EDUCATION

Lominger Competency Guide

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Introduction: A Blueprint for Behavioural Excellence

For decades, organisations have grappled with a fundamental question: what truly separates a high-performing employee from an average one? While technical skills and cognitive abilities are undeniably important, research consistently points to another critical factor: behaviour. This is where the **Lominger Competency Guide**enters the picture. Originally developed by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger, the Lominger model provides a structured yet flexible framework for identifying, measuring, and developing the behavioural competencies that drive success in the workplace. Far more than a simple list of desirable traits, the Lominger Competency Guide has become a cornerstone of modern talent management, influencing everything from hiring decisions to leadership development programmes. In this article, we will explore the origins, architecture, practical applications, and enduring value of this influential tool, helping you understand how it can transform the way your organisation nurtures talent and achieves strategic goals.

The Origins and Evolution of the Lominger Competency Guide

From Research to Reality

The Lominger Competency Guide did not emerge from a vacuum. It was born from rigorous, empirical research conducted by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger during their tenure at the Center for Creative Leadership. Their goal was to identify the specific behaviours and characteristics that distinguished successful leaders from those who derailed. By studying thousands of managers across different industries and functions, they distilled their findings into a set of universally applicable competencies. The initial framework was published in the 1990s, and it has been refined and expanded over the years to remain relevant in a rapidly changing business environment. The word *Lominger* itself is a portmanteau of the founders' surnames, reflecting the collaborative nature of their work.

What Makes It Different?

Unlike competency models that focus narrowly on job-specific technical skills, the Lominger Competency Guide emphasises transferable, behavioural competencies. This means it looks at **how** a person accomplishes tasks, not just **what**they accomplish. For example, competencies such as "Dealing with Ambiguity," "Strategic Agility," and "Building Effective Teams" are applicable across virtually any role, from entry-level positions to the C-suite. This universality is one of the key reasons the Lominger model has been adopted by hundreds of Fortune 500 companies and public sector organisations worldwide.

Understanding the Lominger Competency Framework

The Full Set of Competencies

The Lominger Competency Guide comprises 67 distinct competencies, organised into a clear, hierarchical structure. These competencies are not arbitrary; they are observable, measurable behaviours that can be developed over time. The full set is often referred to as the **Lominger Competency Library** or the **Lominger Competency Deck**, reflecting its origins as a physical deck of cards that managers could use for quick reference and discussion. Each card in the deck describes a single competency, including its definition, a list of associated behaviours, and indicators of both proficiency and overuse.

The Seven Competency Factors

To make the framework more manageable, the 67 competencies are grouped into seven overarching factors or clusters. These factors provide a high-level view of an individual's capabilities and are particularly useful for strategic talent reviews and succession planning. The factors are:

- Strategic & Business Acumen: Competencies here include Strategic Agility, Business Acumen, Decision Quality, and Creativity. This factor measures a person's ability to think broadly, anticipate future trends, and make sound business decisions.
- Leading & Managing People: This cluster focuses on interpersonal and leadership skills. Key competencies are Building Effective Teams, Motivating Others, Developing Direct Reports, and Managing Vision and Purpose.
- Building Relationships & Collaboration: Competencies such as Interpersonal Savvy, Organisational Agility, and Building Strategic Working Relationships fall under this factor. It assesses a person's ability to connect with others, influence without authority, and work across organisational boundaries.
- Drive & Execution: This factor includes competencies related to getting things done: Drive for Results, Action Oriented, Timely Decision Making, and Perseverance. It reflects an individual's energy, focus, and ability to overcome obstacles.
- Personal & Interpersonal Skills: Competencies here speak to a person's character and self-awareness. Think of Dealt with Ambiguity, Learning on the Fly, Integrity and Trust, and Self-Knowledge. This factor is often considered the foundation of emotional intelligence.
- Cognitive & Intellectual Skills: This factor covers mental agility and problem-solving. Competencies include Intellectual Horsepower, Problem Solving, Time Management, and Written Communications.
- Technical & Functional Skills: While the Lominger model emphasises behaviour, it still recognises the importance of expertise. This factor includes functional and technical competencies such as Process Management, Managing Through Systems, and knowledge of specific domains.

How Organisations Use the Lominger Competency Guide

Recruitment and Selection

One of the most common applications of the Lominger Competency Guide is in hiring. Instead of relying solely on a candidate's resume or gut instinct, hiring managers can use the competencies to structure behavioural interviews. For example, if a role requires strong "Decision Quality," interviewers can ask candidates to describe a time they made a difficult decision with limited information. The competency framework provides a common language for evaluating candidates, reducing bias and improving the accuracy of hiring decisions. Many organisations also use the guide to define the core competencies for each role, creating a clear competency map that aligns with job descriptions.

Performance Management and Feedback

Traditional performance reviews often suffer from vague feedback like "needs to improve communication." The Lominger Competency Guide allows managers to be far more specific and constructive. Instead of general comments, a manager can say, "Your 'Written Communications' competency is strong, but I'd like to see you develop 'Presentation Skills' by practicing with a coach." This precision makes feedback more actionable and less threatening. The guide also helps employees understand exactly what behaviours are expected of them, creating a transparent and fair performance evaluation system.

