

Business Ethics Competencies Research: Implications for Canadian Practitioners

David Cramm

Ethics Emporium Canada
dcramm@rogers.com

Ronel Erwee

University of Southern Queensland, Australia
Ronel.Erwee@usq.edu.au

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a proposed framework of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that a practitioner who is competent in business ethics, compliance, or integrity should possess. These competencies may be leveraged as key input to selecting content for an institutionalized business ethics training program. The focus in this paper is on the management problem of ‘*What competencies are important for job performance of business ethics practitioners*’. Phase I consisted of developing a *provisional taxonomy of business ethics competencies* and Phase II involved academic and industry practitioners implicated in business ethics to validate the conceptually developed *provisional taxonomy of business ethics competencies* to eventually make recommendations regarding the selection of business ethics training content. The contribution to the business ethics competency-based management knowledge that is presented in this paper is a *proposed business ethics competency model* and the implications of this model for Canadian practitioners are discussed.

Keywords

Taxonomy of business ethics competencies, business ethics training programs.

INTRODUCTION

Little guidance is available for practitioners in terms of determining the most suitable content for training and development purposes given the lack of agreement on the job and functions of business ethics, compliance and integrity practitioners. Smith (2003, p. 634) suggests that ‘business ethicists have struggled to define the role of the ethics officer’. Moreover, ‘to date little consensus has been achieved concerning the professional qualifications, skill sets, experience and time required for implementing, managing and maintaining accountability for ethics and compliance programs’ (Ezekiel, 2006, p. 4). Further, the position of business ethics, compliance and integrity practitioners is still nascent and malleable, with debates on whether or not certain functions belong together or should be treated separately. Adobor (2006, p. 73) states: ‘As a relatively new position, there may be a lack of existing management development programs for ethics officers.’ Finally, even when requisite competencies have been identified and tailored to a specific context, organizations will want to consider hiring candidates with certain knowledge, skills, attitudes and other relevant attributes (Gomolski, 2000) for example traits such as integrity and honesty, and training for many of the knowledge-based competencies. This view is shared by Slivinski and Miles (1997, p. 22) who state: ‘You must distinguish between what competencies you expect candidates to bring with them, and what competencies they should develop once they are on the job.’

In this paper a *business ethics practitioner* is an individual whose primary occupation is to provide advice and guidance to managers and employees on issues of values and ethics, integrity, and compliance as well as performing other duties related to values and ethics such as conducting investigations of alleged ethical wrongdoing or providing training on workplace ethics. Specific practitioner job titles may vary significantly (Murphy and Leet, 2007). A *competency* is a characteristic of an individual such as knowledge, skill, ability, or other (KSAO) attribute that underlies work performance or behaviour (Campion, Fink, Rugeberg, Carr, Phillips, and Odman, 2011). A *business ethics topic* is any subject confronting an organization or its agents that could challenge an agent’s sense of appropriateness, values or principles and could negatively or positively impact an organization’s ability to deliver on its mandate or limit its ability to meet its objectives (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2009).

The focus in this paper is on the management problem of: *What competencies are important for job performance of business ethics practitioners?* The paper presents an overview of competency management theory, notes competency constructs and

definitions, summarises a user, benefits and stakeholders framework and notes the research method. The discussion of the results includes the proposed competency framework as well as implications for Canadian practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Canadian context competency management (CM), competency-based management (CBM) (Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006; Horton, 2000), or competency-based Human Resource management (Hollenbeck, McCall, and Silzer, 2006) is a management methodology that supports the integration and standardization of all human resource activities (Rodriguez, Patel, Bright, Gregory, and Gowing, 2002) based on competencies that support achievement of organizational goals and objectives (Human Resource Systems Group, 2012). Specifically, Canadian competency-based management is defined as ‘the application of a set of competencies to the management of human resources to achieve both excellence in performance and results that are relevant to the organization’s business strategies’ (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and Public Service Commission of Canada, 1999, p. 2; Public Service Commission, 2003)

Competency models have been used to select employees for over 30 years (Ennis, 2008) but the popularity of competencies began to grow amongst Human Resources practitioners, and in the ‘70s as assessment centres became fashionable (Hollenbeck et al., 2006). Boyatzis (1982) further popularized the notion of competencies and remains oft cited for its definition of “competencies”. Further, as of the ‘90s, competency modelling became more prevalent and leadership competency models became mainstream (Holincheck, 2003; Hollenbeck et al., 2006). By the new millennium, Schippmann, Ash, Battista, Carr, Eyde, Hesketh, Kehoe, Peralman, and Sanchez (2000) developed a comparative analysis of job analysis and competency modelling techniques and Rodriguez et al. (2002) contributed to developing competency models. Finally, Campion et al. (2011) provide perspectives on best practices in competency modelling. These best practices are leveraged in this study to conceptually develop a provisional competency model for business ethics practitioners.

Adoption of CBM within Canadian Business Ethics.

Additionally, there is a second view involving competency development specific to the field of business ethics, compliance, or integrity that began in 2001 with the inaugural *Competency Profile of Ethics Practitioners* developed by the Ethics Practitioners Association of Canada (2001). The merits of a business ethics competency exam are examined by Spurgin (2004) who identified approximately sixteen competencies that are used as one of several benchmarks against the provisional business ethics competency profile developed for this study. The Conference Board of Canada developed an *Integrity Manager Profile* (Ezekiel, 2006, p. 15) based on previous works such as the Ethics Practitioners Association of Canada (2001) competency profile. Second, the Australasian Compliance Institute (2006) released a guide for accreditation against its Certified Compliance Professional schema. Next, the Society for Corporate Compliance and Ethics (2011) launched its Certified Compliance and Ethics Professional (CCEP) designation in 2006. The Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics (2007) released its *Principles and Practices for a Model Business Ethics Program* that identifies approximately nineteen competencies that are also used as one of several benchmarks against the provisional BE competency profile developed for this study. Likewise, the Ethics Resource Center (2007), in collaboration with four other leading non-profit organizations (BRICE, ECOA, OCEG, and SCCE) issued a report on the roles and responsibilities of Chief Ethics and Compliance Officers which also contained over 28 competencies, another industry benchmark.

