

Competencies Required for Club Managers

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Club managers need expertise in business functions, F&B, and HR, but they can delegate things like operating the golf course.

With over 5,000 members, the Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) is the largest organization of club managers in the world. CMAA fulfills its mission of meeting its members' educational needs by offering a comprehensive menu of professional-development opportunities. Club managers clearly are focused on continuing their professional education. Approximately 1,000 members hold the Certified Club Manager (CCM) designation. Moreover, CMAA's Business Management Institute (BMI), an eleven-course club-management curriculum, has registered more than 4,400 managers in approximately 150 one-week sessions since its inception in 1988.

In 1992 members of a CMAA education-certification task force catalogued competencies judged important for club-management success in a seven-category taxonomy. The process involved careful analysis of resources then used in

the BMI series and subject matter addressed in the CCM exam. Results of the analysis have shaped the priorities for topics taught in all CMAA education programs and tested in the CCM examination since that time.

The purpose of the present study was to reassess the competencies perceived important for successful club management. The primary use

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of these findings would be to review the subject matter addressed in CMAA education programs and the CCM exam. A secondary purpose was to provide useful data for educators as they develop and evaluate curricula for club-management education.

Competencies, Computers, and Clubs

The literature review comprised three topics: competency research, computer-assisted surveys, and the club industry.

Competency research. A growing number of businesses and government-sector organizations have turned in recent years to competency modeling as the key link to ensuring that employees can execute corporate business strategies.¹ With increased industry interest has come research designed to test the usefulness of new competency models. Psychologists have long attempted to reduce a job to its essential elements, under the assumption that the job will then be easier to understand.

Pioneers in this area began their study during the scientific-management era. The focus at that time was only on the technical activities of workers. Consequently, the early management scientists generally missed workers' behavioral attributes. Some scholars have described competency modeling as a continuation of those efforts, while others consider it a new topic. Either way, today's research holds one commonality with that of the earlier era, and that is that competency studies are rarely theoretical in nature.

The term "competency" can be defined in different ways. Common among the definitions is that certain motives, traits, skills, and abilities are

attributed to people who consistently behave in specific ways. A competency model depicts those characteristics as a desired behavior set for a particular job position or level.²

Research on competencies is frequently, but not always, focused on specific areas. For instance, Heneman and Ledford and others have focused their research specifically on competencies relative to compensation.³ In contrast, Lawler used competency research to argue for changing the entire efficacy of designing organizations around job structures (an approach that has dominated human-resources management for decades) to one that focuses on individual competency-based training.⁴

Other researchers have argued for changes in professional competencies required in certain fields. For instance, Clyde proposed the competency method for certified public accountant (CPA) professional-certification programs.⁵ Clyde's argument stressed the way an outcomes-based competency approach could end the practice of the "accumulation of hours" (rather than knowledge). For example, instead of the CPA's searching for "eight hours of credit," Clyde suggested that the CPA would plan and work toward a set of needed skills.

Competency-completion programs have become increasingly common in several fields. For ex-

ample, competency fairs for nurses (in which skill teachers are physically arrayed in kiosks much like food-service providers in a scramble system) have become an effective means of ensuring the acquisition of critical skills.⁶ Most who have studied competency fairs in nursing describe the approach as being widely accepted by participants.⁷

Competency training has also been widely accepted in human-resources departments. A study examining training practices at 217 companies found that competency modeling was used to guide a variety of human-resources practices, including staffing (88 percent of the companies), training and development (62 percent), performance management (90 percent), and compensation practices (64 percent). Most of these companies make adjustments to training needs, performance management, and compensation, based on revised competency assessments.

There are pitfalls in competency modeling, however. As Bahl noted, some competency-based programs may inadvertently discriminate.⁸ Other observers have seen competency-based training from the reverse perspective, that is, as the answer to protecting one's organization against discrimination charges because they result in valid indicators of performance on the job.⁹

Computer-assisted surveys.

Any form of job analysis takes time, and competency building is particu-

² Maxine Dalton, "Are Competency Models a Waste?," *Training and Development*, Vol. 51, No. 10 (October 1997), pp. 46-50.

³ Robert L. Heneman and Gerald E. Ledford, Jr., "Competency Pay for Professionals and Managers in Business: A Review and Implications for Teachers," *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 1998), pp. 103-121.

