

Adapting the New ASTD Competency Model™ to Fit Your Needs



The 2013 ASTD Competency Model is adaptable to suit a wide range of specific organizational needs and cultural requirements.

Making Customized Decisions

Here is a checklist for making customization decisions.

- ✓ Who are the targeted users of your competency model (what are their job roles)?
- ✓ What performance level is being targeted (good or outstanding)?
- ✓ What is the time horizon for your competency model (present, future, or both)?
- ✓ Where will your competency model be used (geographical scope)?
- ✓ Why is your competency model being used (for development only, or for all uses such as recruitment, selection, appraisals, promotion, and compensation)?
- ✓ What specifics are important to reflect in your competency model (industry, national culture, etc.)?

Tailoring the Model

Here's a four-phase process to help tailor the competency model to suit your particular use or application.

Phase One—Create a Customized Occupational Competency Model

First, form a team of individuals and their supervisors who represent the targeted group you expect to use the competency model. Ideally, this group consists of good or outstanding performers.

Second, ask the team to review the ASTD Competency Model and recommend which AOE (Areas of Expertise) align with your organization's learning and development strategy, mission, and specific needs.

Third, set up a series of meetings (perhaps one per AOE) to discuss behavioral indicators (to identify which key actions the performer needs to demonstrate to achieve success). The team's job is to examine, modify, or remove any behavioral indicators that are not appropriate to your organization's culture. You should end up with a very lean, targeted list.

Fourth, using the results of step three, the team should develop a final ideal performer profile appropriate to your corporate or national culture. This final product is your customized rough draft competency list.

Note: At the end of this process, you might choose to conduct a few Behavioral Event Interviews (BEIs) to ground the rough draft in the reality of your workplace. A behavioral interview is an interview that is used to collect information about past behavior, usually in a structured and prescribed format. Excellent information about BEIs can be found in *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance* by Lyle M. Spencer and Signe M. Spencer (1993, Wiley).

Phase Two—Validate Your Rough Draft Model

The purpose of the second phase is to validate the rough draft competency list with all the targeted job incumbents, their immediate supervisors, and their stakeholders.

Now that you have a rough draft of your organization’s competencies, you can validate its conclusions and recommendations by conducting a series of focus groups, retreats, or surveys. You can also take a “multi-rater assessment approach” by asking the performer(s) in your target group(s) and their immediate supervisors if the competencies and behavioral indicators are appropriate. You might include other key stakeholders (such as C-suite executives and learners) in this assessment.

Here are some further tips on Phase Two. Before beginning the validation, develop a “cut score.” For instance, if raters are asked to review items on a five-point scale on their importance, eliminate anything receiving less than a 4.5 rating. Note: It is best to have fewer competencies and behaviors than too many because this will help users to focus. At the end of Phase Two you should have final, reviewed, and validated list.

Phase Three—Get Senior Level Approval

Once you and your team are comfortable with your final targeted list, present it (if possible) to a formal team of upper management leaders. Clearly, it is essential to secure agreement from all stakeholders that the final list is in alignment with your organization’s strategic goals and current and future business needs. It is also helpful to think about how to best communicate it. Consider creating a representative graphic that depicts the major competency areas at a high level.

Phase Four—Using the Model

Review all elements of your organization’s human resource system as they relate to training and development practitioners. Pay particular attention to how the competency model will be applied at the outset of the project.

If you’re using the competency model for career and skills development alone, then you might develop assessments to discover the strengths and weaknesses of individual training and



development practitioners. If you choose to apply the competency model more widely, then you will need to incorporate its contents into all elements of your performance management system (recruitment, selection, development, performance appraisals, and promotion).

A Few Customization Caveats

First, note that all elements of the tailoring process should be done in a way that is legally defensible. Different nations have different laws, rules, and regulations governing employment. Be sure to consult legal counsel in your locale to ensure that a particular model adaption is legally defensible.

Second, each step of the tailoring process should be the focus of a communication plan that parallels—and is as robust as—the technical plan of tailoring the competency model to a particular organization or national culture.

Third, remember that globally oriented companies may need to review the competency model in different geographical locations or regions around the world in order to localize the content. While the competencies may remain the same, different regional locales may need adjustments in required behaviors such as for use in Africa, Americas, Europe, Asia, and Oceania. Therefore, you will need to make adjustments for these differences.

Does your organization want to customize the ASTD Competency Model for its own use?

Contact competencystudy@astd.org to obtain written permission to use or license the Model.