### **B. Makes Sound Decisions in a Somewhat Vague Situation**

- Makes and implements decisions when faced with differing stakeholder perspectives and/or some ambiguity of information, based on the organization’s needs and objectives.
- Recognizes conflicting situations as they arise and determines appropriate responses.
- Takes ownership of decisions and ensures decisions are consistent with legislation, precedent, and established policies and procedures.

### **C. Makes Sound Decisions in Ambiguous or Risky Situations**

- Makes and implements decisions where required information is incomplete and/or ambiguous, but sufficient to exercise sound judgment.
- Implements ideas and approaches that are likely to add value, but may not work out.
- Puts systems in place to proactively monitor risks and determine acceptable risk tolerances.

### **D. Makes Sound Strategic Decisions in very Ambiguous Situations Using Advanced Techniques**

- Makes and implements strategic decisions based on principles, values and business cases.
- Champions initiatives with significant potential paybacks, but possible adverse consequences, based on an assessment of the risks and benefits, impacts, etc.
- Integrates risk management into program management and organizational planning.

---

## ***Relationship Building***

---

Relationship Building involves the ability to develop contacts and relationships internal and external to the organization to facilitate work efforts or to gain support/cooperation. It implies building long-term or on-going relationships with clients or stakeholders (e.g. someone internal or external to the organization, on whom your work has an impact). This type of relationship is often quite deliberate and is typically focused on the way the relationship is conducted.

### **A. Understands the Significance of Networking**

- Sees stakeholder relationship-building as key to securing the success of initiatives
- Makes or sustains informal contacts with others in addition to contacts required in the course of work, such as unstructured or spontaneous chats about work-related issues, children, sports, news, etc.)

### **B. Identifies/Approaches Key Stakeholder Contacts**

- Looks for and seizes opportunities to expand one's network of key contacts and nurture the ones in place
- Identifies key stakeholder contacts in the organization with whom a relationship must be established

### **C. Actively Seeks Relationship-Building Opportunities**

- Develops and cultivates effective working relationships with others to accomplish tasks
- Builds a reservoir of good will; exchanges information, services or time with one's network
- Initiates or participates in parties, outings, or special gatherings designed to improve or strengthen relationships with others

### **D. Organizes Involvement of Key Players**

- Identifies internal staff whose individual expertise can meet stakeholder needs
- Matches staff to appropriate stakeholder contacts and coordinates contacts
- Develops new ways to reach out to clients and stakeholders, to stimulate input and exchange of information

### **E. Builds a Network of Contacts**

- Develops and maintains a planned network of relationships with clients, internal colleagues, stakeholders and colleagues in other departments and non-government organizations
- Uses this network to identify opportunities, and to gather market intelligence
- Develops a network and taps into their expertise to seek input to problems and to find alternative ways of resolving an impasse

---

## ***Self-Confidence/Courage of Convictions***

---

Self-Confidence/Courage of Convictions is a belief in one's own capability as expressed in increasingly challenging circumstances and confidence in one's decisions or opinions, within the framework of public interest, ethics and values and organizational integrity. It may include providing leadership, direction, and inspiration to others by making difficult decisions and taking actions that may not be popular but are in the best interests of the organization and its clients.

### **A. Has Confidence In Own Opinions and Capability**

- Speaks positively to peers or clients about initiatives or programs that are not well-liked
- Speaks up to ensure people are properly informed, to clarify inaccurate information
- Offers opinions which may differ from others

### **B. Maintains Positions Even When Faced With Opposition**

- Proposes new or modified approaches, practices, and processes and defends them effectively if challenged
- Takes on activities and projects that need to be done, even though they may not be easy or have popular support
- Reassesses position in the face of justified or persistent resistance

### **C. Maintains Confidence In Own Capabilities In Face of Strong Challenges**

- Speaks up when disagrees with management, clients, or others in power, but disagrees tactfully, stating own view clearly and confidently, even in a conflict
- In spite of complex challenges and no guarantees of success or reward, moves issues or change initiatives forward, on the basis of personal conviction that it is the right thing to do
- Acknowledges personal responsibility for outcomes from decisions made

### **D. Deals With Extremely Challenging Situations With Unwavering Self-assurance**

- Confronts management or clients honestly, sometimes at the risk of triggering a conflict
- Takes on extremely challenging, i.e., very risky personally, positions willingly. For example, defending a minority opinion when it is unpopular
- Makes decisions having significant consequences that are good for the organization and consistent with the values of the organization, subject to public scrutiny
- Instills a desire in groups of people to take action, through encouragement and positive example