Research on the Relationship between Competency and Job Qualification

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Abstract. This paper analyzes the concepts of competency and job qualification, compares their differences in two aspects of development and evaluation application and discusses two forms of their combined applications in the enterprise practice, one is job qualification containing competency, the other is competency containing job qualification.

Problem Introduction

Competency and job qualification are the foundation of human resource management, but their "difficult landing" and "poor adaptability" is a general problem in the practice of the enterprise. One reason is that the enterprise has insufficient understanding of job qualification and competency, confuses the competency standards with the job qualification standards and mistakes competency for the main criterion of personnel recruitment and selection, and job qualification for the sole basis of training and assessment. Therefore, it is of great significance to correctly understand their relationship, so as to play their role of "cornerstone" well.

The Comparison of the Concepts of Competency and Job Qualification

Scholars have conducted in-depth researches on the concept of competency. McClelland (1973) believed that more important factors affecting employee performance, in addition to personal knowledge and skills, were inner deep characteristics such as personality traits, motivation and values \cite{1}. Spencer et al. (1994) believed that competency was the deep characteristic possessed by the individual and having cause-and-effect relationship with high performance \cite{2}. Zhong Lifeng, and Shi Kan (2003) believed that competency was the behavioral characteristic which can be used to distinguish excellent performers from average performers, and these characteristics were the potential and lasting characteristics of individuals, which can be cognitive, attitudinal, tendentious and so on \cite{3}.

Job qualification is the combination of knowledge, experience, skills and behaviors which must be possessed by job holders in the specific positions. It is a proof of the staff’s working ability in a particular field. Job qualification emphasizes on whether job holders are able to meet the requirements of the job or not. Only those who meet the requirements of the job are qualified and those who do not meet the requirements of the job are not suitable for the post and should be replaced, or continue to learn to meet the requirements of the job\cite{4}.

Thus, the concepts of competency and job qualification have different emphases, which can be analyzed in four aspects: the object of concern, the level of attention, the scope of application and the main content (refer with: Table 1). Competency is the individual potential characteristic, which is linked to the high performance, can be used to distinguish excellent performers from qualified performers, and is closely related to job performance. It is focused on high performers and includes motivation, personality, attitude and values, while job qualification is focused on qualified performers, emphasizing the basic requirements to job holders.
Table 1. Comparison of the Concepts of Competency and Job Qualification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Job Qualification</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object of concern</td>
<td>Excellent staff</td>
<td>Qualified staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of attention</td>
<td>The inner deep characteristic</td>
<td>The shallow level quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of application</td>
<td>The core position and talent</td>
<td>Covering the entire position system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main content</td>
<td>Motivation, character, ability, personality, etc.</td>
<td>Knowledge, skills, experience, behavior, etc.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Differences in Competency and Job Qualification

Differences in Development

The construction of competency model is focused on the common core personality traits of excellent job holders in the specific positions, emphasizing the individual potential qualities including self-cognition, internal drive and activity motivation. People are the focus to be analyzed in the process of constructing competency model. Meanwhile, the construction of competency model usually starts from the organization's strategy, values and core competitiveness to reflect the future needs of the organization.

Job qualification is obtained through job analysis, based on the reality, collecting information from bottom to top, analyzing the requirements to job holders systematically and providing detailed information that is measurable and comparable to make a match between positions and personnel. During the development of job qualification, the research object is the characteristic and requirement of the job, analyzing the required ability to complete the job.

Competency can be divided into three categories, general quality, transferable quality and professional quality. General quality reflects the company's strategy and core values, which is applicable to all the staff in the organization and is the basic requirement to the staff. Transferable quality is the quality required in multiple roles, varied according to the degree of significance and proficiency of the position, usually including leadership and management. Professional quality is the special quality required in a particular role or job, such as the expertise in human resource, finance, production, marketing and other professional qualities. The classification of job qualification is based on the job management system of the enterprise. Different job qualifications are required in different post levels and post classifications.

