

The Building of the Competency Model for the Health Care Consultants: An Example Based on a Teaching Hospital in Central Taiwan

Ai-Tzu Li, Yen-Ju Lin, and Yi-Pin Lai

Abstract—The purpose of the study was to build a competency model for health care consultants, and to further utilize it as a reference the recruitment of new health care consultants. The study focused on the interviews done with six consultants in a health care center of a teaching hospital in central Taiwan. The interview data were analyzed along with the competency dictionary issued by the Ministry of Interior. Results showed that the competency of the health care consultants mainly included three tiers: professional competency, core competency, and management competency. The three tiers consisted of four different qualities, namely personal characteristics, interpersonal relationship, management, and marketing. The four qualities can be further subdivided into 29 competency indicators. The study suggested that health care consultants of the executive level needed to improve their abilities on team-management and marketing skills. This may further enhance the administration efficacy, which will be of great benefit for future team-cooperation and leadership.

Index Terms—Competency, competency model, health care consultant

I. INTRODUCTION

In the recent decade, as the general living standards gradually improves, issues such as "health" and "longevity" are gradually being valued. Therefore, the issue on disease prevention has gradually received much more attention than before among the modern society. Especially after National Health Insurance was established, people began to gradually value the health care resources of preventive health care.

While the National Health Insurance Bureau can pay only part of the burden of adult health examination, many hospitals began to introduce packaged physical examination, hoping to attract future potential examination subjects with the quality of service. Health examination centers have been established one after another. The quality of physical check

up and the continuity of health promotion have become the focus of health centers. To achieve tasks mentioned above, health care consultants play a very important role in the functioning of the center, being the driving force behind various health projects, and are the key to the success in the operation of the health center. Public praise of health care practitioner's services has become one of the selection criteria for people to choose the health examination center [1].

Chen [2], mentioned that medical institution with high competitiveness must have great health care professionals, and to enhance the organization's competitiveness must start from the staff recruitment. Therefore, recruiting staff is also one of the keys to enhance the organization's performance. Besides, executives also have quite an impact on the staff. The main role of a midlevel executive is to be responsible for coordinating the work in the organization, thus he or she is a core figure connecting between the higher and the lower level. Only by motivating staff's performance can a successful executive have positive impact on the organization [3], thereby enhancing the overall work performance.

Overall speaking, the main work of health care consultants are collecting and managing each individual's health status and data, and providing consultations and instructions, so as to achieve the goals of disease prevention, disease elimination, and anti-aging. As consultants have different characteristics in their work content and provide service to populations different from the traditional medical personnel, they have a different professional competency. Currently there are only a few studies on the competency model of traditional medical personnel, but the competency model for health care consultant has yet to be established.

Its importance lies in its function as a reference for the recruitment of new members and for the design of the educational and developmental training course. Finally, it can also function as an indicator for performance evaluation. Hence, competency model can promote the professional ability of the health care consultants. Therefore, the establishment of competency model for health care consultant is an urgent and important issue.

There are ten health care consultants in the center studied, two are of the executive-level and eight are of the staff-level. Due to the difference in the responsibility and work content between the two levels, this study focuses on the investigation of the competency of both the executive-level and staff-level health care consultants.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the purpose of the study, the literature review includes three aspects: competency, competency model, and the approaches of establishing a competency model.

A. Competency

The term competency was first proposed by David McClelland [4], a psychologist of Harvard University, who put forward doubts to the IQ test commonly used to select students in the higher education. He pointed out that it should attach more importance to the competency that measures the practical performance. Later, this notion was used into the field of enterprise management. Scholars started to discuss the competency that affects working performance. Mclagan [5], then defined "competency" as "a series of knowledge, skills and abilities sufficient to complete the main working results." Knowles[6], provided a general definition for competency, which included the necessary knowledge, individual value, skills and attitudes for carrying out specific function or work. Hager & Gonczi[7], pointed out that competency should include three elements, namely, knowledge, skill and attitude, all of which will interact with each other and happen on a specific behavior at the same time. Through the building of competency, it can aid executives or employees to find the key ability in high-performance workers that determines their highly effective performance in knowledge, skills, or behaviors [8]. In summary, this study defines competency as term that measures the required knowledge, skills, behaviors, and other basic qualities for work. Moreover, competency can assist a person in achieving high efficacy in work performance.

