

CHAPTER 7

Introduction to Competencies and Personal Competencies

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Summarize how employers use competency-based human resource management processes to screen job candidates.
- Differentiate between job requirements and job competencies.
- Identify the hiring requirements and competencies in a job posting or position description.
- Determine if you meet the hiring requirements for a position.
- Assess to what extent you are able to demonstrate the competencies required for a position.
- Explain how you would develop and demonstrate specific competencies.
- Understand the importance of developing strong report-writing and other written communication skills.

Hiring Processes: Requirements and Competencies

Unlike purely social groups, work organizations exist to carry out their mission through achieving set goals and objectives. They do this through the work of their members, each of whom is expected to be competent and committed to the mission and the work. Modern human resources processes select, train, and promote members based on the extent to which they meet specific job requirements and demonstrate job-related competencies. Employment screening was not always like this.

Discrimination in Employment

In the past, many employers, including the police, screened members based on individual traits such as age, gender, race, marital/family status, religion, or sexual orientation. This constituted discrimination in employment, and it has been prohibited in Canada since human rights laws were enacted in the 1960s (OHRC, 2013a). Discrimination in employment can be explicit and intentional—for example, when a company posts an ad such as the following: “ABC Agency is hiring single men between 21 and 35.” It can also be “constructive” or “adverse impact” discrimination, as defined by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), when “a rule or practice unintentionally singles out particular people and results in unequal treatment” (OHRC, 2013b).

For example, a job posting might say, “ABC Agency is hiring people who are at least 1.8 metres tall, weigh no less than 75 kilograms, and can run 2.5 kilometres in 12 minutes.” **Adverse impact discrimination** sometimes appears to be fair in that everyone must meet the criteria. The problem becomes the validity of the criteria because body composition standards and non-job-related tests of fitness are not predictors of a person’s actual job performance. Worse, they discriminate against women and people from parts of the world where people are smaller and/or lighter. Not only is such discrimination unfair, it is also invalid. A valid screening process evaluates people on their potential to advance the mission of the police—that is, by actually doing the job consistent with professional policing principles.

Competency-Based Human Resource Management

Consistency with human rights law means that employers may only screen for competencies that are **bona fide occupational requirements (BFORs)**, and they must also use valid processes to measure people against those requirements (OHRC, 2013c):

The Supreme Court of Canada has set out a framework for deciding whether a prima facie (on its face) discriminatory requirement is reasonable and bona fide (legitimate) in the circumstances. The organization must show on a balance of probabilities (more likely than not) that the requirement:

1. Was adopted for a purpose or goal that is rationally connected to the function being performed
2. Was adopted in good faith, in the belief that it is necessary to fulfill the purpose or goal
3. Is reasonably necessary to accomplish its purpose or goal, in the sense that it is impossible to accommodate the claimant without undue hardship.

To fit within this framework, police hiring requirements must be consistent with the mission and functions of the police agency, professional police principles and values, and the duties required of police service members.

The first step in preparing for a career in policing is to acquire a solid understanding of professional policing and the core business of the agency that the applicant is interested in because these will drive the job requirements, desired competencies, and screening methods in the recruiting process.

Police hiring BFORs are expressed as requirements and competencies, each of which must be clearly connected to actual job performance. Modern police hiring processes will require candidates to meet a set of requirements and demonstrate specific competencies.

Job Requirements

Job requirements are sometimes called qualifications, and they are criteria that a candidate meets, may meet in the future, or does not meet. Examples of job requirements are age, citizenship, driver's licence, and hearing and vision standards. For example, the Ontario *Police Services Act* (s. 43(1)) provided that no person shall be appointed as a police officer unless he or she:

- a. is a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident of Canada;
- b. is at least eighteen years of age;
- c. is physically and mentally able to perform the duties of the position, having regard to his or her own safety and the safety of members of the public;
- d. is of good moral character and habits; and
- e. has successfully completed at least four years of secondary school education or its equivalent.

In addition, the Constable Selection System (CSS) requires that applicants must have a valid driver's licence with no more than six accumulated demerit points and possess current certification in first aid and CPR. Applicants may also need to meet the CSS vision and hearing standards, have no criminal conviction(s) for which a pardon has not been granted, and pass the medical examination. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has similar requirements and additionally requires that members be willing to relocate anywhere in Canada. All police employers will have explicit and specific job requirements that are clearly described on their website, in recruiting materials, or in the governing



Job requirements encompass a range of qualifications. For example, applicants must possess Standard First Aid and CPR Certificates and be capable of performing duties related to the public's safety.

legislation. Many employers provide potential applicants with a checklist of requirements or qualifications.

The second step for any applicant to a police job is to identify all of the requirements and determine if they meet them or can meet them by the time of application. See Chapters 3 and 4 for more information.

