

# PDP Communiqué

## Competency-Based Training— Always Effective, Always Relevant

Eugene J. Monaco, Executive Director and Public Service Professor  
Professional Development Program

As employers and employees alike continued to seek the shortest routes to the greatest results in the least time, technology-delivered training held great promise. Yet, technology delivered training turned out disappointing in too many scenarios. Technology was only a delivery path—the means to the outcome. Actually achieving the outcome of greater productivity through the acquisition of useful skills and knowledge required more than state-of-the-art technology platforms. Delivering learning by the quickest means has not guaranteed that the results would be useful or applicable. As this awareness became clear, Competency-Based Training (CBT), which originated in the academic environment in the 1980s, began making a comeback. This renewed interest in CBT has gained traction in both corporate and government training.

CBT, with its emphasis on learning defined by the acquisition of specific competencies, relies on measurable assessments that emphasize outcomes. In the CBT model, what a person does as the result of training becomes the focus rather than the process of training. CBT measures the individual's performance to specific standards rather than the individual's achievements relative to others in the group of trainees. The advantages of the CBT model include flexible delivery, self-paced methodologies, performance orientation, recognition of prior learning, and criterion-referencing rather than norm-referencing. In effect, CBT leads to consistency in performance standards, leading to the certification of trainees who have met the standards of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be effective workers.

PDP has consistently designed its training curricula after the CBT model, starting in 1997 when it adopted the Instructional System Design (ISD) model developed by Ruth Clark, to the present day. Although this competency-based ISD model is time-consuming, we strongly support it over other approaches because it is comprehensive and produces the desired performance-based outcomes. A number of

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A Newsletter from the  
**Professional  
Development Program,  
Rockefeller College**



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"PDP has developed a number of trainings that are performance-based and designed to develop the competencies necessary for the tasks that workers must proficiently perform in their jobs."

— Eugene Monaco

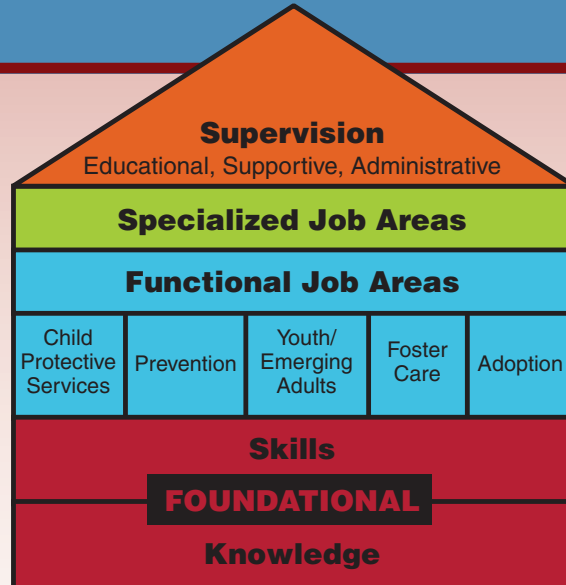
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# Competency-Based Workforce Development: A Promising Approach to Aligning Child Welfare Practice

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Professional Development Program

High performing caseworkers and supervisors are key to building an effective child welfare system, yet few entering the field have all of the competencies needed for the challenging work ahead. Additionally, those who have been in the field for years continually have more to learn due to emerging policies and best practices. Further complicating this workforce development challenge are high staff turnover, burnout, and large caseloads for child welfare workers. Recognizing these challenges, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) formed a workgroup to design a child welfare competency-based workforce development model.

A competency-based model enables workforce alignment by providing a common framework and language for the entire workforce development cycle from recruitment and onboarding to performance management, career development, and succession planning. Competencies are designed by clustering the core knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) needed to effectively perform a task. Competencies link behaviors to outcomes and individual professional growth to organizational growth.