⁴ Ed Lawler III, "From Job-based to Competency-based Organizations," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 1994), pp. 3-15.

⁵ Nita J. Clyde, "CPA Is Broke: Let's Fix It," *Journal of Accountancy*, Vol. 186, No. 6 (December 1998), p. 773.

⁶ Mary Reichle and Anne K. Westfall, "Competency Fairs: The Answer to Staff-development Dilemma," *Nursing Management*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (March 1997), pp. 58-59.

⁷ Ruth Prickett, "Innovative Grading Systems Lifts Morale at NHS Trust," *People Management*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (January 1998), pp. 19-26.

⁸ Kamlesh Bahl, "Cautioned on Competencies," *People Management*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (January 1998), pp. 12-20.

⁹ Andrew L. Klein, "Validity and Reliability for Competency-based Systems: Reducing Litigation Risks," *Compensation and Benefits*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (July-August 1996), pp. 31-38.

¹ See: Jim Kochanski, "Competency-based Management Training and Development," *Training and Development*, Vol. 51, No. 10 (October 1997), pp. 40-45.

larly tedious. By necessity, it involves asking many participants to rank or rate many different factors based on their importance to a job. (The present study examined 127 variables.) Researchers must code each response into job skills, tasks, and actions, and then undertake a content analysis to determine which responses fall into each major competency area. To speed the process, methods other than traditional paper-and-pencil surveys have been devised. For example, Career Architect (the CD-based system used to collect data in the present study) is a computer-assisted (CA) program designed for this type of data collection.¹⁰ CA programs work well for this process. Indeed, one review of the program described Career Architect as a solution that links retooling, reengineering, and performance management in one package.¹¹

Computer-assisted data-collection methods offer the researcher a number of advantages. One frequently mentioned benefit is the likelihood of more "honest" responses from participants. Some researchers have found that participants using a CA program are more likely to reveal personal information. This finding has led researchers to use CA methodology to collect data on such sensitive topics as alcohol and drug use and smoking.¹² In addition to the reliability of responses, data collected with a CA method are easier to use than the traditional paper variety.¹³ The Career Architect, for example,

¹⁰ See «www.lominger.com» for more information.

¹¹ Doreen Fitzpatrick, "Career Architect Helps Companies Build a More Competent Workforce," *Westchester County Business Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 48 (1995), p. 29.

¹² Debra L. Wright and William S. Aquilino, "A Comparison of Computer-assisted and Pencil-and-paper Self-administered Questionnaires," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Fall 1998), pp. 331-354.

¹³ John T. Phillips, Jr., "Tracking Technology: Software for Surveys," *HR Focus*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (March 1997), pp. 9-11.

Exhibit 1

Overview of club-manager competency domains

Competency domain	Number of competencies	
	1992	1998
• Private-club management (background)	10	25
• Food and beverage management in private clubs	30	28
• Accounting and finance in private clubs	12	15
• Management of human and professional resources in private clubs	19	15
• Private-club building and facility management	18	20
• External and governmental influences on private clubs	9	8
• Management and marketing in private clubs	13	16
<i>Total:</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>127</i>

collects responses and tabulates totals. This eliminates the need for data entry and frequency analysis.

Club management. Club management has not been a widely researched area. Barrows reviewed major research findings through 1995 for this industry segment in a single short article. Researchers' interest has picked up since that time, however. For example, the Lodging, Restaurant and Tourism Index maintained at Purdue University lists 159 club-related articles. Only two appeared in refereed journals (one in the *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing* and one in the *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*).¹⁴ Others were

¹⁴ Purdue's index appears to be incomplete. *Cornell Quarterly* has published the following club-management articles in the past 15 years: James M. McBeth and R. Wayne Mondy, "Why Club Managers Leave," Vol. 25, No. 4 (February 1985), pp. 12-14; David L. Whitney, "Managerial Style: Molding the Club Environment," Vol. 28, No. 4 (February 1988), pp. 23-27; Jeffrey L. Pellisier, "Remarketing: One Club's Response to a Changing Market," Vol. 34, No. 4 (August 1993), pp. 53-58; Michael P. Sim and M. Chase Burritt, "Enhancing Resort Profitability with Membership Programs," Vol. 34, No. 4 (August 1993), pp. 59-62; Jeffrey L. Pellisier, "Adapting to a Changing Market: The 10th Tee Grill," Vol. 35, No. 6 (December 1994), pp. 90-95; Ronald F. Cichy and Raymond S. Schmidgall, "Financial Executives in U.S. Clubs: Foundations of Leadership," Vol. 38, No. 5 (October 1997), pp. 67-73; and James Singerling, Robert C. Woods, Jack Ninemeier, and Joe Perdue, "Success Factors in Private Clubs: A View from Stakeholders," Vol. 38, No. 5 (October 1997), pp. 74-79.