Police Agency Job Competencies

In addition to job requirements, an applicant must possess and demonstrate certain competencies. A **competency** can be defined as “any skill, knowledge, ability, motive, behaviour, or attitude required for successful performance of the job” (Winacott, Bradford, & DeBruyne, 2012, p. 17). Competencies may be classified as essential or developmental. **Essential competencies** must be demonstrated before hire (note that the OACP’s new constable selection process includes an “Essential Competency Interview”); **developmental competencies** require candidates to demonstrate strong potential to meet the competency before hire, with the expectation that the candidate will develop the competency as required.

Competence is often expressed in three dimensions that describe what a successful employee (1) needs to know (knowledge), (2) needs to do (skills), and (3) needs to value and be committed to (attitudes), which together are sometimes described as “KSAs” (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004, p. 33). The technical terms used to describe these competencies are cognitive, psychomotor, and affective, but they can be more simply expressed as head, hands, and heart.

Some of the hiring systems explicitly list sets of competencies. For example, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police CSS describes 8 essential

and 11 developmental competencies (Winacott et al., 2012, p. 16). Other selection systems may list requirements and competencies on their websites, recruiting materials, or job postings. Sometimes competencies are not explicitly described, however, and applicants have to closely examine recruiting materials and use their knowledge of the job to deduce them. For example, a job posting might say “demonstrated ability in customer service” or “five years of teaching experience.” In these cases, the applicant will need to break down the generally accepted definitions of terms like “customer service” or “teaching” to identify the component competencies.

Some occupations require an applicant to possess a specific professional or academic credential or a licence. For example, doctors and lawyers must be members in good standing of a professional body, and university professors require a doctoral degree in their field. Electricians, airline pilots, and gas fitters must have a valid licence authorizing them to work. These occupations will not typically describe competencies in their job postings because it will be assumed that an applicant who has the required credential or licence is competent. Professional or vocational educational programs are often competency based. For example, all Ontario College Police Foundations diploma programs must meet a number of job-related “vocational learning outcomes” and “essential employability skills” described in the *Police Foundations Program Standard* of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2010).

Police hiring, training, and promotion systems are highly focused on competency. In addition to meeting every requirement, applicants must be able to demonstrate mastery of the required competencies and show the potential to meet developmental competencies. This starts with an understanding of:

- what the competencies are;
- how an employer might measure mastery or potential mastery; and
- how the applicant can demonstrate meeting the competency.

This chapter will examine the typical personal competencies that the police require when hiring. Interpersonal competencies, including leadership, are examined in Chapter 8.

Personal Competencies

Different services and agencies may differ in their specific expectations, but in general, **personal competencies** are inwardly focused and may include the following:

- CSS competencies:
 - *Cognitive Skills*: Analytical thinking, information-seeking, concern for safety, flexibility, and work organization.
 - *Affective Skills*: Self-confidence, self-control, achievement orientation, and commitment to learning.
 - *Psychomotor Skills*: Medical/physical skills and abilities.

- RCMP competencies:
 - *Cognitive Skills*: Problem-solving, accountability, developing self, and flexibility.
 - *Affective Skills*: Conscientiousness, reliability, composure, self-control, respect, integrity, honesty, compassion, and professionalism.
 - *Psychomotor Skills*: Mentally and physically fit for the job.
- Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) competencies:
 - *Cognitive Skills*: Analytical thinking, reasoning skills, sound judgment, understanding difficult situations, service excellence, decisiveness, and career-minded.
 - *Affective Skills*: Personal integrity, values and ethics, and respect.
 - *Psychomotor Skills*: Mentally and physically fit for the job.
- Ontario Police Foundations Program Standard Essential Employability Personal Skills:
 - Managing self.
 - Managing change and being flexible and adaptable.
 - Engaging in reflective practices.
 - Demonstrating personal responsibility.

Cognitive Competencies (Thinking)

Cognitive competencies are about thinking—that is, the way people’s minds work to perceive, plan, problem-solve, make deductions, learn, and prioritize. Some of these competencies are defined in the Ontario CSS as follows (Winacott et al., 2012, p. 17):

- *Analytical Thinking*: The ability to analyze situations and events in a logical way, and to organize the parts of a problem in a systematic way.
- *Information Seeking*: The ability to seek out information from various sources before making decisions.
- *Concern for Safety*: The ability to exercise caution in hazardous situations in order to ensure safety to self and others.
- *Flexibility*: The ability to adapt one’s approach in a variety of situations.
- *Work Organization*: The ability to develop and maintain systems for organizing information and activities.