Figure 1 provides a conceptual framework that depicts the relationship between various components of competency modelling such as competency models, profiles, dictionaries, competencies—knowledge, skills abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) such as traits and values, and behavioural indicators.

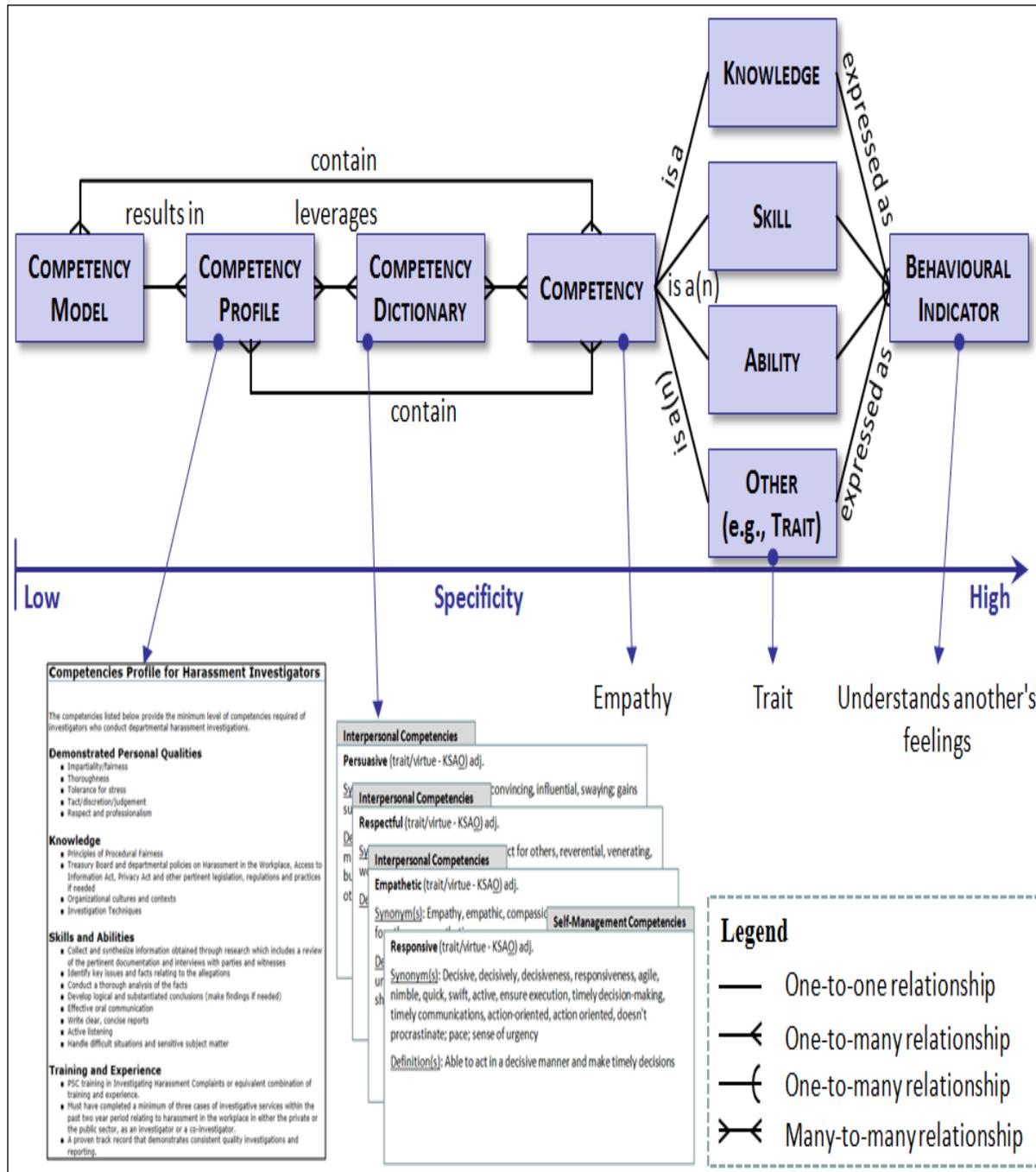


Figure 1 Relationship model between the various components of competency modelling
(Source: Developed for this research)

As depicted in Figure 1, a given *competency model* may result in the creation of one or more *competency profiles* or *competency dictionaries*. However, the distinction between a competency model and competency profile (Slivinski and Miles, 1997) or job profile (Mirabile, 1997) is not frequent so these terms are often considered synonymous along with other terms such as competency architecture (Human Resource Systems Group, 2012) or structure. In turn, one of more

competency profiles can leverage one or more *competency dictionaries*. Competency models, profiles, and dictionaries all contain *competencies*; however, the level of detail can vary significantly. The most detailed of the three is typically the competency dictionary yet these may be general in nature and applicable to several different roles therefore a competency profile (tailored to a specific role and organizational context) may contain more specificity than a competency dictionary.

Next, *knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs)* such as traits and values are all competencies. Additionally, knowledge, skills, and abilities can also be compared or contrasted based on their relative level of complexity ranging from low complexity (e.g., basic terminology) to high complexity (e.g., principles and theories). Moreover, synonymous terminology is used to define various competencies. For example, education and experience are a proxy for demonstrating knowledge or talent is often used synonymously for ability. In addition, in order to provide operationalization of various HR uses to leverage competency profiles, competencies must be expressed in terms of one or more observable and measurable *behaviours*. For example, the competency *empathy* can be described as a trait and assessed by the behavioural indicator of ‘understanding another’s feelings’. Further, as depicted by the centre line in **Figure 1**, the level of specificity typically increases from the left-hand side to the right-hand side. Therefore, competency models are the least specific and behavioural indicators provide the most specificity. Finally, since consistent use and consensus on Competency-Based Management (CBM) terminology is lacking (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003; Vazirani, 2010), the next section provides some definitions for the constructs introduced in **Figure 1**. Slivinski and Miles (1997, p. 2) acknowledges this lack of terminological standardization. For this study, adapted definitions are reflected in **Table 1** based on a number of sources in the table.

