



Nova Scotia Public Service Commission

*Competency Dictionary
For Leadership Roles in the
Public Service of Nova Scotia*

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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.

Competency Profile

A job competency profile (or model) is a set of predefined "key" competencies and proficiency levels required to perform successfully in a specific job.

Competency Clusters

The competencies within the dictionary have been grouped into the following four clusters: Thinking Capabilities, Leadership Effectiveness, Self Management and Social Awareness. Each cluster covers a broad range of behaviours and provides an overall picture of the focus of the different behaviours.

Thinking Capabilities: This cluster captures the behaviours associated with problem solving and planning, and one's cognitive ability to research, analyze and make well thought out decisions which are aligned to the government's strategic direction.

Leadership Effectiveness: This cluster groups leadership qualities and behaviours that allow one to have an impact on their employee's contribution, development, and understanding of their role. In addition, this cluster draws on behaviours associated with one's ability to align others to the government's vision.

Self Management: This cluster includes the competencies related to one's ability to know one's own triggers, preferences, and internal resources and be able to apply those to guide one's performance.

Social Awareness: This cluster includes the competencies related to one's ability to manage our relationships effectively. This cluster also draws on behaviours associated with being socially aware of the work environment and how best to make an impact.

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.

Strategic Orientation

Strategic Orientation is the ability to link long-range visions and concepts to daily work. It implies the ability to think conceptually and to “see the big picture”. It includes an understanding of capabilities, nature and potential of the department and the Organization. It involves taking calculated risks based on an awareness of societal, economic and political issues as they impact the strategic direction of the department and the Organization.

A. Understands Business Fundamentals and Strategies

- Has a general grasp of the fundamentals of business success.
- Is able to analyze and comprehend operational and organizational goals and strategies developed by others.
- Uses understanding of business fundamentals to add value at meetings.

B. Aligns Current Actions with the Organization’s Strategic Goals

- Applies a broad business understanding to improve the performance and processes of the group.
- Prioritizes work in alignment with business goals, acts and implements strategies and policies in accordance with the organization’s strategies, objectives and goals.

C. Links Daily Tasks to Strategies

- Considers whether short-term goals will support long-term objectives.
- Reviews own actions against the organization’s strategic plan.
- Projects or thinks about long-term applications of current activities.
- Anticipates reactions to different initiatives.

D. Thinks in Strategic Terms

- Thinks beyond the work environment and makes decisions in the context of the total environment.
- Is a visionary and a long-term planner.
- Actively increases one’s own knowledge/awareness of the business and competitive environment to determine long-term issues, problems or opportunities.
- Develops and establishes broad scale, longer-term objectives, goals or projects. (e.g. affecting a department, several departments or the organization).
- Develops a business strategy.

E. Understands Effect of External Factors on Internal Strategy

- Is aware of the projected directions of external factors/trends (such as economic, social, political, or environmental) and how changes might impact the organization.
- Considers how present policies, processes and methods might be affected by future developments and trends.

F. Plans Actions to Fit Strategy and Meet External Events

- Ensures contingency plans exist for problems and situations that might occur.
- Redesigns the structure and/or operations of the department or organization to better meet long-term objectives.
- Establishes a course of action to accomplish a long-term goal and shares with others own view of the desirable future state of the organization.

Development of People

Development of People involves working to develop people's contribution and potential. Involves a genuine intent to foster the long-term learning or development of others, including direct reports, peers, team members or other staff. The focus is on the developmental intent and effect rather than on a formal role of training.

A. Expresses Positive Expectations

- Makes positive comments regarding the developmental future of direct reports, peers, team members or other staff (comments can either be to or about the other(s)).
- Expresses positive expectations about an employee's potential even when others might not share the same beliefs about that person's potential.
- Believes others want to and/or can learn or improve their performance.

B. Gives Short-Term, Task-Oriented Instruction

- Gives detailed instructions and/or on-the-job demonstrations to direct reports, peers, team members or other staff.
- Establishes or implements routines and activities to facilitate work.
- Offers suggestions that help people find solutions to their problems.

C. Gives Reasons and Other Support

- Gives directions or demonstrations to direct reports, peers, team members or other staff with reasons or rationale as a training strategy.
- Gives practical support or assistance to make job easier for others. (i.e., volunteers additional resources, tools, information, expert advice, etc.).
- Asks questions, gives tests, or uses other methods to verify that others have understood explanation or directions.

D. Gives Feedback to Encourage Ongoing Development

- Gives direct reports, peers, team members, or other staff specific suggestions for improvement to help them reflect and learn from previous experience, avoid future pitfalls, and build on past successes.
- Gives feedback to direct reports, peers and/or team members or other staff in behavioural rather than personal terms for developmental purposes and refers them to available resources to help further their success.
- Documents and follows through on a specific development plan for direct reports to support the achievement of performance targets and competencies.

E. Provides In-Depth Mentoring, Coaching, or Training

- Arranges appropriate and helpful assignments, formal training, or other experiences for the purpose of fostering a person's learning and development (may include career pathing or career planning).
- Understands and identifies a training or developmental need and establishes new programs or materials to meet it.
- Actively supports competent employees in seeking lateral and promotional opportunities to further their career.

Team Leadership

Team Leadership is the intention to take a role as leader in a team or other group. Leadership involves communicating a compelling vision and embodying the values of the Nova Scotia Public Service. Team Leadership is generally, but not always, shown from a position of formal authority. The “team” here should be understood broadly as any group in which the person takes on a leadership role, including the organization as a whole.