B. Competency Model

According to Lin [9], and Wu [10], competency model can be categorized into soft and hard competency. Spencer & Spencer [8], also proposed "The Iceberg Model" in their work. According to the content of competency, it can be divided into explicit behaviors and implicit qualities. The nature of explicit behaviors is similar to hard competency, which is easily affected by external impacts; and implicit qualities tend to be characteristics that are born within an individual [8]. Combining the characteristics above, competency model not only helps to understand the work itself, but also can be used as tools to predict behavior, performance management, staff recruiting, or work tasks, which are all related to work performance. Adhering to the vision and the goal of the organization is important while applying competency to reach desired effect.

Competency model can be designed based on the entire organization, its specific roles, functions, or work, as members in the organization have different demands and goals. It mainly can be divided into four types [11].

- 1) Core competency model: It focuses on the competency needed by the entire company, and often closely combines with the organization's vision and value, which are applicable to the staff of all classes and fields.
- 2) Functional competency model: It is established based on different functions of the enterprise and is only applicable to the staff in the same functional class. It is

not applicable to the staff in other functional class.

- 3) Role competency model: It is mainly for individuals with a special position in the organization, but irrelevant to their expertise or function (e.g., supervisor, engineer, technician, etc.).
- 4) Working competency model: It is the narrowest type of the four. It is only applicable to a single kind of work content that many staff work on.

C. The approaches of establishing a competency model

It is important to use correct method of assessing employees' competencies. If the method is inaccurate, the model might be poorly constructed. Since the competency model in health care industry is rarely established, according to the literature [12], the approaches being used include, 1) drawing from an existing model from the same or similar company; 2) developing by consultants through focus groups, surveys, or interviews to identify competencies. There are some drawbacks of using existing model because each company has its own problems or characteristic, a model might not fit to the two similar companies. If the model is poorly constructed, the competencies may not accurately link to desired results. It may waste resources developing employees' competencies that are not needed. Therefore, the health care center was willing to cooperate with the research team to build a competency model.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

A. The Introduction of the Case Center

To distinguish from other medical facilities, this hospital puts the management of the health of the general population as its main principle. With preventive medicine as its basis, this is the first high quality self-pay health care center in central Taiwan. The center provides various high quality examinations, including standard physical check up, cardiovascular check up, cancer prevention check up, high class physical check up, and "elite" level physical check up.

Since the establishment of the center, management was not effectively done. In response to the hastening changes and increasing demands of the society, the issue on human resource has become increasingly important. In order to increase the competency of the organization and to aid the recruitment, training, and performance evaluation, a competency model was developed for the general health care consultants and executive-level consultants.

B. Study Design

The purpose of the study was to construct a health care consultants' competency model. Based on the literature review, the study utilized a qualitative case study approach on data collection. Six health care consultants in the health care center were interviewed. Two were managers and four were staff. The competency dictionary issued by the Ministry of Interior was used to build the management competency and the core competency. The process was shown below (Fig 1):