Table 1: Sample definitions in competency-based management

No	Construct	Adapted Definition / Description	Some sources consulted
1	Competency Model	A framework illustrating the relationships between a set of competencies and effective job performance.	Hollenbeck et al., 2006; Schippmann et al., 2000; Slivinski and Miles, 1997
2	Competency Profile	A descriptive taxonomy of competencies needed to function well in a specific job. In this study, the context is competencies needed to perform well as a business ethics, compliance, or integrity practitioner.	Mirabile, 1997; Slivinski and Miles 1997
3	Competency Dictionary	A reference tool that contains behavioural and other details on the competencies and proficiency levels for various job families.	Hay/McBer, 2004; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2007, 2010
4	Competency	A characteristic of an individual such as knowledge, skill, ability, or other attribute that underlies work performance or behaviour.	Gomolski, 2000; Mirabile, 1997; Slivinski and Miles, 1997
5	Knowledge	Information that underlies work performance or behaviour.	Marzano and Kendall, 2007; Vazirani, 2010
6	Skill/Ability	Ability to perform tasks developed through experience or learning that underlies work performance or behaviour.	Astorga, 2002; Slivinski and Miles, 1997
7	Traits	A tendency to act in a defined way that underlies work performance or behaviour – e.g., empathy and respect.	Mirabile, 1997; Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2012; Princeton University, 2012

(Source: Developed for this research)

Despite ongoing debates, many agree on the merits of competency models for learning. Some proponents see the competency movement as nothing more than a fad or enchantment, built on shaky ground and faulty assumptions such as the notion that a ‘single set of characteristics adequately describes effective’ behaviours and that each competency is independent of context and others and additive; therefore having more of each makes a person better (Hollenbeck et al., 2006, p. 399). Moreover, they (Hollenbeck et al., 2006, p. 399) state that ‘no one set, whether 15 or 20 or 180, includes all the potentially useful competencies, and even if they did, no one person has them all.’ However, these authors do concede the value of competency models with respect to training and development, stating: ‘*We do not argue that competencies cannot be useful in a minimum standards approach to...development.*’ Likewise, proponents of competency models such as Silzer (in Hollenbeck et al., 2006, p. 402) steadfastly hold to the value of competency models for developmental purposes, stating:

‘...competencies can provide clear guidance on the behaviors that seasoned incumbents think are related to effectiveness. They provide a tremendous educational tool to people trying to learn how to become more effective.’ (Emphasis added)

Accordingly, influential industry sources also see the merits of competency models in providing a framework for learning, development, and training (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003). Regardless of which side one favours in the debate, arguably both sides agree that competency models are never intended to represent a single comprehensive list of requisite KSAOs in a prescriptive manner given the complexity and nature of any given role that necessitates the use of a mix of competencies under different circumstances (Hollenbeck et al., 2006). In summary, this section examined competency management, its historical development and applications to business ethics and introduced some constructs and definitions. Next, common uses and benefits of competency models, as well as stakeholders most impacted by or involved in their development are briefly introduced.

Uses, Benefits, and Stakeholders (UBS) Competency Framework

The objectives behind the development and use of a competency model can have a large impact on the success of competency modelling. Typically, the most common application of a competency model is for objective learning, training or development (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and Public Service Commission of Canada, 1999) of employee skills and involves the least amount of stakeholders. This can include as few stakeholders as affected employees, line management, and possibly Human Resources (HR) advisors. In contrast, the most complex application that requires the broadest stakeholder involvement (such as trade unions, HR, legal, executive management, affected employees) relates to the use for performance management and compensation purposes.

Figure 2 depicts a uses, benefits and stakeholders framework developed for this study following the *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation* of the extant competency management literature. This framework shows typical organizational and employee-level Human Resources Management uses, benefits, and key stakeholders (UBS) affected by or involved in developing competency models.

First, typical uses of competency models surround human resource management processes such as recruitment, staffing, selection, performance evaluation, succession planning, talent management, coaching or mentoring. Other popular uses include facilitating behavioural interviewing and targeted recruiting (Slivinski and Miles, 1997). All of these varied uses are touted to yield a broad range of benefits, both from an organizational (demand-side) and individual (supply-side) perspective (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003; Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006; Ennis, 2008; Erwee, Willcoxson, Smith and Pedersen, 2002).