Differences in Evaluation Application

Competency is the potential quality of excellent performers in specific positions, which is neither good nor bad, only suitable for the position or not. The matching degree between the quality of job holders and competency model is usually obtained from the psychological test. In human resource management, it is most widely used for talent recruitment, selection and performance evaluation and it can also be applied in the middle and senior management training.

Qualification evaluation is the core of job qualification management system. It uses a variety of assessment methods to overall assess the staff's knowledge, skills, education, experience and performance, compares the evaluation results with the qualification criteria of the type of the post where the staff is in and determines the roles of the staff according to the evaluation results. Qualifications are the basic elements in job qualification management system, concentrating on the basic quality of the position. They are the essential requirements of the post, the "threshold" standard of talent selection and recruitment, and provide specific guidance for staff training, including the induction training for new employees and the job-transfer training and promotion training. In addition, it can provide direction for staff career development and provide the basis for salary grade evaluation.

The Connection between Competency and Job Qualification

Applications of competency and job qualification are both aimed at improving the adaptability
between person and post and improving the effectiveness of human resource management and development. In the corresponding human resource management mode, they both play a fundamental role. The development of competency is based on qualifications, generating from the work analysis. Moreover the difference between excellent performers and qualified performers is also measured by the standards of qualifications. In the enterprise practice, they have two combination forms, one is job qualification containing competency, the other is competency containing job qualification.

**Job Qualification Containing Competency**

In this mode, competency model is included in job qualification. In addition to basic knowledge, experience, skills, education, job qualification also contains values, personality, traits and other “invisible” characteristics of the iceberg model. The scope of the elements in job qualification is more extensive than competency model.

Huawei is the earliest enterprise to introduce job qualification management system and competency model. It brings competency model into job qualification management system. Job description contains both required qualifications and competency of job holders. In this way it can not only make up for defects of competency model itself, but also make competency model and human resource management system work closely through job qualification management system, so as to make competency model and job qualification become useful management tools of human resource management and development[4]. It is worth noting that the key reason for the successful adoption of competency model in Huawei is that they make detailed grade of the quality in competency model and the quality of each grade can be evaluated according to the grading standards. By this way, the staff is very clear about the level of their own quality. What quality and which level of quality a position requires can be linked up with job qualification. As shown in figure 1, job qualification standards include three parts: namely basic conditions, core standards and references. Competency model is included in the column of job qualification of the post specification. Which level of quality the position requires is clearly reflected and connection of competency and job qualification becomes realized.

![Figure 1. Elements of Huawei's job qualification standards.](image)

**Competency Containing Job Qualification**

In this mode, job qualification is included in competency. Zhao Shuming et al. (2007) built
human resource management system based on competency model. They divided competency into three levels: necessary competency, differentiation competency and strategy competency. Necessary competency refers to knowledge and skills employees must have in the organization. Differentiation competency is personality traits and motivation that excellent performers possess. Strategy competency is closely linked to the organization’s core values [7]. It can be seen from the concept of the necessary competency that necessary competency is the job qualification of each position and job qualification is a level of competency.

Li Du et al. (2012) summarized the construction of competency model of China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC)’s overseas oil and gas business talent [8]. It is divided into five dimensions, namely political quality dimension, professional ability dimension, foreign language level dimension, environmental adaptability dimension and physical and mental status dimension (refer with: Fig. 2).

In the five dimensions of competency model, professional qualification in the political quality dimension refers to professional background, professional experience and professional certificate. Professional ability refers to the employee's professional skills, including three elements of knowledge, skills and experience, focusing on the employee’s practical working ability. Foreign language level requires employees to be proficient in using at least one of four foreign languages. Employees without this ability will be one-vote veto. Professional qualification, professional ability and foreign language level are basic conditions that staff in this position must have, belonging to the category of job qualification.

**Conclusion**

The explicit identification of the relationship between competency and job qualification is the
prerequisite to play their basic role effectively. Competency focuses on high performance while job qualification focuses on qualified performance. There are great differences in their development and evaluation application. But at the same time, there is a strong connection between them. Based on different enterprise practices, job qualification may contain competency and competency can also contain job qualification. Only reasonably use competency and job qualification can we establish and perfect evaluation system, promotion system and development system of human resource.

**Literature References**


