

Competency management at the Dutch Probation Service

Every day, the Dutch Probation Service focuses on the behavior of offenders and accused persons. That in turn demands a critical look at the Service's own behavior.

This behavior needs to become transparent and be developed further.

On the basis of that consideration, in 2006, the Dutch Probation Service introduced competency management.

COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT AT THE DUTCH PROBATION SERVICE TARGETS TWO CORNERSTONES:

- On the one side, strategic control: what do we want our employees to do in the various positions, and what do we want them to be responsible for?
- On the other side, competency management is a development instrument. Employees who know what their responsibilities are and how they should perform their tasks, also know what they are good at and what needs to be improved.

Competency management is a smart way of talking with each other about behavior. Not just the what of a position is important, but also the how. It comes in useful in recruitment and selection, and in performance and assessment interviews.

THE OBJECTIVE OF INTRODUCING COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT READS AS FOLLOWS:

- Employees know what their contribution is to the mission and vision of the Dutch Probation Service.
- Employees know what the Dutch Probation Service considers and expects successful behavior to be, and act in accordance with this.
- Employees take up their own responsibility for their professional development; their manager facilitates, supports and supervises.
- Managers systematically and consistently take into account the results and competencies of their employees.
- Managers are able to set out clearly which type of behavior they expect of their employees.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT:

- Phased introduction. With an eye to setting an example, this starts with the board and management.
- Direct involvement of staff from all positions when drafting competency profiles.
- Practical feasibility: adaptation and use of a restricted number of human resource instruments.
- Competency profiles and instruments are developed, implemented and used simultaneously. Sufficient financial resources and capacity. Clear communication strategy for the various project phases.
- Competency management as a 'tool of management'. Visible support from the board.
- Human resource instruments must be developed so that they strengthen the development of personal qualities and, through that, the performance of the organization.
- Realistic planning, satisfactory prioritization, reasonable expectations and speed.
- Commitment from the Employees Council and sufficient support within the organization.
- Good consultation with the Employees Council on purpose, approach and progress.

CONCEPTS IN THE COMPETENCY PROFILE:

- Competencies: personal qualities in terms of behavioral skills that employees must have in order to perform their tasks successfully.
- Competency profile: description of behavioral skills that are crucial to the successful performance of the tasks related to a position.

- Essential situation: situation in which certain behavioral skills are of overriding importance for proving what one is worth in the position.
- Result areas: products and services supplied to (internal and external) customers.

THE APPROACH:

For each position, rounds of discussions are held with job holders and their managers to find out which competencies are of key importance. A controllable number of competencies (no more than eight) is sought for each position.

The competency profile concept is evaluated by the Dutch Probation Service's national management team. The management makes choices with respect to the profile: Is this what we want for this position? Or should the emphasis be shifted?

Subsequently, for each position, there is a competency management introduction day involving all job holders. The program includes an explanation of competency management and a discussion of the provisional profile. There is also opportunity for comments and changes. Changes are processed, and then the definite profile is adopted by the board.

The job holders are informed of any changes, and receive the definite profile.

The renewed methodology of functioning and evaluation introduced in 2009 now pays attention to the how of a position as well as to the what. Every year, in an agreement discussion, development agreements are made about two competencies. In the ensuing year, the employee focuses on these specific competencies. After six months, a performance interview is held in which the state of affairs is discussed. If necessary, the agreements are modified. The series of discussions culminates in an assessment interview in which the manager assesses how the competency development has gone. Thus, the employee works on his or her own development in a continuous process.

RESOURCES THAT HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT THE PROJECT:

- card set of 27 competencies, with definitions and examples of behavior
- competency profiles for every position in the organization
- booklet on the development of and connection between competencies
- booklet with development tips for competencies
- booklet on the application of competencies in recruitment and selection