**NYS OCFS Core Competencies**

The workgroup developed a tri-level child welfare competency model built from core competencies, foundational competencies, and functional competencies. The core competencies are directly pulled from the 2015 OCFS Child Welfare Practice Model to establish a consistent and recognizable approach to child welfare practice across New York State. Each of these core competencies (or domains) have been broken down into functional competencies. The functional competencies are based on the KSAs of a particular job area within child welfare. Each competency is linked to one or more measurable performance outcomes. The next step is to support these performance outcomes by identifying associated training objectives and developing training programs.

The workgroup discovered several best-practices for competency-based workforce development, including these five highlights:

1. **Workforce development strategies should target competencies, not courses.**

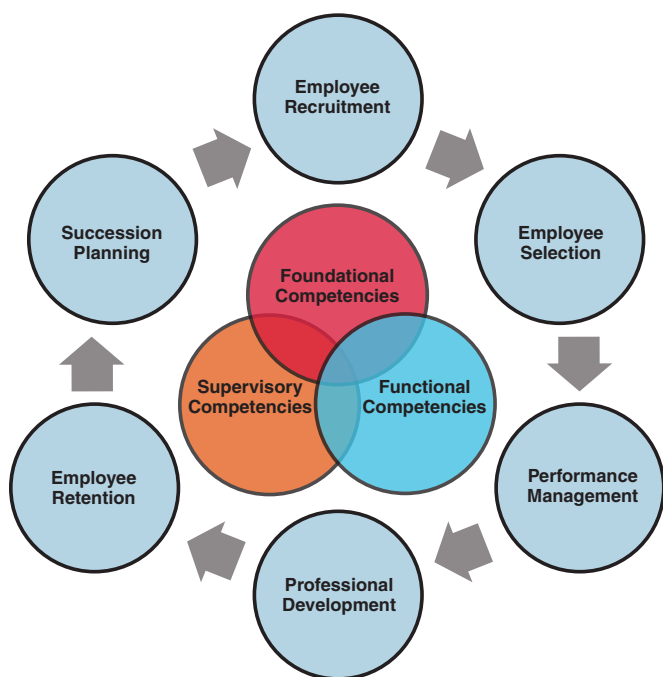
By targeting and communicating critical skills clearly, workers can control their own professional development and create a method that works best for them.

2. **Competency modeling is most successful when engaging employees' intrinsic motivation to learn.**

Employees control their own path to competency and proficiency when learning is interactive and relevant.

3. **Competency relies on the proper alignment of organizational goals and competencies throughout the workforce development cycle.**

Competency should be included in each stage of the workforce development cycle.



Did You Know?

## Competency-Based Education Trends



The generic (transversal) competencies most often developed are effective communication, critical thinking, lifelong learning, cultural knowledge, problem solving, global perspective, ethics, decision making, diversity, team work, and technology literacy.



Assessment methods include standard tests, assignment grades, observation of learner behavior, student self-assessment, and pass or not pass grades.



Competencies are taught in two forms: in specific courses and embedded in the curriculum.



Teaching methods are focused on experiential learning.



A majority of organizations offer online learning in addition to traditional format.



75% of children entering elementary school will have jobs that do not even exist today.



Labor environments will become multicultural due to globalization and multigenerational, with up to four generations working together.

## Developing a Performance and Competency-Based Training: HOPTI

David Pinkowski, Training Program Coordinator  
Professional Development Program

In October 2016, the Professional Development Program (PDP) piloted the five day Hearing Officer Procedural Training Institute (HOPTI) to representatives and subject-matter experts from PDP, OTDA Training and Staff Development, and the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). HOPTI is a performance and competency-based training that relies on adult learning principles to prepare OAH Hearing Officers to conduct administrative hearings involving issues related to publicly funded benefits. The delivery marked a major milestone in the instructional design process of a program that was first envisioned in 2014.

