

# STOP WASTING YOUR TIME WITH A COMPETENCY MATRIX

by Martin Fairn-Managing Director, Gazing Performance UK

The eternal challenge for HR and training departments is to find a coherent way to describe the skills needed by people in different roles across their organisation. Enter the 'competency matrix' which allows us to create a list of the roles we have and another list of all the skills people might possibly need in those roles. Fantastic because it will look great as a powerpoint slide at Senior Team presentations and "we can use it to assess who has which skills!"

The problem is that people don't think in terms of matrices and they certainly don't work that way. Of course it is possible to create a strong case for the 'competency matrix' and many HR professionals will be able to justify each skill as being 'critical' to that role. The challenge comes when you move from the 'matrix' to the real world.

In the dynamic, pressurised and often chaotic business environment of today there are very few roles that require for a list of isolated skills to be used in convenient sequential application. Most roles demand a wide range of skills and knowledge, often to be applied at the same time and sometimes with a different emphasis due to different situations. So what do people need to help them develop and perform their roles more effectively?

There is no doubt that jobs do need to somehow be broken down into a series of skills and knowledge required to carry out that role. It helps with the creation of an effective learning strategy and also gives a point of reference for both recruiting and career development.

At Gazing Performance however our perspective is that you should start with a clear description of how each role should be carried out in order to deliver the optimum level of performance. For example what does that person need to do most of and be best at?

The outcome of this assessment will be to define the priority or critical areas of attention for each role. There will also be several other peripheral components that relate to additional knowledge and skills, which will provide an underpinning platform for the performance of that role. The key is then to organise all the different components in a way that is both practical and meaningful for the individual and the organisation as a whole.

We have found a useful approach is to look at simple methodology based on a classification of either:

**MACRO SKILLS:** an overview of the critical components needed to perform in a role

**MICRO SKILLS:** the key specific elements sitting within each 'macro skill' that allow the individual to carry out that role effectively. This approach provides a simple hierarchy of skills



**Gazing Performance Systems UK Limited**  
Capital House 67 - 69 Johns Road  
Isleworth Middlesex TW7 6NL  
United Kingdom



**“At Gazing Performance however our perspective is that you should start with a clear description of how each role should be carried out in order to deliver the optimum level of performance. For example what does that person need to do most of and be best at?”**

www.gazing.com  
E: gazing@gazing.com  
T: +44 (0)20 8568 0298  
F: +44 (0)20 8568 9782



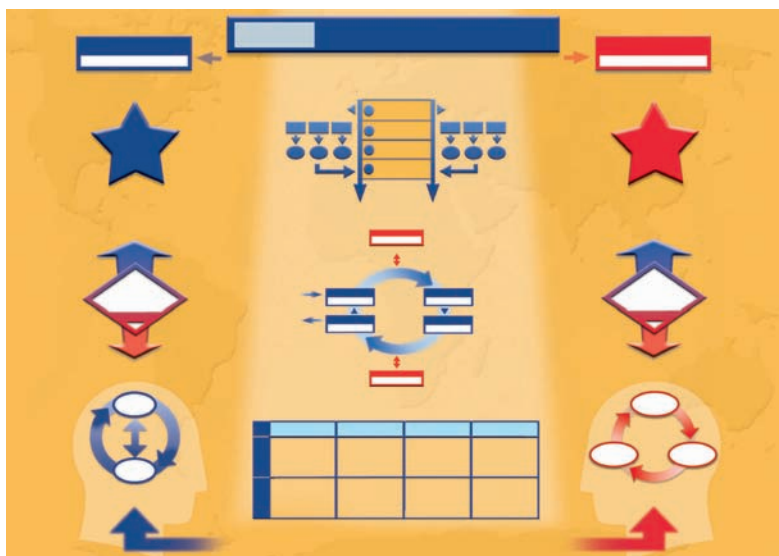
and knowledge that can be used by the HR department to develop training and the individual to develop themselves. The ‘macro skills’ should be seen as providing the overview, or ‘big picture’ related to each role. The benefit of this is that when people are under pressure and need to perform well they require a simple, accessible point of reference. The macro skills provide that reference and allow people to refocus their attention on priority areas before returning to the more detailed micro skills.

Rather than presenting a long list of skills or possible competencies for each role in the form of a matrix, Gazing believe the attention should be on organising the requirements into a more practical framework.

Our choice is to use 1-page maps which are designed to represent the skills and knowledge needed to perform a role in a picture. We have chosen to use the concept of Maps because they:

- 1 Present both an overview and detail (macro and micro skills)
- 2 Can be used by experts and novices
- 3 Place attention on the route as well as the final destination (process vs outcomes)
- 4 Provide a common platform with a common language
- 5 Can be used in conjunction with specific tools to change and develop behaviour.

In my view competency matrices can be confusing and too detached from reality to make them practical. Work done to organise the skill and knowledge requirements of a job under the MACRO or MICRO headings and then prioritise onto a 1-page Map will provide a significantly more effective platform for recruitment, assessment and critically the development of people’s performance



Copyright of Gazing Performance Systems International Ltd



**Gazing Performance Systems UK Limited**  
 Capital House 67 - 69 Johns Road  
 Isleworth Middlesex TW7 6NL  
 United Kingdom

“  
**Rather than presenting a long list of skills or possible competencies for each role in the form of a matrix, Gazing believe the attention should be on organising the requirements into a more practical framework.**  
 ”