carried in industry (trade) publications. Of the 159 articles in print, 99 (62 percent) appeared in just two publications: *Club Industry* and *Club Management*. Fifteen of the articles appeared in *Nightclub and Bar* magazine (which has more emphasis on night clubs than on private-membership clubs). Of the remainder, 32 appeared in other industry publications.

CA Study

As we indicated above, the classification system for competencies in current use by CMAA sorts management attributes into seven domains, as identified by the 1992 CMAA education and certification task force and developers of the existing BMI programs and CCM exam. To begin the current study, CMAA's professional-development staff members, seven CMAA members who had achieved the association's highest certification level (Master Club Manager, MCM), and the researchers reviewed those competency statements, along with the current materials used in the BMI series. We expanded the number of competencies to be studied to 127 as a result of these analyses. Exhibit 1 shows the competencies identified in the earlier study and those for which information was solicited in this study.

Fortunately, one important competency studied—namely, the one relating to food-borne illness—was little used.

A survey to solicit perceptions about the competencies was developed and formatted onto disk (the first survey of this type used by CMAA). A survey “package” consisting of the survey disk in a return mailer and two pages of hard-copy instructions were sent to 446 non-retired members of CMAA who were Certified Club Managers and to honor-society members (i.e., those who have met educational and length-of-membership requirements far beyond those needed for the CCM designation). Respondents were asked to reply within three weeks of survey receipt. Of the 128 responses received, 114 (25.6 percent) were usable. The pool of respondents included 87 (76 percent) who had more than ten years’ experience, 105 (92 percent) who were Caucasian, and 105 (92 percent) who were male. It is worth noting that this profile regarding ethnicity and gender is similar to that of CMAA’s total membership and of private-club managers in general.

Most Important and Most Frequently Used Competencies

The survey queried respondents about the importance of the 127 competencies under study (“How important is this competency in doing well in this job or in this unit or team?”). For each competency, the respondents could choose one of five points on a Likert-type scale, ranging from mission critical (5) to not important (1), or a sixth, no-answer point (0). A second survey question concerned how frequently the managers used each competency (“How frequently is the competency used in performing in this job in this unit or team?”) and used a three-point scale, ranging from all of the time (“This competency is called upon heavily”) to infrequently. The survey format was open ended, in that it allowed respondents to make a statement or a query to further elaborate on their

responses. Exhibit 2 identifies the competencies club managers perceived to be the most important and most frequently used.

Aggregate Measure

When reviewing Exhibit 2, note that the competencies are listed in descending order based on an aggregated rating (the sum of the average importance rating and the average frequency rating). We realize that adding the two ratings together does not take into account the relative weighting of each of the two scales (that is, importance is rated on a scale of 1 through 5, while the frequency scale is 1 through 3). However, summing those two scales does present a conceptual approach for understanding not only what competencies are important, but which are actually in use. We believe that this was a worthwhile approach. Exhibit 2 also indicates the rank and average rating of each competency relative to both importance and frequency.

Moreover, the managers’ perceptions about the competencies that are most important are similar to the perceptions about the competencies most frequently used. Thus, for example, seven of the ten highest-rated competencies (in aggregate) are also among the ten competencies that are most important and the ten most frequently used. The competencies in question fall within the following four domains:

- accounting and finance (two competencies),
- food and beverage management (three competencies), and
- human and professional resources (three competencies).

Low-priority Competencies

Exhibit 3 shows the competencies that the club managers perceived to be the least important and the least frequently used (in aggregate).