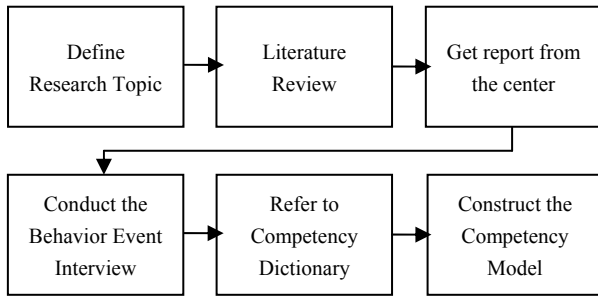


Fig. 1. Research Process

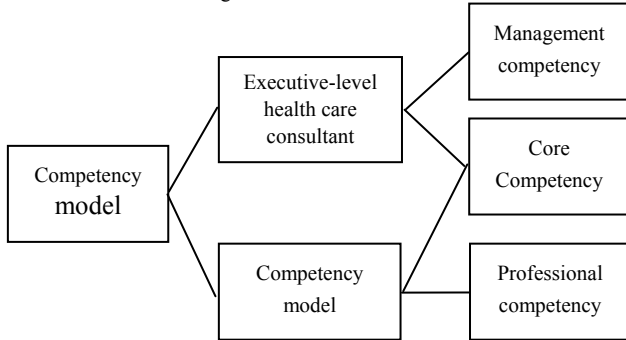


Fig. 2. Concept Map of the Competency Model

C. Data Collection

Behavioral event interview, which aims on the collection of information on past behaviors, was the major data collection method. Two executive-level managers and four health care consultants were interviewed with interview duration of one to one and half hour. The interviews were tape recorded with their agreement and were transcribed immediately after the interview. The interview questions began from the background information of a health care consultant, including the responsibilities, work experience, and etc. Then, the questions were shifted to focus on their past performance and skills that were critical to the success of this position.

D. Competency Dictionary

The Ministry of Interior issued a set of competency dictionary, providing the basis for building competency-oriented human resources development. The study consulted this competency dictionary. Then based on the brief introduction, work content, and management principle provided by the health center, the research team analyzed the interview results, built four competency items of different qualities, and listed the definition of each competencies and the behavior indicators of the health care consultants.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

According to the interview, the results showed that the competency model includes three tiers (fig 2):

- 1) Core competency: This is a description of a behavior based on the value of the organization. It is an ability that every consultant should possess.
- 2) Management competency: This is an ability that an executive-level consultant should possess, as to lead his or her staff in achieving the organization’s mission.
- 3) Professional Competency: This is the ability that a

health care consultant should possess in order to complete the usual work task.

An executive-level health care consultant should possess management competency and core competency. As for the general health care consultant, aside from core competency, professional competency was also required to effectively complete daily work task. The details of each competency were explained below.

A. Core Competency

According to the results of the behavioral event interview, the study preliminarily sorted out the roles and responsibilities of health care consultants based on the failures or successful events mentioned by each interviewee. Their roles and responsibilities were divided into four categories, which were reception, guidance, assistance, and consultation. The corresponding competencies were listed in table 1. The core competencies involved customer-oriented, problem-solving, proactive, patient, emotion management, communication, cautious, counseling skill, self-management, interpersonal relationship, computer literacy, and mandarin/Taiwanese capability. The 12 competencies could also be further divided into two dimensions: personal characteristics and interpersonal relationship.

TABLE I: ROLES, JOB RESPONSIBILITIES, AND CORE COMPETENCY FOR THE HEALTH CARE CONSULTANT

| Roles | Job Responsibilities | core competency |
|--------------|--|---|
| Reception | 1.Computer documentation and administration processing | 1. customer-oriented |
| | 2.Internal and external communication | 2. Problem-solving |
| | 3.Statement processing | 3.Mandarin/Taiwanese capability 4. Proactive |
| Guidance | 1.Explain the procedure | 1.Interpersonal relationship Mandarin/Taiwanese capability |
| | 2. Assist in customers’ health examination | 2.Emotion management |
| | 3. Provide service for other demands of the customers | 3.Problem-solving 4.Communication |
| Assistance | 1. Assist the doctor to perform panendoscopy and colonoscopy | 1.Mandarin/ Taiwanese capability |
| | 2.Clinical initial examination | 2.Interpersonal relationship |
| | | 3.Self-management 4.Customer-oriented 5.Cautious |
| Consultation | 1. confirm the report content -Comment and suggestions | 1. Self-management 2. counseling skills |
| | 2. Orally explain the checking outcomes for the customers | 3. communication 4. Patient |

Since the executive-level consultants have to lead the center and provide assistance, guidance, teaching, and influence to their subordinates, team cooperation added to be parts of their core competencies.

B. Professional competency

The staff-level consultants were the first-line practitioners and needed to be familiar with the content and the process of health care management in order to effectively provide professional assistance to their clients, therefore, professional knowledge on nursing was an indispensable ability.