Leadership Development and Succession Planning

The Lominger model is particularly powerful for developing future leaders. By assessing current leaders against the

67 competencies, organisations can identify strengths and development needs accurately. This data feeds into personalised development plans that might include targeted training, job rotations, mentoring, or stretch assignments. In succession planning, the competency guide helps identify high-potential employees who demonstrate the broad range of competencies needed for senior roles. It answers the critical question: who is ready now, and who needs further development?

Talent Reviews and Organisational Culture

During talent review meetings, the Lominger Competency Guide provides a consistent framework for discussing individuals across different departments. Instead of subjective opinions, the conversation is anchored in observable behaviours and agreed-upon competency definitions. Over time, this consistency shapes the organisational culture. When a company consistently values competencies like "Integrity and Trust" or "Innovation Management," these behaviours become embedded in the corporate DNA, attracting and retaining employees who align with those values.

The Role of the Lominger Competency Guide in Talent Management

Creating a Common Language

One of the greatest challenges in talent management is the lack of a shared vocabulary. A manager in marketing might describe a candidate as "sharp," while a manager in finance says they are "analytical," yet both may be referring to the same underlying competency of "Problem Solving." The Lominger Competency Guide solves this problem by offering a standardised, well-defined lexicon. This common language facilitates more productive discussions across teams, departments, and even geographical boundaries. It ensures that everyone is talking about the same thing when they discuss performance, potential, and development needs.

Integrating with Other HR Systems

The Lominger model does not exist in isolation. It integrates seamlessly with other human resource systems, including 360-degree feedback tools, learning management systems, and performance appraisal software. Many organisations map their internal job grades and role profiles directly to the Lominger competencies. This integration creates a cohesive talent management ecosystem where data flows smoothly from recruitment to development to succession planning. For instance, a 360-degree feedback assessment based on Lominger competencies can identify a specific gap in "Strategic Agility," which then triggers a recommendation for a targeted online course on strategic thinking. This connectivity saves time and ensures that development efforts are directly linked to business needs.

Implementing the Lominger Competency Guide in Your Organisation

Getting Started: Assess Your Needs

Before diving into the full 67-competency library, it is wise to define your organisation's specific objectives. Are you primarily trying to improve hiring decisions? Develop a leadership pipeline? Transform your performance management system? Your goals will determine which competencies to prioritise. Most organisations start with a core set of 8 to 12 competencies that are most critical to their strategy and culture. For example, a technology startup might prioritise "Innovation Management" and "Dealing with Ambiguity," while a manufacturing firm might focus on "Process Management" and "Drive for Results."

Tailoring the Framework

While the Lominger Competency Guide is designed to be universal, it is also highly adaptable. You can customise

the competency definitions, add a few organisation-specific competencies, or weight certain competencies more heavily than others for particular roles. The key is to maintain the integrity of the original model while ensuring it fits your unique context. Avoid the temptation to reinvent the wheel; the power of the Lominger model lies in its research-based validity, and significant alterations can undermine its effectiveness. Many practitioners find that using the framework "off the shelf" with minor modifications yields the best results.

Training and Calibration

Implementing a competency model requires more than just distributing a document. Managers and HR professionals need training on how to use the competencies effectively in interviews, feedback sessions, and talent reviews. Calibration sessions are also critical to ensure consistency. In these sessions, managers discuss specific examples of employee behaviour and align on which competency level is demonstrated. Without calibration, the same behaviour might be rated as "Developing" by one manager and "Expert" by another, defeating the purpose of standardisation. Investing in this training upfront pays enormous dividends in the quality of your talent decisions.

Technology and Tools

Fortunately, you do not need to build everything from scratch. Many software platforms offer built-in Lominger competency libraries, including the full set of definitions, behavioural indicators, and proficiency scales. These tools can automate the process of mapping competencies to roles, integrating with assessments, and generating reports. If you are a small or medium-sized organisation, even a simple spreadsheet or an internal wiki can work effectively as a starting point. The most important thing is to start using the framework consistently, even in a basic form, and then scale up as your comfort and experience grow.

Benefits and Limitations of the Lominger Competency Guide

Key Benefits

- Evidence-Based: The competencies are derived from decades of research on managerial success, not from theory alone.
- Comprehensive yet Flexible: With 67 competencies, it covers almost all relevant behaviours, yet it can be tailored to specific contexts.
- Actionable: Because competencies are defined in behavioural terms, they provide clear guidance for development and evaluation.
- Universal Language: It fosters alignment across an organisation, reducing ambiguity in talent discussions.
- Proven Track Record: Used by thousands of organisations globally, the model has a strong track record of delivering results when implemented properly.

Limitations and Considerations

- Complexity: The full model with 67 competencies can be overwhelming if not implemented thoughtfully. Starting small is essential.
- Time Investment: Training managers and calibrating assessments requires a significant upfront time commitment.
- Risk of Mechanistic Use: If used too rigidly, the model can reduce human performance to a checklist, missing the nuance of context and culture.
- Not a Silver Bullet: The Lominger Competency Guide is a powerful tool, but it must be complemented by strong leadership, clear strategy, and a supportive organisational culture. It is not a substitute for good management.

Conclusion: A Foundation for Sustainable Talent

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