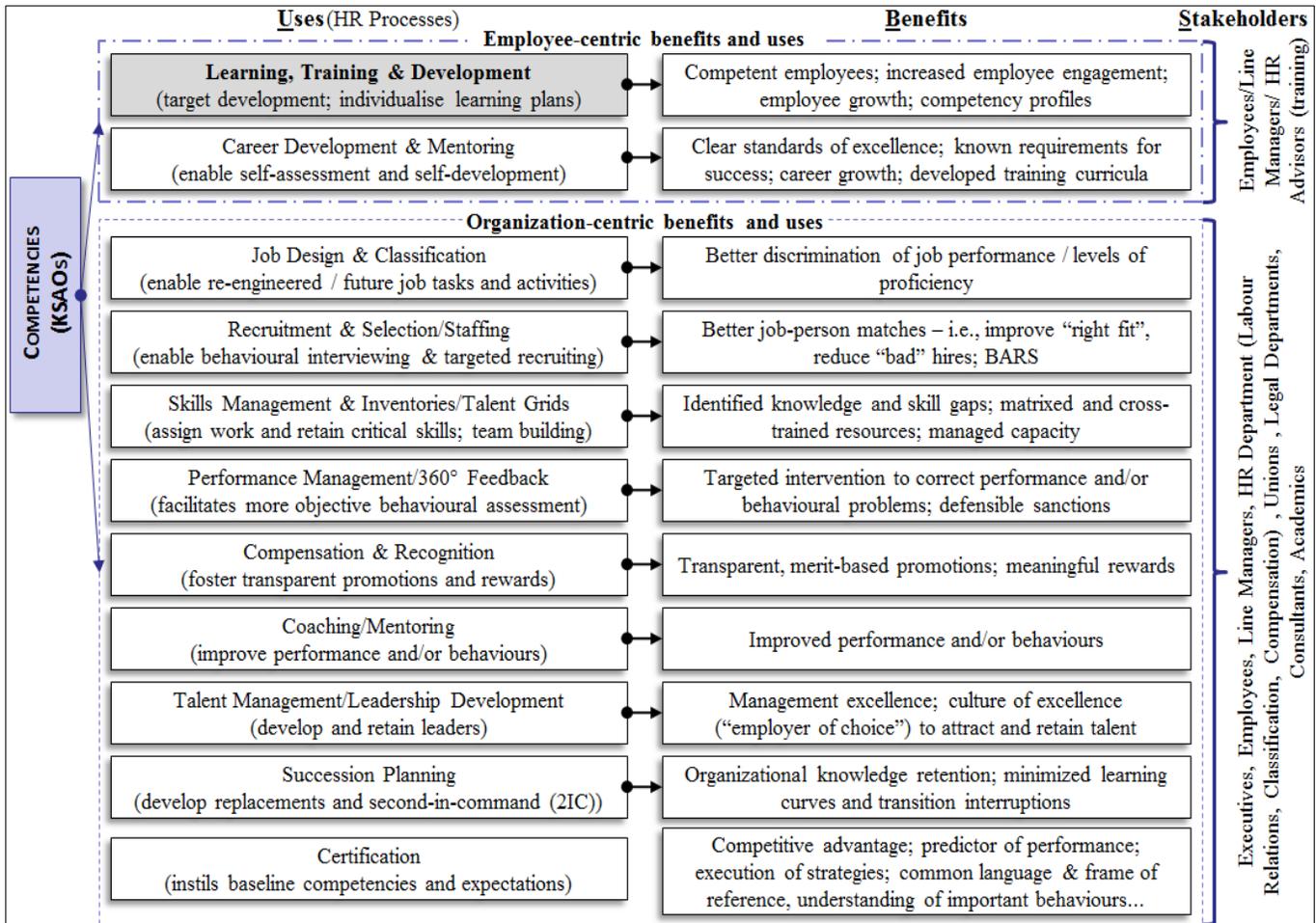
Second, *organizational-level* benefits include better discernment of job performance, improved or better job-person matches, targeted intervention to correct performance or behavioural problems (Corporate Leadership Council, 2003), transparent, merit-based promotions, fostering a “culture of excellence” or becoming an “employer of choice” to attract and retain talent. Common advantages of adopting competency models noted by industry practitioners include providing a competitive advantage (Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006; Lado and Wilson, 1994; Slivinski and Miles, 1997), providing a common language and fostering shared understanding of important behaviours and excellence. Moreover, *employee-level* benefits include facilitating self-assessment against clear standards of excellence and known requirements for success (Erwee et al., 2002), helping to identify mentors and develop learning plans, and facilitating career planning, development, and growth by providing a known career path.

Third, the types and level of engagement of various key stakeholders can vary significantly between competency modelling initiatives, depended on the intended use of any resulting competency framework. The most complex application which requires the broadest range of stakeholder involvement such as trade unions, HR, legal, executive management, affected employees relates to the use for performance management and compensation purposes. As these objectives affect the livelihood of individuals, the level of rigour of any resultant competency model and supporting human resources applications must be high. Slivinski and Miles (1997, p. 13) supports this idea:

‘When assessing for staffing, deselection or other areas where appeal or investigations are not uncommon, it is advisable to choose an assessment methodology and tool which is rigorous and has a standardized procedure to objectively measure behavioural targets. Conversely, more latitude is generally available in career counselling or training and development. In these cases, more subjective information, self-assessment and a different level of detail is possible’.

Having briefly introduced the UBS model, further discussion of intended benefits now elaborate on a key issue namely the *dual nature* of competencies.

Figure 2: UBS framework – uses, benefits, and stakeholders of competency model



(Source: Developed for this research)

As with any major change initiative—such as the implementation of a competency model (Mirabile, 1997), claimed benefits may also lead to *disadvantages* and other *externalities* that are infrequently broached. For instance, an organizational culture and existing HR systems and processes may inhibit the operationalization of new competencies or even overcome existing desirable competencies (Lado and Wilson, 1994, p. 700). Besides, every desirable competency, if expressed in the wrong context (Slivinski and Miles, 1997, p. 10) or in excess (e.g., to the detriment of other desirable competencies) can also be perceived negatively—e.g., too much ‘self-confidence’ may become ‘arrogance’ (Hollenbeck et al., 2006; Tett, Guterman, Bleier, and Murphy, 2000). Conceptually, this represents the *bi-directionality of traits*. For example, being a perfectionist, extroverted, conscientious, or creative may have merits in certain circumstances, but be detrimental in others; effective or ineffective behaviour can vary depending on the context. According to the Slivinski and Miles (1997, p. 22), ‘[u]nderstanding ineffective behaviour may be as valuable as understanding effective behaviour.’ In contrast, Silzer (in Hollenbeck et al., 2006, p. 411) argues against the popular belief that ‘a person’s strength frequently becomes a weakness’, providing an example that a ‘team player’ unable to stand alone is simply lacking complementary KSAOs such as ‘decisiveness’ or ‘independence’ rather than their ‘team player’ skill leading to incompetence.

