

## What Does it Take to Develop a Competency Program?

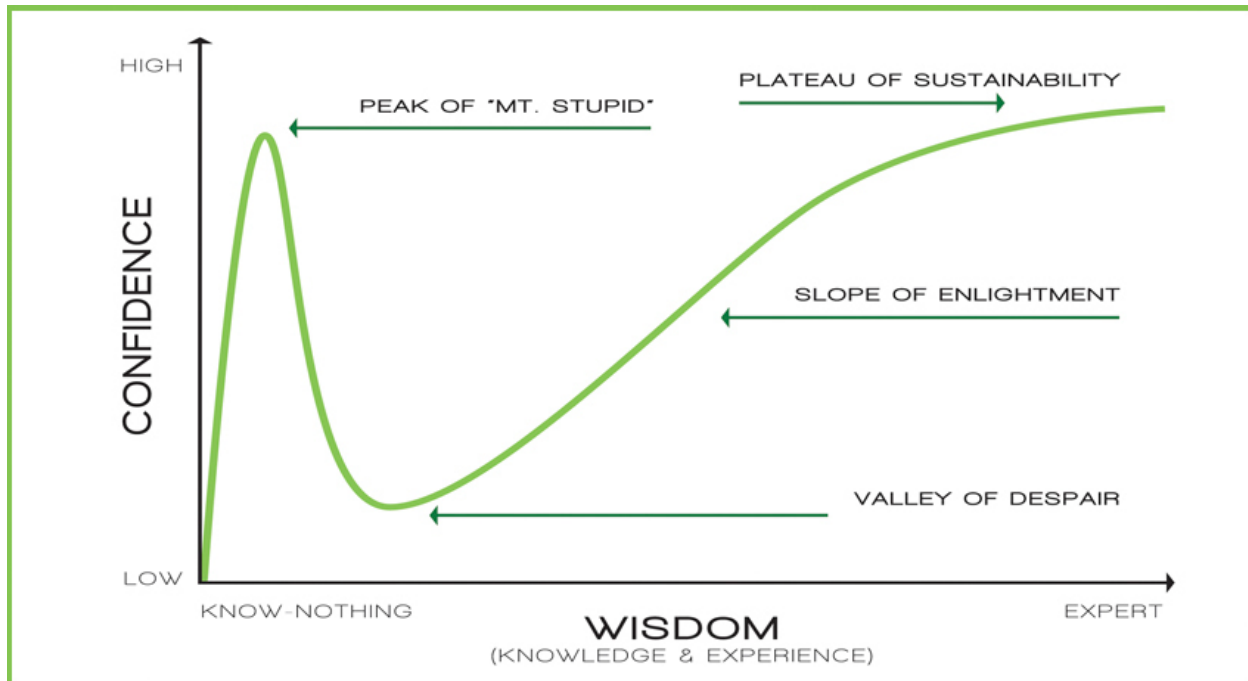


Figure 1. Dunning Kruger Effect (1999)

Glad to see you're press onward! So, in the second of our three articles, we'll focus this article on understand how a competency management system works, and the advantages of having a CMS program to develop the skills of a new and emerging workforce here in the US.

Have you ever started a new job, and then wondered if you can actually do the job? It's been said, "You don't know what you don't know."

David Dunning and Justin Kruger studied the journey of learning new skills and mastering knowledge and understanding, recorded in [The Dunning-Kruger Effect](#). They observe a person's naive illusion of competence when first learning something new (Figure 1). Dunning-Kruger emphasize that trying something for the first time comes with a false sense of confidence and without optimism, people may give up before they even try. Over time, with some gained self-awareness in their work experiences, people realize how much learning is required and gradually persevere to press on to their goals.

For the first time in America, the next generation is entering frontline jobs (think blue-collar) with little to no one to coach them due to the accelerated retirements of those with decades of experience. Consequently, the new workers don't fully understand what's required to achieve high level competency in their new role.

Many companies rely heavily on their older, long term frontline employees to pass on their practical *tribal knowledge* to the next generation of workers, but as these senior workers retire or leave, company's aren't making changes to address the information gap. As a result, Deloitte [reports](#) the next generation workforce turnover rate is between 18-24 months.

Over 30 years ago, a majority of first world industrialized nations moved to competency management for their frontline job roles to ensure new employees developed the required skillset needed for their role. In this article, we'll review the core components needed for a

competency program and how these programs can improve and become a game-changer in your operations.

### What is a Competency Program?

A competency program provides objective means to verify a person's knowledge and understanding, as well as their ability to perform the job. Since all frontline jobs have associated safety requirements, after thorough training, employees are not only assessed on technical skills, but also on safety standards.

