



**Shifting From  
Competencies  
to Critical Success  
Factors**

By Julie Caspar  
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Step one of the *7 Steps Recruitment and Selection* model found in *7 Steps to Increasing Your Hiring Success Ratio* is **Paint the Portrait**. This first step is all about designing and defining the job so that internal managers and external candidates will be able to adequately envision the overall purpose or objective of the job along with what it will take to meet that objective.



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Designing and developing jobs so business needs are adequately met calls for the job developer to have a good grasp of:

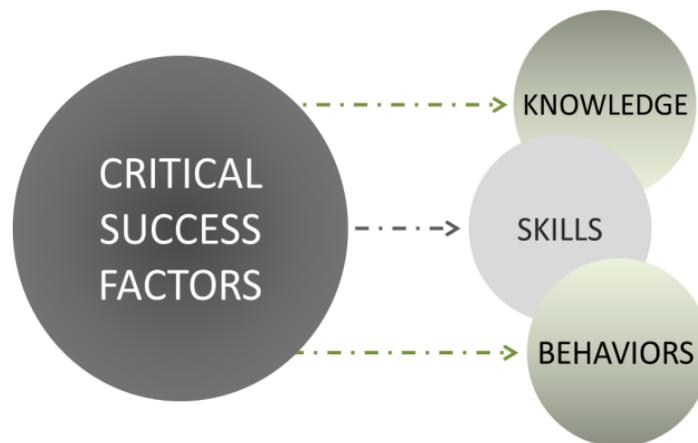
1. The business;
2. Where gaps lie;
3. Sensibly grouping duties to fill the gaps; *and*
4. The capabilities required to successfully execute job duties

Capability can be broken down into three main elements: knowledge, skills and behavior. These capability elements are depicted on job descriptions as requirements in the form of education and experience (knowledge) and competencies (skills and behaviors).

Using competencies as a basis for recruitment and selection has been a trend adopted by many U.S. organizations for a number of years. Job competencies are identified during job analysis; incorporating input from team members, job stakeholders and the manager. Holding a competencies discussion among these parties is effective in better pinpointing the most critical job competencies.

Along with accountabilities, education and experience, competencies are among the most important aspects of job design considerations. “7 Steps” urges a paradigm shift regarding how we think about knowledge, skills and behaviors. The thinking, “competencies are good to have”, now shifts to, “Critical Success Factors are vital to have”. Highlighting job requirements with Critical Success Factors magnifies focus; driving home the critical nature of these essential elements for job achievement.

Critical Success Factors become the foundation of your recruitment and selection strategy and combine the following elements:



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The selection of CSFs requires clear definitions developed with joint consensus among the parties responsible for the job's design. The benefits of establishing Critical Success Factors include:

- Creating understanding among interested parties of what it takes to “get the job done”
- Providing clear direction and focus for interviewers
- Producing a game plan that keeps interviewers focused on the same criteria

Critical Success Factors will vary by: (1) the type of job, (2) function or discipline, (3) the job's overall objective or purpose, and (4) the nature of appointed responsibilities and accountabilities.

In addition to the knowledge component (education and experience), multiple critical success factors may be applied to one job. Only factors of the utmost criticality should be chosen, typically no more than five per category. Any more than ten factors total in addition to the education and experience requirements will create a candidate profile difficult to fill. Managers need to be realistic in finalizing the Critical Success Factor list. Partnering with Human Resources, your manager, your team members and job stakeholders will help to provide additional insight.

Keep in mind that: (a) aspects of different CSFs overlap so select the factors that best apply to the job; and (b) revising the list a few times may be necessary until it is “right”. A valuable and useful tool for managers in identifying critical success factors is a CSF Glossary. Glossaries enable managers to have access to a pre-determined approved list aligned with the organization's jobs. CSF glossaries help to ensure consistent definition of different factors, saves time, and eases the identification of CSFs for the manager. Electronic glossaries may also be easily updated as new jobs are created or role transitions take place.

In addition to implementing a Critical Success Factor glossary, some organizations may use additional resources including consultants, assessment tools and on-line competency libraries.

Doing something as simple as changing the language from competencies to Critical Success Factors is one way to shift perception and impress upon managers the critical nature of these

factors for hiring success. Critical Success Factors keeps selection focus on the criteria for all involved; a formula that will increase the probability of finding the right person for the right job the first time.

More information on Critical Success Factors and other successful recruitment and selection practices can be found in *7 Steps to Increasing Your Hiring Success Ratio* available on Amazon.com.

### **Sources**

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