One of the questions that emerged during this research was *how many competencies should a competency model or profile have?* Contextually there is general recognition amongst practitioners that the responsibilities of ethics and compliance officers are growing (Ethics Resource Centre, 2007). This field is still very malleable, undefined, and subject to rapid skill inflation. For example, the Ethics Resource Centre (2007, p. 6) suggest: ‘The knowledge, skills, and experience needed to fulfill the duties of the CECO [Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer] far surpass previous expectations’. According to Campion et al. (2011, pp. 248-9), ‘[t]here really is no ideal number of competencies... our collective experience is to keep it

to around 12.’ Moreover, the Canadian Public Service Commission (Slivinski and Miles, 1997, p. 10) also supports this rule of thumb, stating ‘as a guideline you may find it useful to limit the number to 12 key competencies’. Vazirani (2010, p. 125) recommends ‘a group of 7 to 9 total competencies are usually required of a particular job’. Finally, Gomolski (2000, p. 1) states ‘...organizations should narrow their list of competencies to 25 or 30, and use those as the building blocks for competency models.’ The scale of recommended competencies from various authors ranged from a low of seven (Vazirani, 2010) to a high of 30 (Gomolski, 2000) which is still significantly lower than the empirical mean. In brief, the *theoretical* ideal number of competencies proposed for a model ranged from seven to 30 while the *empirical* ideal for the number of competencies was 46 competencies. The model developed for this study includes 33 baseline Tier-1 and another nine optional Tier-2 competencies for a total of 42 KSAOs. A mean value of 46 KSAOs was derived from the *analysis, synthesis, and evaluation* of 57 competency models, profiles, research articles and other documents used to address this question (Cramm, 2013). In contrast, it is worth noting that the *theoretical* rule of thumb or heuristic proposed by some authors for an “ideal” number of competencies within a competency model is substantively lower than the *empirical* mean of 46 competencies calculated for this study.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

Using a post-positivism research paradigm, this mixed-method qualitative and quantitative research design explored and described in terms of a taxonomic classification, the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) required by business ethics practitioners based on frequencies of observed competencies reflected within business ethics-related academic and industry publications using a Phase I document analysis with *triangulation of method* provided by Phase II survey of business ethics academicians and practitioners. This study adopts a research design similarly employed by a number of studies in information technology (cf. Aasheim, Li and Williams, 2009; Lethbridge, 2000; Surakka, 2005, 2007) which sought to determine the set of critical competencies required of practitioners to perform their jobs successfully. These studies used document analysis to determine the initial set of competencies (Phase I in the current study) that was then included in a survey instrument and administered to academicians and practitioners (Phase II in this study).

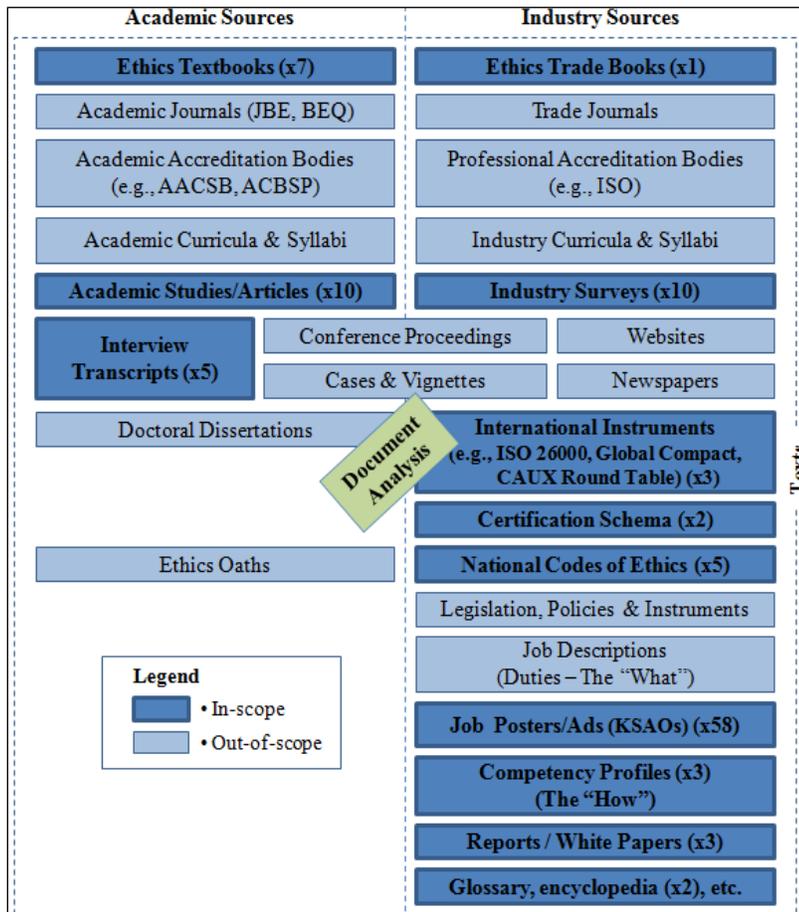
PHASE I : DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS - DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

In **Phase I**, an extensive *document analysis* of academic and industry texts using frequency counts of KSAOs was completed to construct a *preliminary business ethics competency model and survey instrument*. Established precedents for using a document analysis method are many and include research into codes of ethics (Lugli, Kocollari and Nigrisoli, 2008; Preuss, 2008), ethics policies (Hassink, de Vries and Bollen, 2007), and ethical value statements (Chun, 2005; Scott, 2002). Document analyses have also been used to analyse ethical content (Arce, 2004), learning objectives (Buff and Yonkers, 2005), decision-making (Harris, 2001; Payne and Joyner, 2006), and teaching (Cornelius, Wallace and Tassabehji, 2007). Similarly, studies in information technology (IT) have also leveraged content analyses to identify core knowledge and skills for practitioners (cf. Gallivan, Truex and Kvasny, 2004; Ho and Frampton, 2010; Lee and Han, 2008; Surakka, 2007). Additionally, benchmarking was performed against a generic management/leadership competency model constructed in parallel (based on dozens of industry and academic competency models and research) as well as against two industry (Hay/McBer, 2004; Orme and Ashton, 2003) and two academic (Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics, 2007; Spurgin, 2004) competency assessment models and two industry competency profiles (Ethics Practitioners’ Association of Canada, 2001; Ezekiel, 2006). These benchmark comparisons served to enrich the discussion and partially validate the *preliminary business ethics competency model and survey instrument*.

