

Occupational Competencies

OCCUPATIONAL COMPETENCIES are measurable skills, abilities, behaviors, knowledge, and personal characteristics that you need to perform work properly. Competencies are taught, developed, and evaluated and specify the “how” of performing occupational tasks.

Workplace competencies and task analysis give employees a guide for what is expected of them. They indicate what behaviors are recognized, valued, and rewarded.



Objectives:



1. Explain the importance of occupational competencies in gaining employment.
2. Describe the use of task analysis.
3. Describe occupational competency needs in gaining occupational preparation.

Key Terms:



attitude	knowledge	task analysis
employability skills	occupational	technical skills
general education	competencies	
human relations skills	skill	

Occupational Competencies Are Important in Gaining Employment

Occupational competencies are the attributes that enable an individual to perform the duties of an occupation. Competencies in an occupation tend to be similar regardless of where

the occupation is carried out. Occupational competencies can be divided into three important areas: knowledge, skill, and attitude.

THE THREE AREAS OF OCCUPATIONAL COMPETENCIES

Knowledge is the information that a person has acquired and can recall to use in performing an occupation. It is the ability to read, write, do arithmetic, communicate, and execute personal and business skills. Some individuals might say that knowledge is “stored information.”

Skill is the capacity to perform activities that typically require a high degree of development. Examples in an occupation are executing manipulative functions, doing mathematical calculations, and using a global positioning system.

Attitude is how a person feels about something. Our attitudes are kept internally but are evident by how we relate to people, perform tasks, use resources, and view work. Attitudes are demonstrated by smiles, friendliness, honesty, and productivity at work. People are said to have “good attitudes” or “bad attitudes.”

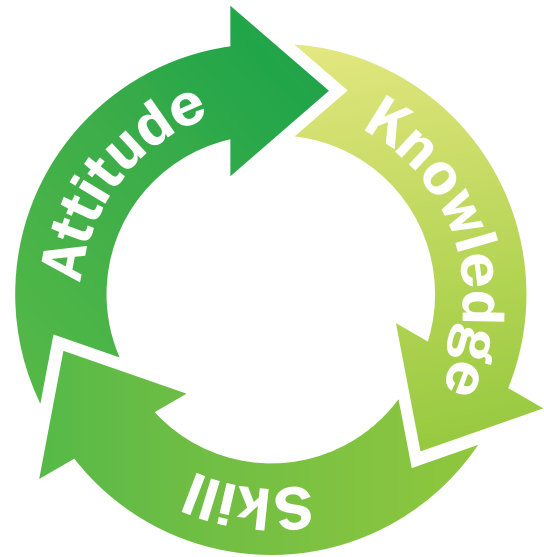


FIGURE 1. Occupational competencies can be divided into three important areas: knowledge, skill, and attitude.

ADVANTAGES OF GOOD OCCUPATIONAL COMPETENCIES

An individual who has developed occupational competencies should have the capacity to meet occupational requirements set by employers. When looking for a job, an individual with a broad range of competencies will have an advantage over a person with few competencies. An individual with competencies will require less training to be a productive employee.

Task Analysis and Its Uses

Task analysis is the process used to identify occupational competencies. Task analysis involves carefully studying what people do at work in an occupation.

The activities in an occupation are determined by observing the workers performing in the occupation, interviewing people employed in the occupation at different locations, interviewing supervisors of people employed in the occupation, and gathering information in other ways. Several sources are needed to produce an accurate task analysis, though observing even one individual can be helpful.

The units of work needed in an occupation are listed. The major units are competencies or skills. The units of work that can be clustered within a competency are sub-competencies. A competency may have two or more sub-competencies that make up the overall competency. Sub-competencies are sometimes known as tasks.

Personnel directors and other qualified people review the list of competencies and sub-competencies for an occupation and suggest improvements. People trained in vocational education development often study occupations to identify competencies. Students can do their own competency studies by observing a person at work in an occupation and making a list of what the individual does.