Again, the lists of least-important and least-used competencies have

Exhibit 2

Most important and most frequently used competencies

Competency	Competency domain	Aggregated rating*	Importance rating (5 = mission critical; 1 = not important)		Frequency rating (3 = all of the time; 1 = infrequently)	
			Rank	Average	Rank	Average
1 <i>Budgeting</i> : Can explain basic concepts relating to the development and use of the club's operating budget.	Accounting and finance	7.34	1	4.67	6	2.67
2 <i>Financial statements</i> : Can explain how to read balance sheets, statements of changes in financial position, and income statements when developed according to CMAA's uniform system of accounts.	Accounting and finance	7.26	3	4.58	5	2.68
3 <i>Professional behavior</i> : Can explain techniques of basic business etiquette, the importance of proper business attire, and how to build rapport with members and staff.	Club management	7.26	6	4.48	1	2.78
4 <i>Control of food and beverage operations</i> : Can explain basic procedures to establish expected costs and revenues, to assess actual costs and revenues, to undertake variance analysis, and to implement and evaluate corrective-action procedures for effective management.	Food and beverage management	7.25	4	4.55	4	2.70
5 <i>Employee relations</i> : Can explain basic principles of effective employee relations (e.g., leadership practices, managing teams, and procedures for employee motivation).	Human and professional resources	7.24	5	4.49	2	2.75
6 <i>Chief operating officer; general manager</i> : Can explain that the board should provide general approval for broad matters and that the general manager should plan and carry out strategies that move the club toward goals.	Club management	7.19	2	4.64	14	2.55
7 <i>Supervision tactics</i> : Can explain how to use time effectively and efficiently (e.g., by setting priorities, by delegating effectively, and by using time-analysis procedures).	Human and professional resources	7.17	7	4.64	3	2.71
8 <i>Implementing labor-cost controls</i> : Can describe basic procedures to control labor costs by effective planning (e.g., establishing labor standards, determining productivity rates, and developing and using labor-staffing guides).	Food and beverage management	7.01	10	4.36	7	2.65
9 <i>Calculation of actual F&B costs</i> : Can explain procedures to determine the full costs incurred for food and beverage operations (e.g., calculating monthly and daily food costs, inventory valuation, and cost of sales adjustments).	Food and beverage management	7.00	8	4.39	11	2.61
10 <i>Communication principles</i> : Can explain basic principles of effective communication to be used when speaking, listening, and writing.	Human and professional resources	6.91	20	4.26	8	2.65

*Aggregated rating equals the importance rating plus the frequency rating (maximum = 8).

Exhibit 3

Least important and least frequently used competencies

Competency	Competency domain	Aggregated rating*	Importance rating (5 = mission critical; 1 = not important)		Frequency rating (3 = all of the time; 1 = infrequently)	
			Rank	Average	Rank	Average
1 <i>Carpets and floors</i> : Explain basic procedures to minimize costs associated with the purchase and cleaning and maintenance of carpets and flooring.	Building and facility management	4.67	118	3.08	117	1.59
2 <i>Electrical-system costs</i> : Can describe procedures to effectively manage electrical systems (e.g., electrical-system design and maintenance and ways to reduce electrical consumption).	Building and facility management	4.63	117	3.11	120	1.52
3 <i>Waste management</i> : Can explain current waste-management issues (e.g., cost of solid-waste disposal, recycling, reuse, and waste transformation).	Building and facility management	4.60	120	3.04	118	1.56
4 <i>Ceilings, walls, furniture, fixtures, and equipment</i> : Can explain selection and cleaning considerations for ceiling surfaces, wall coverings, and FF&E.	Building and facility management	4.60	122	2.95	113	1.65
5 <i>Unions, negotiations, and collective bargaining</i> : Can explain labor-relations concerns applicable to clubs (e.g., labor unions, negotiations, and collective bargaining).	External and governmental influence	4.49	119	3.06	123	1.43
6 <i>Lighting systems</i> : Can explain procedures to manage lighting costs (e.g., types and costs of lighting, design of lighting systems, and maintenance and energy-conservation strategies).	Building and facility management	4.35	124	2.85	121	1.50
7 <i>Golf-facility operations</i> : Can explain the differences between a regulation and championship golf course.	Club management	4.31	123	2.90	124	1.41
8 <i>Lodging operations</i> : Can describe procedures for a comprehensive member or guest lodging-management system (e.g., efficient and accurate reservation, check-in, and check-out processes).	Building and facility management	4.13	126	2.74	125	1.39
9 <i>Parking areas</i> : Can describe basic materials used for parking areas (e.g., concrete and asphalt) and explain basic considerations when designing and maintaining parking lots and garages.	Building and facility management	4.04	125	2.74	126	1.30
10 <i>History of private clubs</i> : Can provide a brief history of city and country clubs beginning with their origins in England and Scotland.	Club management	3.30	127	2.18	127	1.12