A. Keeps People Informed

- Delivers consistent messages that reinforce the Government’s/Department’s priorities.
- Lets people affected by a decision know what is happening, even if they are not required to share such information.
- Explains the reasons for a decision.
- Makes sure the group has all the necessary information.

B. Manages Resources

- Delegates the required authority to carry out assigned responsibilities
- Facilitates the work of others by providing tools (frameworks, examples) to help move the work along
- Ensures all team members are fully deployed
- Matches the skills of the individual to the requirements of the work
- Anticipates the implications of project changes on resource needs

C. Creates Environment for Team Effectiveness

- Gets others’ input for purposes of promoting the effectiveness of the group or process. Resolves conflicts in the team, gives fair feedback (individual or collective), etc.
- Acts to build team spirit for purposes of promoting the effectiveness of the group or process
- Recognizes staff efforts by celebrating accomplishments
- Takes a proactive, positive view of staff and their capabilities, ensuring they understand their role and responsibilities, counselling and supporting them in improving their skills
- Fosters a climate of openness, trust and solidarity among staff by treating each person as a valued team member and where people feel comfortable in expressing their opinions and need

D. Positions Self as the Leader

- Sets a good example by personally modelling desired behaviour and establishing norms for group behaviour (“rules of engagement”); takes appropriate action if group norms are violated.
- Takes action to ensure that others buy into leader’s mission, goals, agenda, climate, tone, and policy.
- Provides direction to the organization on emerging public issues and concerns.

E. Communicates a Compelling Long-Term Vision

- Inspires confidence in the mission.
- Generates excitement, enthusiasm and commitment to the group mission

Achievement Orientation

Achievement Orientation involves working to achieve results and improve individual and organizational contribution. Achievement Orientation is a concern for working well or for surpassing a standard of excellence. The standard may be one's own past performance (striving for improvement); an objective measure (results orientation); outperforming others (competitiveness); challenging goals one has set; or trying something new that will improve organizational results (innovation). Achievement Orientation also involves effectively managing internal and external resources to achieve the Government's goals.

A. Wants to Do Job Well; Expresses Affect or Feeling about Performance

- Tries to do the job well or right
- Expresses a desire to do better
- May express frustration at waste or inefficiency

B. Creates Own Measures of Excellence

- Sets and achieves individual performance targets aligned with the business plan, keeping others informed of progress or barriers to achievement.
- Organizes people and allocates tasks and responsibilities so that multiple objectives can be accomplished simultaneously.
- Identifies resources (including partnerships or indirect resourcing approaches) that will facilitate the achievement of the Government's goals.
- Keeps track of and measures outcomes against a standard of excellence not imposed by others.

C. Improves Performance

- Is receptive to feedback from others on existing ideas, procedure and policies.
- Seeks out creative/innovative solutions for improvement in business outcomes.
- Questions conventional means of service delivery to more effectively and efficiently meet the Government's goals.
- Makes specific changes in the system or in own work methods to improve performance (examples may include doing something better, faster, at lower cost, more efficiently; or improves quality, client satisfaction, morale, etc., without setting any specific goal).

D. Sets and Works to Meet Challenging Goals

- Sets and works to meet goals that are a definite stretch, but not unrealistic or impossible. These may be goals one sets for oneself or goals one sets for direct reports.
- Effectively oversees a range of significant programs and time-sensitive issues using appropriate resources.
- Refers to specific measures of baseline performance compared with better performance at a later point in time. (e.g., "When I took over, efficiency was 20% — now it is up to 85%").
- Sets out to achieve a unique standard. The standard may be a process-oriented or people related (e.g., "No one had ever done it before").

E. Balances Limited Resources Against Outcomes

- Analyzes for organizational outcomes in order to make decisions, set priorities or choose goals on the basis of calculated inputs and outputs. This includes analyzing both process and people related outcomes.
- Provides leadership in effective management and stewardship of resources.
- Makes decisions that allocate limited resources (time, people, budgetary, etc.) to meet program delivery and/or policy objectives.
- Knows how and when to influence policy development in order to impact policy and delivery outcomes.

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

Impact and Influence

Impact and Influence implies an intention to persuade, convince, influence or impress others (individuals or groups) in order to get them to go along with or to support the organization's direction. The "key" is understanding others, since Impact and Influence is based on the desire to have a specific impact or effect on others where the person has his or her own agenda, a specific type of impression to make, or a course of action that he or she wants the others to adopt.

A. Takes a Single Action to Persuade

- Uses direct persuasion in a discussion or presentation
- May appeal to reason, data, others' self-interest
- May use concrete examples, visual aids, demonstrations, etc.
- Makes no apparent attempt to adapt presentation to the interest and level of the audience

B. Takes Multiple Actions to Persuade

- Takes two or more steps to persuade without trying to adapt specifically to level or interest of an audience
- Includes careful preparation of data for presentation
- Makes two or more *different* arguments or points in a presentation or a discussion

C. Calculates Impact of Actions or Words

- Adapts a presentation or discussion to appeal to the interest and level of others
- Anticipates the effect of an action or other detail on people's image of the speaker
- Takes a well-thought-out dramatic or unusual action in order to have a specific impact
- Anticipates and prepares for others' reactions

D. Uses Indirect Influence

- Uses chains of indirect influence: "get A to show B so B will tell C such-and-such"
- Takes two or more steps to influence, with each step adapted to the specific audience
- Uses experts or other third parties to influence

E. Uses Complex Influence Strategies

- Assembles various stakeholders
- Builds "behind-the-scenes" support for ideas
- Uses an in-depth understanding of the interactions within a group to move toward a specific agenda (eg., may withhold information to have specific effects)

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