Task analysis provides information that is useful to determine the education and training needed to enter an occupation. Individuals use task analysis to help acquire the skills they need. Educators use task analysis to develop curriculum to prepare people to work in occupations. Employers use task analysis to design training for new employees.



DIGGING DEEPER...

UNCOVERING ADDITIONAL FACTS: Task Analysis in the Medical Field

Task analysis explores how a task is accomplished, including manual and mental activities, task duration, frequency, complexity, environmental conditions, and other unique factors required for a person to perform the specific task. Task analysis is also the process of breaking a skill into smaller, more manageable segments in order to teach the skill. When the learner masters small steps, independence is developed, along with the ability to perform the larger skill.

In time of emergency, public health officials require competencies in preparedness and response. Public health professionals are trained to assess infectious disease outbreaks in their communities, but during natural and human-caused disasters their competencies must be able to address the unexpected, such as the 9/11 event in 2001 and Hurricanes Katrina in 2005 and Isaac in 2012.

The knowledge, skill, and attitude competencies to respond to public health emergencies are part of health professionals' core preparedness and response competencies. Public health-care workers must be competent to:

1. Respond to the public health role in emergency situations and collaborate with other professions in biological, environmental, and weather emergencies
2. Cooperate within the chain of command in emergency response
3. Follow the emergency plan
4. Perform and demonstrate abilities in emergency response
5. Demonstrate correct use of communications equipment
6. Recognize one's limits in knowledge and skills and demonstrate an attitude of cooperation with others
7. Creatively solve problems and maintain flexible thinking to meet challenges

Occupational Competencies Needed to Prepare for an Occupation

The competencies needed to prepare for an occupation vary from one occupation to another. Occupations that are similar may have similar competencies. The competencies needed for an occupation may be grouped into four areas: technical skills, general education, human relations skills, and employability skills.

Technical skills are the skills specific to a particular occupation. Technical skills are those identified through task analysis and generally associated with the occupation being studied. For example, a chef needs skills that people in other occupations would not need.

General education is the preparation an individual needs that is not specific to a particular occupation. General education includes the ability to read, write, do arithmetic, and communicate. For example, a chef needs those abilities.

Human relations skills are the abilities to get along with other people. They include common courtesies that help people work and live together happily. For example, a chef works with other kitchen staff, waiters, and employees and must know how to relate to them.

Employability skills are the abilities to get and keep a job. They relate to being productive on the job. For example, a chef must be at work on time, stay on task, and follow the employer's procedures.



FIGURE 2. Target your skills to develop professional competence and expertise.

Summary:



Occupational competencies are the attributes that enable an individual to perform the duties of an occupation. Competencies in an occupation tend to be similar regardless of where the occupation is carried out. Occupational competencies include knowledge, skill, and attitude.

An employee with high competency skills can perform a job well and may require less on-the-job training. A means of measuring occupational competencies is task analysis. Task analysis provides information that is useful to determine the education and training needed to enter an occupation. Through task analysis, people learn what skills are needed to enter and perform an occupation, educators develop curriculum to prepare people to work in occupations, and employers design training for new employees.

The competencies needed to prepare for an occupation vary from one occupation to another. Occupational competencies are grouped into four areas: technical skills, general education, human relations skills, and employability skills.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Define occupational competencies.
2. What are the three areas of occupational competencies?
3. Name three advantages of having good occupational competencies.
4. What measure is used to identify occupational competencies?
5. Explain the differences between technical skills, general education, human relations skills, and employability skills.

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Task analysis is a method used to organize and prioritize jobs and information. This method can help you evaluate the skills needed to perform your summer job and to prepare class assignments. Task analysis is a tool used to categorize information as well as skills. To understand the vast uses of task analysis, see <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~stasko/6750/Talks/07-task-analysis.pdf>

Web Links:



Occupational Competency Assessment

<http://www.ed.psu.edu/educ/ppdc/occupational-competency-assessment>

A Practical Model for Identifying and Assessing Work Competencies

http://www8.esc.edu/esonline/across_esc/forumjournal.nsf/wholeshortlinks2/Work+Competencies

Task Analysis

<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/TaskAnalysis.html>