The Phase I document analysis method was chosen since job advertisements, competency profiles, surveys, textbooks, trade books, all reflect required or desired competencies for business ethics, integrity, or compliance practitioners and were accessible in an unobtrusive manner. *Source validity* (Merritt, 1970), or the appropriateness of data sources to capture constructs of interest and answer research questions was addressed by leveraging similar sources used in other content analysis research studies. For instance, job advertisements are common to many Information Technology studies (cf. Gallivan, Truex and Kvasny, 2004; Lee and Han, 2008; Litecky and Arnett, 2001; Surakka, 2005). Both published and unpublished texts were considered, and a mix of more rigorous quality publications such as academic textbooks and industry trade books were considered, along with less rigorous publications such as surveys and job advertisements. However, for the intents of the study, job advertisements posted on a website are quite relevant in terms of capturing required competencies therefore their lower academic rigour compared to textbooks for instance is less relevant in this context.

Figure 3 shows that seven academic textbooks were considered for the document analysis along with ten academic studies from authoritative journals such as the *Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)* and others, and five video transcripts. Industry sources included: a trade book, ten industry surveys, three international instruments, two certification schemas, five national codes of ethics, three competency profiles, three reports from a respected industry thought leader, an official Canadian government glossary on management values and ethics, and an encyclopaedia. Finally, rounding out the industry sources was a census of 58 Canadian Public Service job advertisements between 2006 and 2011. Since job advertisements are the premier recruitment vehicle, they should reflect the true nature of the competencies required of ethics practitioners.

Figure 3: Sources for document analysis



(Source: Developed for this research)

PHASE II: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS - SURVEY

In **Phase II**, identifying potential questions was completed by examining other business ethics academic and industry surveys as well as several IT academic surveys (cf. Aasheim, Li & Williams 2009). Choosing appropriate questions was facilitated with the use of a survey design guide developed for this study. Moreover, selection of appropriate competencies was informed based on competencies with the highest frequency counts obtained in phase I from the document analysis and further augmented with a few perceived under-estimated KSAOs (e.g., environmental scanning and risk assessment). Pre-testing was conducted by the lead researcher and five knowledgeable and experience subject matter experts in ethics, compliance, or integrity functions using a paper-based prototype of the online survey instrument.

This online survey, based on the document analysis of competencies from Phase I, was administered to academics and ethics practitioners to empirically validate the *preliminary business ethics competency model* and establish to what extent their perceptions differ about the competencies. This facilitates comparison (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001; Yin, 2003) to support a core set of essential competencies for ethics practitioners. Our confidence in getting an accurate measure of *key competencies*

is greater if essential KSAOs identified during the document analysis phase (in Phase I of the current study) are supported by the survey of academics and practitioners (in Phase II of the current study). Moreover, any differences in results between the document analysis and survey provide informative data as a basis for training design (Neuman, 2003).

The final open-ended survey question allowed respondents to comment on the overall survey. The single-most consistent comment received demonstrated the relativity of *important* competencies. Answers along the lines of ‘it depends on the situation’, the ‘industry’, or the ‘specifics of the individual’s job’ were received by a handful of respondents. However, without providing an overly granular or restrictive scenario to allow for greater generalizability, it is deemed that these comments are valid and apply to any competency model or profile for any organizational role and are therefore an inherent limitation in most if not all competency-based models reflected in the need to tailor a portion of the model to account for context.

Sample Data from a total of one hundred and two respondents (n=102) were obtained. Academics accounted for 45 percent of the survey respondents with 33 percent being men aged 50 or above from the US holding a doctorate degree. The next most common demographic was women aged 50 or above from the US holding a doctorate degree (11 percent). Respondents were asked to identify the various business ethics roles (identified in Chapter 2) they performed, independently of how frequently a role may be performed. Respondents could check more than one role. Eighty-nine percent of academics identified educator as a role, followed by scholar (72 percent) and advisor (26 percent) as the next two most popular roles. A sizeable majority of respondents (85 percent) are forty years old or above and a correspondingly large proportion (87 percent) have over 5 years of experience in business ethics and can therefore be considered Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

Industry Practitioners accounted for 55 percent of the survey respondents with 18 percent being Canadian men aged 40-49 holding a Master’s degree. The next most common demographic was Canadian men aged 50 or above holding a Master’s degree (11 percent), together accounting for almost a third of respondents. Two-thirds work in government (64 percent) with the remaining third working primarily in the private sector (30 percent) with a very small minority representing the non-profit sector (5 percent). One third of respondents (36 percent) indicated they were executives with the next most popular answer being consultant (29 percent) totalling two-thirds (65 percent) of practitioners. The remaining third consisted of Managers (11 percent), Officers (11 percent), and others. Respondents were also asked to identify the various BE roles they performed, independently of how frequently a role may be performed. A significant majority of practitioners (70 percent) identified advisor as their role, followed by manager (46 percent), educator and investigator (39 percent) each, then finally counsellor (36 percent) and scholar (34 percent). Finally, a large proportion (70 percent) have over 5 years of experience in BE and can therefore be considered SMEs.

RESULTS

PHASES I AND II BASED ON DOCUMENT ANALYSIS AND SURVEY – BUSINESS ETHICS COMPETENCY MODEL

Due to the vast detail of the results based on the document analysis in Phase I and the survey results in Phase II, the primary focus of this paper is only on the presentation of a business ethics competency model resulting from the analysis.

A conceptually developed and empirically validated *proposed business ethics competency model* containing 33 very important Tier-1 and optionally 9 almost very important Tier-2 knowledge, skill, ability, or trait-based competencies was distilled during the study as presented in **Figure 4**. These 42 KSAOs stem from an original proposed model of 61 competencies developed based on a thorough literature review and document analysis.

The competencies in **Figure 4** are relevant to ethics practitioners since a majority of survey respondents were Canadians (55 percent) and 61 percent of documents analysed were Canadian content. However, a third (33 percent) of respondents were US residents and almost another third (31 percent) of document analysed were US-centric while 12 percent of survey respondents were international and eight percent of the documents analysed were international as well, therefore the research findings may have potentially broader applicability, though further empirical research would be required.

Items appearing in **bold blue** in Figure 4 are *very important* Tier-1 skill, ability, or trait-based competencies, where the number preceding the competency relates to ranked importance based on means values provided in the Phase II survey. Items in *italicised blue* with a “†” suffix are Tier-2, *almost very important* skill, ability, or trait-based competencies. Items in **bold red** are *very important* Tier-1 knowledge-based competencies while those appearing in *italicised red* with a “†” suffix are Tier-2, *almost very important* knowledge.