### What are the Core Components of a Successful Competency Program?

#### *What You Need To Know (Knowledge)*

All companies have some type of training matrix that defines what employees need to learn relevant to their jobs, be it safety or technical. The importance of a structured safety and technical training program cannot be overstated. When a competency program is implemented, the training program must be aligned with the defined skills to ensure the correct knowledge transfer is taking place. This will allow the Qualified Assessor to assess accurately against the pre-define skills requirements.

#### *Practice Getting Your Hands Dirty (Experience)*

We can be taught information, but when we're in a situation that requires expertise, the only thing that can get us through that moment is *experience*.

Remember taking the driver's license test and being asked what should be done if the vehicle hydroplaned? At the time of the test, most of us probably didn't have any experience in what it felt like to hydroplane. Not until we experienced hydroplaning did we get to apply the information we were taught: don't panic, steer into the skid, and slowly pump the brakes until regaining traction.

Like the diagram in Figure 2, experts say that after required knowledge is taught, hands on experiences help our brain correlate *what* we know with *how* to do it, or in other words, gaining *competency* or *skill*.

#### *Having The Required Proficiency Needed (Skill)*

When an employee is armed with the right knowledge and hands on experiences, they need to consistently and repeatedly demonstrate their skillset, which proves their ability or skill in a given job or task.

Company standards, procedures, or guideline documents are usually clear and simply written documents that define rules, responsibilities, and processes. These documents are used as measurables for instruction, but also for assessments.

Within a competency program, a new employee is given a competency standard that defines:

- A profile with the core and essential competencies required for the role.
- Elements of each competency are then broken down into simple requirements.

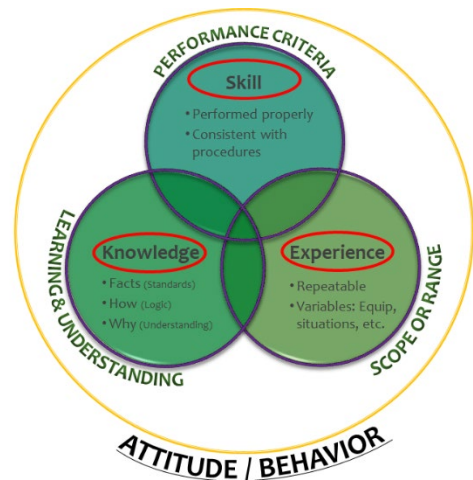


Figure 2. Components of a Competency Model

- Training is aligned as required to transfer knowledge to help develop the expected skills over time.

A competency standard for a specific job role is broken into learning units, with each unit containing required elements of competency proficiency.

Think of it like learning American history. The high-level learning unit would be *American History* while the sublevel elements of competency proficiency would be *Colonial Settlements*, *American Revolution*, *Birth of a New Nation*, etc.

In a competency program, the competency standard for each role maps out a requisite level of proficiency for job duties and responsibilities (in technical lingo: *Level 3 – Skilled*). The competency standard also lists key documents for essential reading to learn more about a topic and suggests tactile examples an employee could provide to the assessor to demonstrate relevant competency.

Competency programs can be a game-changer when it comes to the safety of your organization. They can help employees get informed faster, but they can also identify the gaps in your current training programs. In the end, they allow you to rest easier at night knowing your employees are following the company's expectations for safe and reliable operations.

### **How Does A Competency Program Actually Work?**

Every competency program needs individuals who understand how competency programs actually work. When it comes to a Competency Management System (CMS) for your frontline, the simpler and more practical it is, the better. There is a right and wrong way to roll out a CMS to a frontline. It will either gain engagement or face total failure, as the frontline may see it as slowing down work.

One key to a competency program is the Qualified Assessor. They are trained and know how to conduct a legal performance workplace assessment against the competency standard to determine if an employee can demonstrate competency or if there are skills gaps that need addressing. The final article in this series will give a detailed description of a Qualified Assessor in a frontline competency program.

It's also important to have a CMS enterprise software tool to help manage your training and competency program. The world is full of Learning Management Systems (LMS) software tools, but it is hard to find off-the-shelf Competency Management System software tools. Picking the right one is critical. The good news is there's not many to select from. Find a CMS package that:

- Handles all your training requirements.
- Allows you to upload and manage the assessment data created by your assessors.
- Helps you to categorize employees who need a stronger skillset and those who have clear and demonstrated skillset already, ready for promotion.

Since you've made it this far, be on the lookout for our third and final article, *What Is The Key To Assuring The Skillset Of Your Frontline Workforce*, to find out how a company can assure continued skillset with their frontline workforce.

Is it time to add a competency program to your organization and improve the frontline culture of your operations? [Shea Capability & Compliance Solutions](#) and [Shea Writing & Training Solutions](#) have the solutions you may need to help you improve your frontline. Browse our sites and if we can help add value to your bottom line, give us a call.