C. Management competency

As for the executive-level health consultant, it was found that general management and marketing were the most important competencies. Based on the interviews, the lack of management competency was the main reason for the lack of communication and consensus in an organization. In terms of administration, enhancement of the overall work performance cannot be achieved when promoting or implementing projects if consultants lack management competency. The lack of marketing competency may cause a health center to have ineffective performance while promoting new programs. Therefore, the study results showed that management and marketing competency were the core competencies needed in the executive positions, which helped organizes human resources and enhanced the overall team performance. It was a competency gap that was seldom noticed in the past.

In summary, the competency of the health care consultants mainly includes four dimensions: personal characteristics, interpersonal relationship, management and marketing. From the four dimensions, they can be subdivided into 29 competency indicators, including 5 competencies of personal characteristics, 7 competencies of interpersonal relationship, 12 competencies of management, and 5 competencies of marketing (Table 2).

TABLE II: THE EXECUTIVE-LEVEL HEALTH CARE CONSULTANT'S COMPETENCY ITEMS

| Competency Dimensions | Competency Items |
|----------------------------|---|
| Personal Characteristics | proactive, cautious, patient, self-management, EQ management |
| Interpersonal Relationship | interpersonal relationship, teaching others, communication, team cooperation, affecting others, customer-oriented, counseling skills |
| Management Competency | priority distinguishing, position assignment, administrative management procedure, leadership, conflict management, time management, finance management, project management, quality-oriented, cost concept, strategic thinking, outcome oriented |
| Marketing Competency | market segmentation, product packaging, market opportunity identification, market penetration, promotion strategy |

The research found that professional nursing knowledge was a necessary ability for each health care consultant. Therefore, when building the competency model (Figure 3), the study regarded the professional nursing knowledge as a requisite ability, placing it as the basis of the model. Moreover, the professionalism of health care consultant is different from that of the general medical system in that it is more related to the service industry. Therefore, considering the suitability of practitioner's personality and attitude in this field, the study placed personal characteristics as the second

tier of the model. According to Ohtaki Reiji [13], the competency he emphasized was the "soft skills" of high performers. The important factors affecting the performance level mainly came from the part of "soft skills". Therefore, the study placed the interpersonal relationship on the third tier of the model. Finally, since the executive-level health consultant has to lead the whole team to reach business goals, the two hard competencies (management and marketing, which area required by learning), were regarded as the core competencies of the executive position, and were placed on top of the model.

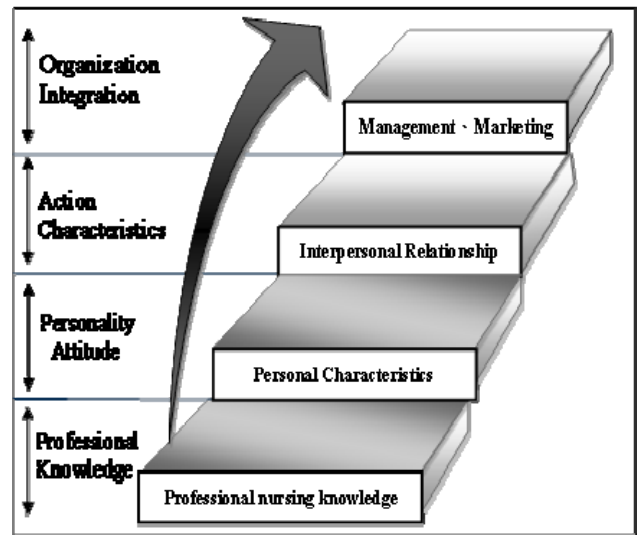


Fig. 3. Health Care Consultant's Competency Model

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to build a health care consultant's competency model. It was built the information collected from the behavioral event interviews with the executive-level and general health care consultants and the application of the competency dictionary. The competency model was consisted of professional competency, core competency, and management competency, which were the basis and reference for staff recruitment, training development, and performance appraisal.

Two suggestions are derived from the constructed competency model:

- 1) Provide guidelines for developing learning road map
The competency model is helpful in developing competency test for the health care consultants. Based on the test results, short, medium, and long term training courses suitable for all the consultants may be developed, which in turn is helpful for the consultants' career development.
- 2) Serves as a tool for talent recruitment and performance appraisal

Competency may function as an indicator for recruitment and performance appraisal. The study has shown that personality qualities such as proactive, cautious, patient, self-management, and EQ management are essential for a beneficial interpersonal relationship. Thus, it is important to utilize various types of assessments to have an in-depth understanding of the applicants. Moreover, it can be further

developed into a behavioral indicator for future basis of performance appraisal.