An effective training is grounded in the tasks that a worker needs to perform on a daily basis. To uncover those tasks, the HOPTI development team started the instructional design process by meeting with subject-matter experts to conduct a needs assessment and task analysis. This early design stage focused on identifying training needs, identifying the basic job tasks for which Hearing Officers require proficiency, and determining the training emphasis for each job task.

The next step, composing the design plan, involved organizing the information gathered into manageable “chunks,” translating those chunks into units and lessons, and composing actionable objectives for each unit and lesson. The HOPTI design plan outlined six core units, each broken into smaller, manageable lessons, which encompassed Hearing Officer job tasks. It also contained actionable and specific objectives that detailed exactly what the trainee would be able to do after each unit and lesson. These objectives framed learning expectations and provided a measure that, when met, assured that learning occurred.

The curriculum was composed during the development phase of the instructional design process. A well-designed curriculum “spirals” learning by asking participants to reuse previously learned skills to perform new and increasingly complex tasks. In HOPTI, each unit focused on a specific part of conducting a hearing and explained how that skill related to the earlier parts of the hearing process. The HOPTI culminated with a mock hearing, an activity that brought together all of the individual skills practiced throughout the week to simulate the Hearing Officers’ work environment.

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# PDP Coordinates Competency-Based Executive Leadership Program

**Jim Bonville, Manager  
Professional Development Program**

Competency-based trainings are commonly understood to focus on the transfer of concrete skills. However, programs focused on the less prescriptive skills associated with leadership can be competency based as well. The Professional Development Program (PDP) joined forces with NYS Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) and Rockefeller College, Public Policy and Administration to develop and deliver a year-long program to high-level NYS executives based on the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs). According to OPM, these ECQs "define the competencies needed to build a federal corporate culture that drives for results, serves customers, and builds successful teams and coalitions within and outside the organization. The ECQs were designed to assess executive experience and potential—not technical expertise."<sup>1</sup> Federal employees must exhibit a required level of mastery within the ECQs before they can be considered for Senior Executive Service.

The OPM ECQs are:

- Leading Change
- Leading People
- Results Driven
- Business Acumen
- Building Coalitions

The ECQs established by OPM in 1997 and revalidated and reissued in 2006 were developed through extensive research on attributes of successful executives in both the private and public sector.<sup>2</sup> They will serve as the foundational framework for the New York State Leadership Institute's executive leadership program.

NYS GOER identified a need for training that will equip state government leaders with the knowledge and competencies needed to transform New York State government. Building on GOER's vision, PDP proposed a collaboration with Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, State University of New York at Albany. Rockefeller College offers a team of experts and master practitioners well-versed and experienced in providing continuing professional development to government executives.

Rockefeller College is consistently one of the highest ranking Public Affairs colleges in the nation and is embedded in a multitude of governmental affairs. The Rockefeller faculty designated for this project will seamlessly pull together academic and practical expertise to meet the specific objectives of the program and develop the necessary competencies within the Executive Leadership Program's participants. This approach will ensure continuity between training sessions as future program deliveries are likely to be delivered.

A project-oriented component was added as an important part of the program's 15 training days to help ensure the transfer of theory-based academic content to practical application in state government operations. An additional goal of the team-based project was to encourage participants to stretch out of their comfort zone, and facilitate the transition from competence to mastery in each of the five ECQs.

GOER, Rockefeller College, and PDP kicked off the program in late February at University Hall on the SUNY Albany campus and it will run through December 2017. **PDP**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/senior-executive-service/executive-core-qualifications/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/senior-executive-service/reference-materials/guidetosomesquals\\_2012.pdf](http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/senior-executive-service/reference-materials/guidetosomesquals_2012.pdf)

The mission of the Professional Development Program is to make a difference in a changing world by linking the learning, applied research, and evaluation resources of the University with the continuing professional education needs of public service employees. One of the ways this is accomplished is through contributions to conferences for professional associations. In the past year, PDP staff presented at numerous conferences helping to link practice to industry knowledge.



