

Preeta Nayak:

Hello, I'm Preeta Nayak, a partner at The Bridgespan Group, a nonprofit organization that works to strengthen other nonprofits through research, advising, and capacity building. You're receiving this video because your organization is participating in a program with The Bridgespan Group called Investing in Future Leaders, and the team participating is eager to get your input. Thank you for taking the time to listen.

The focus of the program is to strengthen leadership development at your organization by piloting new processes and practices designed to promote equity and support individual growth. It's focused on questions like: How can you grow in a way that helps you in your job and helps you reach your longer term career goals? How can your supervisor support you in making growth happen? One tool that organizations have used for developing people is competencies. A competency is a skill or capability needed to perform a job well. It's visible as specific workplace behavior that can be observed, measured, supported, and developed. Competencies are important because they establish clear criteria for development and build shared expectations for success. Let's take a look at one competency as an example: critical thinking.

Here, the competency of critical thinking is defined as "consistently identifies, gathers and applies relevant information to their work." While this overall definition is helpful, it doesn't describe what it looks like to improve this skill. That's why it's helpful to have what we call a scaled definition. The aim of a scaled definition is to create shared language around development of a given competency. A well-written scaled definition is objective and it clarifies what improvement looks like. It avoids reinforcing norms of the in-group that aren't actually critical to success, and instead it focuses on what's essential. Having a common set of competencies and scaled definitions gives you a shared language to draw upon. It makes it clear what your organization values.

Now, there are two types of competencies we've found to be helpful in building the shared language: core competencies and leadership competencies. We define core competencies as those needed by everyone in the organization, regardless of their role. Examples of core competencies include collaboration, initiative, and equity mindset. We've defined leadership competencies as those that are especially needed by people in positions of greater leadership, that might include roles involving managing people or overseeing complex functions. This doesn't mean that you need a formal leadership role or title to build leadership competencies, but they're likely to be critical for individuals in those roles. Some examples of leadership competencies might include team building, decision-making, and change management.

Competencies selected solely by a leadership team are more likely to reflect the norms or biases of that group and, however unintentionally, to promote inequity. The leadership team is asking for your input on the draft list because they want the organization's approach to reflect the needs and experiences of those beyond their team. The email you received should include specific instructions on how to provide input. Now, if you don't feel you're able to candidly share input for any reason, we encourage you to reach out to someone you trust within the organization, someone who could convey your feedback anonymously. Your leadership team will discuss this feedback in the coming weeks and circle back on how feedback was incorporated. Thank you in advance for your time and investment in this process.