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How Competency Management Supports Business Continuity

Q&A Session with Avilar CEO

Tom Grobicki, Avilar CEO, has long been a proponent of using competency management programs for business continuity purposes. We had a chance to sit down with Tom for his perspective, lessons learned from previous business continuity challenges, and practical tips for harnessing competency management in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Q. When people are implementing competency management programs, it's usually for workforce development and workforce planning issues. In what way is competency management well-suited for business continuity planning, too?

A. Competency management is all about understanding your employees and helping them to be more effective for your business. In most cases, we talk about optimizing the workforce, hiring the right people, retaining employees, making sure employees understand their jobs, providing the appropriate training, and making sure they are on a good career path.

A good competency management system can also collect additional information that can be critical when the normal course of business is disrupted. This can be as simple as a daily "Are you available?" status check or more complex information such as a list of vaccinations. While everyone today is talking about COVID-19 and pandemics, the approach is the same across a spectrum of potential disasters such as volcano eruptions, flooding, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Of course, it is very difficult to implement something in the middle of a rapidly evolving situation like a pandemic. Yet, during a

business disruption, every business has to make many decisions about their employees quickly. At a minimum, organizations should include the skills needed by every business continuity-related job in the company. Leaders will need to answer the questions, "Who has those skills? Are those skills being fostered?"

Q. You've been a leader in the competency world for more than 25 years. You've seen multiple instances of companies turning to competency management programs in the wake of disasters such as hurricanes, floods, 9/11 and more. Is there one example that stands out? What was the disruption and how did competency management help the company?

A. During the Ebola crisis, we had an organization that needed to know which of their employees were available, and which were not. They needed to know what skills had to be backfilled until affected employees returned. So we collected availability information daily from employees. This allowed managers to identify employees who were unavailable quickly, and flag available employees with similar skills who could step in.

There are other examples, like the sudden loss of an entire building that happened in 9/11. It is often surprising to me how little an organization knows about its employees – even those who have been at the company for a long time. If you have to suddenly replace them, even temporarily, it's often a big problem. That's especially true when managers only have old resumes of employees, which generally do not reflect what they are doing for you today. In any emergency, your response must be specific to the situation at hand; the absence of essential employee information makes that task far more difficult than it should be.

Q. We're hearing that the novel coronavirus will negatively impact organizations around the country (and the world) for many months to come. What advice do you have for employers as they navigate evolving business conditions in the coming months? How can competency management inform their decisions?

A. You might need to task people quickly to take on unfamiliar duties. A good competency management system will allow you to see what skills are needed for each job and suggest appropriate training. If you haven't already, include some "emergency" job roles that suggest training for remote working, facilitating or participating in virtual meetings, and managing a remote workforce. Getting employees immediate training is key.

Also, this is a very fluid situation with rules seemingly changing on a daily basis. The rules will likely impact different people in different ways, depending on each person's tasks and responsibilities.

The company can also use the data in the system to start planning for the recovery. While going into a pandemic is a crisis that requires you to be nimble and know what to do, you also

want to look down the road to the recovery to make sure you have people prepared for rebuilding your business.

Q. Can you say more about working from home?

A. Working from home is part of many business continuity plans, including for infectious diseases. It requires a collection of skills that employees, managers, and businesses need to have. But many people have no experience being a remote worker. And businesses may be writing or adjusting policies, procedures, and tools that specifically support remote work.

A competency system can help to identify and offer the appropriate training and checklists for these skills. Company leaders can help by prioritizing the policies, training, and tool activation – leading through regular communications that provide updates and model the tools and practices for the rest of the workforce to follow.

Q. If there's a silver lining with this novel coronavirus, it's that, for many, symptoms are relatively mild. What should employers and employees do while teleworking to advance their competency management programs?

A. There are some critical, often-overlooked activities in any competency management program. A significant one is making sure that your competencies are current. Do they reflect the current industry and market conditions? And what additional adjustments might be necessary during an extended business interruption — like additional training to help

employees deal with stress, “selling” in a down market, and other challenges? Training is another area that is often not kept up. Now is a good time to review not just what training is being offered but understanding why. We view this as a “spring cleaning” of the system.

You also might want to start thinking about the kind of information that would have helped you be better prepared for the current pandemic, and start implementing improvements now. Keep track of the process you’re going through and a list of what’s worked and what you might do differently if a similar situation occurs in the future. What information did you need about an employee? Where was that information kept? What will you need to know when conditions improve?

Q. Any last thoughts to share with the Avilar community?

A. Continuity and pandemic plans are often overlooked in small organizations – and, surprisingly, in big ones, too! Having a detailed image of your employees helps to improve your decisions, especially as you look to the recovery phase.

Are you ready to get started?

If you are looking to improve your competency management program for business continuity, [contact us](#) to learn how our [WebMentor™ Skills](#) competency management system can support your business continuity and disaster planning efforts.

About Avilar

Avilar – The Competency Company™ is a leader in web-based competency management and learning solutions for corporations, government, and non-profit organizations. Formed in 1997, Avilar was a pioneer with its award-winning WebMentor™ product line and has built itself on the basis of superior customer service and highly adaptable product design.

Avilar consultants are recognized as industry thought leaders and have decades of experience in implementation and analysis. Let Avilar help you transform your organization from ordinary to extraordinary. Visit our website to schedule a [demo](#) of our competency management system or our LMS. You can be confident that we will listen to your organization’s specific needs and help you find the best solutions to the talent management challenges you’re facing.