Core and role-specific competencies

KSAOs at the centre of the model in **Figure 4** represent *core competencies* that apply generally to most of the roles. For example, having *integrity* and being *honest* are traits that apply to all six BE roles. In contrast, those competencies appearing on one of the six arms relate primarily to a specific BE role. For instance, being able to perform *risk management* and *championing* an ethics program are primarily linked to managing or directing an organizational ethics program. Finally, those competencies appearing on bi-directional arrows apply to more than one role, but not likely all six roles. For example, *advising* and having *empathy* relate primarily to the roles of advisor and counsellor. Similarly, being *discreet* and *trustworthy* primarily related to the roles of advisor, counsellor, and investigator. Finally, being *fair*, *impartial*, and *tactful* relate to the roles of advisor, counsellor, investigator, and manager.

It is important to note that the allocations of KSAOs, though not arbitrary, are tentative at best and could serve as a topic of future research. It was deemed that rather than clumping all of the competencies together, at least a provisional assignment against popular BE roles could serve to make the model more pragmatic. Finally, the provisional allocation is not meant to be exclusive of other roles. In other words, despite being allocated to one or more specific roles, a particular competency may also apply to other roles not associated, although likely to a much lesser degree of frequency or applicability.

Figure 4: Business ethics competency model



(Source: Developed for this research)

The argument is that this insight into KSAO depicted in Figure 4 can be used to construct overarching objectives of a business ethics training program. According to Trautman (2012, p. 1), ‘at a very minimum, the goal of every educator should be to successfully transmit a clear understanding of the **core body of knowledge** and **competencies germane** to any scholarly discipline’ (emphasis added). Both Rossouw (2002) and Lermack (2003) posited three objectives that include teaching for the purposes of instilling *cognitive (knowledge)*, *behavioural (skills)*, and/or *managerial competencies (perspective setting)*. The top tier of the proposed taxonomy of competencies for this study divides KSAOs into two broad categories—first, knowledge, and second skills, abilities, and traits that address the other two categories.

Finally, future research may wish to deconstruct the second broad category of skills, abilities, and traits into separate categories as some proponents suggest that knowledge and skills can be taught, while talents (traits in this study) cannot. Still, others suggest that some competencies (e.g., personality traits, motivations) cannot directly or easily be measured in behavioural terms (e.g., flexibility, cooperation, autonomy) (Vazirani, 2010, p. 128). On the other hand, some proponents suggest that virtually any KSAO can be enhanced, as postulated by McClelland (1973, p. 8) who stated: ‘It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a human characteristic that cannot be modified by training or experience...’ Arguably, there may be consensus that some KSAOs are simpler or less time consuming to teach and therefore many suggest hiring for abilities and traits for instance, while focusing the efforts of a training program on instilling knowledge.

Three additional qualitative findings of interest were observed. These issues may serve future researchers and include *competency homogeneity*, *skill inflation*, and *ad inflation*.

(1) Competency Homogeneity. Based on the *generic competency model*, a good deal of commonality was observed with the broad and generic competency categories (e.g., ‘communications’, ‘interpersonal’, ‘personal or self-management’, and ‘leadership’) and individual competencies amongst industry providers of competency-modelling and other models (e.g., public sectors). For instance, competencies such as ‘drive’, ‘planning’, ‘creativity/ innovation’, and ‘flexibility’ all have equivalents amongst the various competency models. Campion et al. (2011, p. 246) state: ‘...competencies associated with effective leadership are often highly similar across organizations and industries.’ Finally, this further supports the concept of generic and contextual competencies.

(2) Skill inflation. According to Gallivan, Truex and Kvasny (2004, p. 66) the importance of nearly all skills is expected to increase over time. In other words, once a skill is required, its overall importance is not likely to wane over time. However, an issue’s *life cycle* may change over time; therefore, knowledge-based competencies in particular may become obsolete or be replaced by knowledge that is more important over time. Further, there is a notion of future or forward-looking competencies that may take precedence over current competencies making them obsolete over time.

(3) Ad inflation. According to Todd, McKeen and Gallupe (1995), the average length of job advertisements has increased over the past few decades. This ‘skill inflation’ seems to coincide with a trend in government to ‘do more with less’. However, according to the research findings in Phase I of this study relating to 58 Canadian Public Service job advertisements posted from 2006 to 2011, the average length of job advertisements for ethics practitioners seems to have decreased over a number of years.

DISCUSSION

This research has contributed towards understanding important business ethics roles and associated competencies for ethics, compliance, and integrity practitioners in Figure 4. This study extends existing research in three ways. First, it provides an empirically validated Business Ethics competency model of important and very important knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) for ethics, compliance, and integrity practitioners which serves as a general baseline of competencies, independent of organizational context. As such, it adds further support to the extant literature (cf. New, 1996) for the presence of both general and contextual competencies. Next, an extended study (Cramm, 2013) focuses on key organizational context factors important for role performance such as organizational culture and the organizational environment as well as introduces a Business Ethics competency architecture, further information on a Uses, Benefits, and Stakeholders Framework for Competency Models focused primarily on learning, training, and development.

Implications for Practice

Figure 4, the *Business Ethics Practitioner’s competency model*, provides a starting point or baseline set of KSAOs that training and development departments can use to provide direction for developing or expanding their training programs. This may also involve modifying existing courses to better align with identified and tailored competencies. Further, and much as Locklear (2011, p. 1) proposed ‘an innovative framework for managing emerging risks within an overall enterprise risk

management program', the extended study (Cramm, 2013) proposes a *Revised Content Selection Model for BE Instruction*. This model innovatively leverages Risk Management theory, in particular augmented risk identification (environmental scanning) and risk assessment models to tailor the baseline KSAOs and augment them based on organizational context, looking both at emerging and current risks. In addition to identified KSAOs as part of this study that practitioners can leverage to build various facets of their institutionalized business ethics program, including training content, a number of recommendations have been created to guide practitioners in selecting additional competencies to augment or tailor existing competencies identified in this study. These guidelines incorporate research findings and are essentially lessons learned. They are based primarily on an extensive review of dozens of industry competency models analysed including 58 job advertisements analysed as part of the Phase I document analysis.