The details of the two suggestions could be depicted as figure 4.

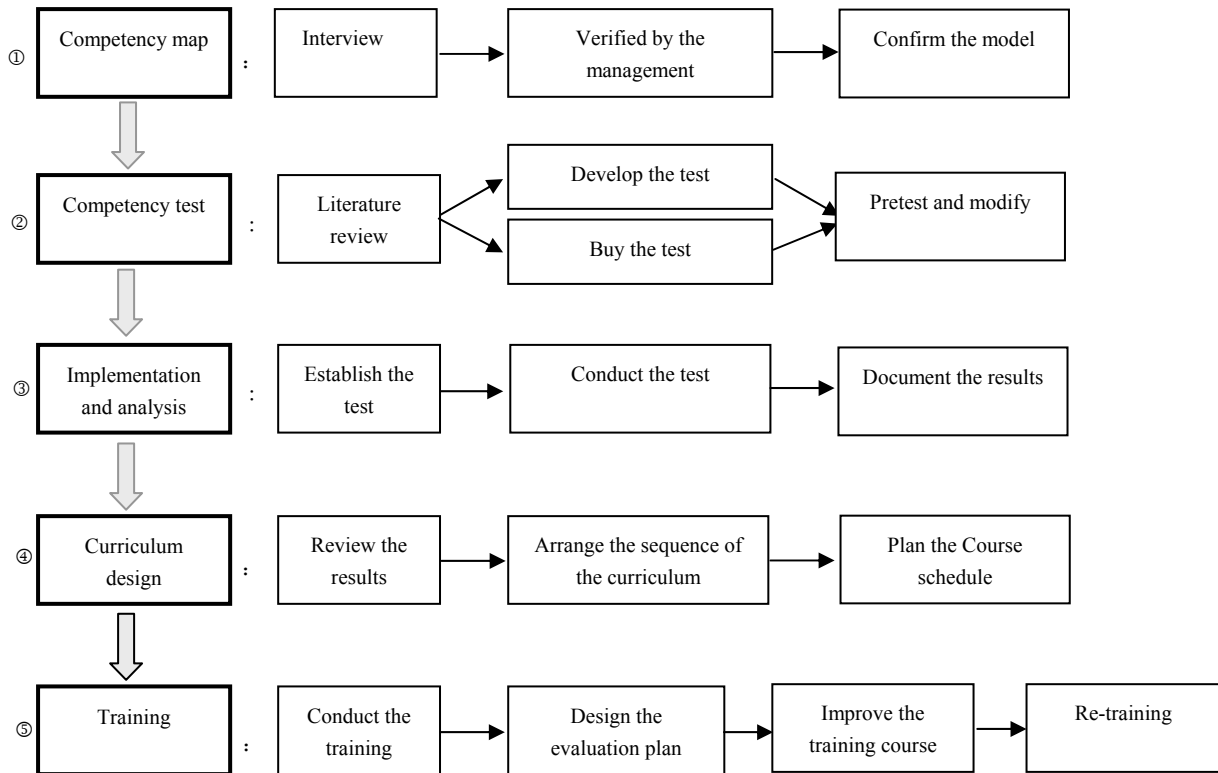


Fig. 4. The application of the competency model

I. APPENDIX

A. Demographic Background information

- 1) What is your educational background?
- 2) Currently, what are your main job responsibilities?
- 3) How many years in total have you been a health care consultant?

B. Key questions

- 1) Please tell us the most successful work experience you ever had. What made it success? Who was involved?
- 2) What was the biggest challenge you ever faced? Who was involved? Why was this incident significant to you?
- 3) What was your most frightening first—something you did for the first time that really had you worried?
- 4) In order to accomplish your job successfully, what kind of professional knowledge and competency should you possess?

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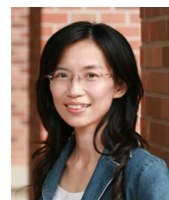
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