**JESSICA BASHAW** from the Department of Temporary Assistance Training presented *Just-in-Time Training: Delivering the Goods* at the November 2016 Continuing Education Association of New York (CEANY) Conference.

**DEANNA COOPER** and **DIANE HODURSKI-FOLEY** from the Department of Temporary Assistance Training presented *Implementing Large-scale Workforce Training with Webinars* at the November 2016 Continuing Education Association of New York (CEANY) Conference.

**SUSAN GIERYIC, FAZANA SALEEM-ISMAIL,** and **ARINKA ABAD** from the Evaluation Unit presented *Traveling the Evaluation Highway: Using Data to Map the Way* at the November 2016 Continuing Education Association of New York (CEANY) Conference.

**MAUREEN GODWIN** from the Department of Computer Training Services co-presented *The "Hows" of OCFS Child Welfare Processing Systems* at the January 2017 New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) 148th Annual Winter Conference.

**PENNY KURTZ** and **ERICA HUNTER** from the Instructional Technologies Unit presented *Concrete Strategies for Building Interactive Courses* at the 2016 Lectora User Conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

#### Competency-Based Training: Always Effective, Always Relevant

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PDP's government training programs have incorporated this approach for their design, including courses such as *Hearing Officers Procedural Training Institute*, *Institute for Temporary Assistance Programs*, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Training Institute*, *Employment Services Training Institute*, *Welfare Fraud Investigators Training Institute*, and the *Advanced Audit Institute*.

PDP has developed a number of trainings that are performance-based and designed to develop the competencies necessary for the tasks that workers must proficiently perform in their jobs. By using a competency-based training model, PDP has enabled our government and private sector contractors to provide training programs that produce high-performing employees. **PDP**



*Eugene Monaco*

#### Competency-Based Workforce Development: A Promising Approach to Aligning Child Welfare Practice

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#### 4. **Once competencies are defined, evaluations are needed to quantify employees' KSAs.**

Stuart Dreyfus's Model of Adult Skill Acquisition assists in assessing a workforce's competency by placing skill acquisition on a continuum with five stages: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competent, Proficient, and Expert.

#### 5. **Most competency programs begin with thinking about the novice worker and the onboarding process; however, competency programs should consider the entire workforce.**

In addition, proficient and expert workers can be engaged to teach, mentor, and coach novice and advanced beginners.

The challenge of recruiting and retaining competent child welfare workers is not new and is not likely to end here. However, a competency-based workforce development model will provide alignment and clarity to the ever-changing environment of child welfare. In the end, the goal is to synergize the child welfare system and its dedicated, courageous workers. **PDP**

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## Editor Moving On

In November 2016, Deanna Cooper, editor of the *PDP Communiqué* for the past five years, left PDP to become the Director of Adult Education at Questar III BOCES, Castleton-On-Hudson, New York. We greatly appreciated Deanna's ongoing dedication and service in keeping the *Communiqué* a top-quality publication and wish her well in her new position.

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### Developing a Performance and Competency-Based Training: HOPTI

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The final stages of instructional design are evaluation and revision. As part of the pilot process, HOPTI participants completed level 1 evaluations that focused on initial participant reactions regarding difficulty, pacing of delivery, and overall impressions. PDP also collected Open Comment sheets to provide subject-matter experts the opportunity to provide more specific insights into the curriculum and delivery. These comment are assisting a round of revisions to the program currently in process. Also, as part of the ongoing process of evaluation and revision, future participants will be provided with level 2 evaluations (a pre-test and post-test) to determine learning gains and identify areas in need of improvement.

Many of us have first-hand experience in a lecture-based classroom. The instructor acts as a "sage on the stage" while the learners are expected to take notes in preparation for a written test. Performance and competency-based trainings effectively challenge this paradigm by centering learning on the learners and the hands-on completion of the specific tasks necessary to perform their jobs. **PDP**