*Aggregated rating equals the importance rating plus the frequency rating (maximum = 8).

many items in common. These low-priority competencies generally fall within the following domains:

- club building and facility management (seven competencies) and
- external and governmental influences (one competency).

We suspect that the highest aggregated competencies are among those which are very important to club members (accounting and finance and food and beverage operations) and those important to the managers (human resources). We suspect this is true simply because if problems exist in these areas the affected members and employees are most likely to interact with (that is, complain directly to) the club manager.

Competencies with the *lowest* aggregated ratings may be those for which fewest member and employee complaints are likely. At least two competencies (unions and negotiations or collective bargaining, and lodging operations) are not relevant to most clubs. Two others (golf-facility operations and history of private clubs) address technical, knowledge-related issues only.

About golf. Competencies relating to golf generally were neither rated important nor were they frequently used. This finding stands in contrast to the likelihood that many of the respondents' clubs have golf facilities. We did not ask survey respondents the type of club managed, but approximately 70 percent of CMAA-member clubs offer golf-related facilities. The percentages of survey respondents with golf facilities was probably similar to the CMAA-average. Golf-related competencies in the study were as follows.

- *Golf-operations management:* can identify the components of full-service facility (importance rank = 32; frequency rank = 51);
- *Golf-employee management:* can review the advantages of

hiring certified golf professionals and superintendents (importance rank = 52; frequency rank = 106);

- *Golf-operations management:* can describe basic facilities and amenities (importance rank = 42; frequency rank = 56); and
- *Golf-course management:* can identify basic concepts of turf-grass and golf-course management (importance rank = 73; frequency rank = 75).

We speculate that golf-related competencies received relatively low aggregated ratings for importance and frequency for two reasons. Both of those reasons are related to the fact that the club managers themselves rarely directly manage the golfing operation, but instead usually delegate course-related responsibilities. First, members' problems are likely to be addressed by the golf-course superintendent and golf professionals. Second, relatively few managers have professional golf experience and competencies related to golf are more difficult for them to identify. In contrast, because most club managers have considerable food and beverage experience, for example, they can easily identify F&B-related competencies. Note that the importance of one golf-related competency—golf-employee management—was most disparate relative to its rank. While the competency was important enough, with a rank of 52, respondents rated its frequency of use a low 106. Perhaps those ratings arise because few problems occur between the club manager and golf-course staff members. This is an area where future research would be helpful.

While this discussion generally has focused on the extremes of most- and least-important competencies and most- and least-frequently used competencies, our study also indicated some other interesting findings, such as the two following.

- The competency relating to foodborne-illness complaints was

judged very important (4.35; rank = 12). At the same time, however, this competency was not used frequently (1.63; rank = tied at 89). We take this as an indication that sanitation training coupled with use of effective food-handling procedures obviates the frequent use of knowledge and skills in this very important area.

- The competency relating to financing capital projects was viewed similarly to that of foodborne illness. While the managers judged having competency in this area to be very important (4.04; rank = 49), they believe it is used relatively infrequently (1.96; rank = tied at 89). This finding seems reasonable, since conducting capital projects are not an everyday event in most clubs.

Foundation for Training

This study has provided a foundation for understanding the competencies that are important for club managers. As we have noted throughout this article, the first step in designing or developing any training program must be to determine exactly which skills a trainee should acquire. We believe that the computer-assisted approach we used to assess the competencies needed by club managers provides the best system available for collecting that information. The next step in the process is to apply the information to club-management training programs.

As a final note, we want to thank those club managers who devoted so much of their time to this project. The computer system as we configured it required the diligent attention of participants, and the process was time intensive. The results confirm our belief that club managers are interested in improving their skills and their field overall. Whether other groups would respond so willingly or so completely to such a time-consuming survey is certainly a point of conjecture. **CQ**