Job Advertisements for Canadian Practitioners

This section provides a brief discussion and recommendations to address perceived issues that may have important implications for practice. Based on the Canadian Public Service Board job advertisements analysed in Phase I, some findings were uncovered. Several of these findings also apply to other competency models examined and may have broader-ranging implications beyond merely the Canadian Public Service.

Competency materiality (applicability). Many competencies appearing in job advertisements were not appropriate in several cases as these 'competencies' actually represented broad concepts, job functions or bodies of knowledge that are themselves subject to separate professional certification and, as stated within the job advertisements, are not testable. For example, 'project management skills', 'experience in project management', or 'knowledge of project management practices' appeared in several ads. Project Management is a very broad job function with its own well-defined Body of Knowledge and professional certification. From the job advertisements, it is unclear what specific aspects of project management were being sought. For instance, risk management, communications management, HR management, quality management, and so forth. Moreover, the issue of *competency materiality* occurs in other competency profiles as well. For example, 'personality' appears as one of fourteen key leadership competencies for Associate Deputy Ministers and senior executives in the 'La Relève' profile for the Canadian Public Service (Public Service Commission of Canada, 2003). *Personality* is a complex construct, itself construed from many other competencies. Similarly, one could argue that everyone should have a 'conscience' and 'values and ethics'; however, more specificity would be required understand the desired characteristics behind such vague constructs. A recommendation would be to use specific competencies such as 'Experience using MS Project' when required. Arguably, if a Project Manager is required to perform values and ethics project development work, use a qualification such as 'Certification in Project Management', in which case applicants would need to provide proof of certification.

Competency recognition (verifiability). Professional certification schemes in the field of values and ethics are scarce and relatively in their infancy. Placing too much emphasis on industry certification in this field, as attestation to professional competence is potentially problematic until broader recognition exists for a common Business Ethics Body of Knowledge and certification. For example, some job advertisements asked for 'Certification in organizational values and ethics', 'Professional certification in the field of ethics' or 'certificate from a recognized university or college in...ethics' or 'Possession of a degree from a recognized university in ethics...'. As formal university programs specific to ethics are scarce, and a standard, recognized curriculum is still lacking, potential incumbents screened out from competitions on the basis of such requirements may lead to complaints and recourse measures. A recommendation would be to define through empirical research an objective set of core competencies for Business Ethics practitioners. Organizations can leverage the research findings and conclusions to ensure appropriate competencies are sought.

Competency granularity (degree of specificity). Competency granularity is arguably the most important challenge to defining appropriate competencies and appears to have chronic recidivism. There is a wide disparity on the level of specificity used to describe competencies observed within the extant literature. This observation is as valid today as it was over twenty years ago as identified by Wise et al. (1990, p. 3) who noted the 'lack of agreement between researchers on what is the most appropriate level of specificity for describing a skill or attribute.' A recommendation would be to avoid vague or high-level descriptions such as 'communications' as they are infinitely more challenging to measure and assess objectively than specific descriptions such as 'ability to communicate orally in providing presentations'.

Construct confusion with Competence. Several competency models confound competency with competence—the boundary between competency levels (competence or proficiency) and competency types (categories) is ill-defined (cf. Wise et al., 1990). Some competency models restrict certain competencies to a specific proficiency level rather than providing effective

behavioural indicators across each proficiency level. For example, the *Profile of Public Service Leadership Competencies* from the Public Service Commission of Canada (2003, p.5) appears to limit ‘strategic thinking’—embedded under its ‘cognitive capacity’ competency and broader ‘intellectual competencies’ category, to the Assistant Deputy Minister hierarchical level: Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) need to be able to ‘Formulate long-term (5-10 years) strategies’; Director General (DG) need to be able to ‘Identify medium-term (2-5 years) objectives’ and Director needs to ‘Work within the framework of short-term (1-2 years) goals’.

Based on these limited descriptions, one could surmise that *strategic thinking* is limited to Assistant Deputy Minister while tactical and operational thinking is limited to Director General and Directors, respectively. In this model, it appears that accountability for key activities of strategic (long-term), tactical (mid-term), and operational (short-term) planning have been confounded with the actual *strategic thinking* competency. However, in practice responsibility for strategic planning at many Canadian federal government departments and agencies is held at the Director level, as Directors are responsible to develop business proposals and Cabinet Documents to seek approval and funding for multi-year, multi-million dollar programs and projects. A recommendation would be to avoid confusing competence with competency. Each competency may typically be defined in terms of four or five demonstrably different behavioural indicators for each level using the anatomy of a competency profile.

CONCLUSIONS

Academic sources tend to focus on knowledge areas rather than skills, abilities, and traits. In addition to 15 Tier-1 and Tier-2 knowledge-based competencies, this study identified 28 Tier-1 and Tier-2 skill, ability, or trait-based competencies that academic programs could consider addressing in training content targeted towards future Business Ethics practitioners to make issues more germane while addressing an identified gap. Moreover, a number of potentially over-emphasized competencies were identified that academic programs could leverage to ensure an appropriate balance of training content.

The study results, along with the benchmark profiles (cf. Ethics Resource Centre, 2007; Ethics Practitioners’ Association of Canada, 2001; Ezekiel, 2006) and other works may serve to inform future certification initiatives as a step towards gaining greater acceptance as a profession given the breadth and depth of roles and responsibilities within the purview of business ethics, integrity, and compliance practitioners.

The proposed *Business Ethics Practitioner’s competency model* adopted a nondescript organizational level as opposed to specific management or proficiency levels. Future research could *delve into* a specific hierarchical level or proficiency level for the various competencies. For example, some competencies may be different (present or absent) depending on the hierarchical level and the expected level of proficiency may be different as well (less or more proficiency required). Also, future research could *detail* the various Behavioural Indicators (BIs) for each of the competencies identified in this study.

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