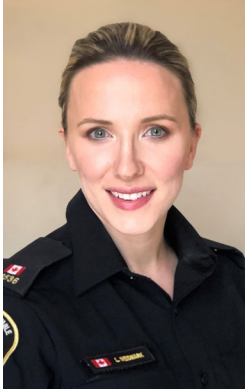
Affective Competencies (Character)

Affective competencies are about feelings and character—the values, motives, and principles that help people determine what is right—and are defined in the Ontario CSS as follows (Winacott et al., 2012, p. 17):

- *Self-confidence*: A belief in one’s own abilities and judgment and a recognition of personal limitations and development needs.
- *Self-control*: The ability to keep one’s own emotions under control and to restrain negative actions when provoked or when working under stressful conditions.

CAREER PROFILE

Lauren Weidmark



Lauren Weidmark is a special constable for the University of Toronto's downtown campus.

1. Describe your career path. How did you reach your current position?

My career path has not been linear. I completed my undergraduate degree in psychology while simultaneously working part-time in the Campus Police Communications Centre. After graduating, I was approached by a colleague who said they were hiring special constables and asked if I would apply. I hadn't considered a career in law enforcement; however, I applied and was in training less than six months later.

2. What does your typical day look like? What are your usual tasks?

People are often surprised to learn the types of calls Campus Police are involved in, and many people don't realize that we have police powers on campus. The U of T is like its own small city, so our days can be as unpredictable as a municipal force's. We patrol the campus, respond to calls for service, and conduct investigations.

3. What are the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of your job?

The most rewarding aspect of my job is connecting with the community. While we often shorten our name to Campus Police, we are officially the University of Toronto Campus Community Police. It's in our name to form community connections, and it's a highly celebrated part of our job. We come up with and carry out community initiatives. I think a large part of creating a safe environment is building trust with the community; "humanizing the badge" through community policing initiatives is a great way to accomplish this. The most challenging aspect of my job is applying the law with compassion and social responsibility. You end up being involved in a lot of people's "bad day," and it takes work to mentally protect yourself from that.

4. What is your advice for those interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement?

My advice is to learn about yourself and never stop. Know what makes you tick, what motivates you to get into a career, and do what you need to do to stay humble. Be respectful of people no matter what their station in life. Humility is important in any career but especially in law enforcement; those who savour their ability to wield power over others are those who should not be given that power to begin with.

- *Achievement Orientation*: The desire for continuous improvement in service or accomplishments.
- *Commitment to Learning*: A demonstrated pattern of activities which contribute to personal and professional growth.

Psychomotor Competencies (Performance)

Psychomotor competencies concern performance—that is, what an individual is able to do—and these are defined in the Ontario CSS as follows (Winacott et al., 2012, p. 17):

- *Medical/Physical Skills and Abilities*: Job-related medical/physical skills and abilities, including vision, hearing, motor skills, cardiovascular endurance and upper-body strength.

Think about the competencies required by police officers. Read the following example and make a list of all of the personal competencies that the officer used to resolve the situation.

IN THE FIELD

The Application of Personal Competencies: Betty Fisk

Betty Fisk is a uniformed patrol officer in a small city, assigned to traffic duties. Mid-morning, she responds to a call about a minor collision at an intersection controlled by a stop sign. A large and very angry middle-aged businessman was driving his luxury sedan to work when a female high school student drove through the stop sign and into his path. When Fisk arrives, the businessman is standing by the open driver's window of the student's car screaming insults at her, and she is crying.

Fisk analyzed the situation and approached the situation confidently. She carefully moved into the businessman's physical space, and he moved back a few paces and stopped yelling. Fisk firmly told the businessman that she was there to investigate the matter and directed him to return to his car, assemble his documents, and wait for her. He muttered something about "you girls will stick together" and stalked off to his car. Fisk ignored the comment and turned her attention to the young woman, adopting a more supportive demeanour. After determining that she was all right, Fisk reassured her and asked her to compose herself, assemble her documents, and wait in her car. She then conducted her investigation and completed the report.

Fisk brought a number of personal competencies to bear on this situation. She used analytical thinking, concern for safety, self-confidence to intervene and take charge of the situation, and self-control to defuse the aggression of the male driver. She used a flexible approach with each individual. She needed information-seeking and work organization skills to conclude an accurate, complete, and fair investigation of the collision. Psychomotor skills included driving, measuring, photography, crisis intervention, and, potentially, defensive tactics. She also used a number of interpersonal competencies that will be described in Chapter 8.

How to Develop and Demonstrate Personal Competencies

The first step in preparing for a career in policing is to develop a solid understanding of professional policing, including the job requirements, required competencies, and recruiting processes. The second step is to devise a plan for meeting the stated requirements. The third step is to learn, develop, and demonstrate the required competencies. Here are four scenarios that illustrate how this might be accomplished.

Alex: Competencies and Cognitive Competencies

Alex is an 18-year-old student in grade 12. His mother is Constable Betty Fisk, so he has grown up around policing, and he has wanted to follow in her footsteps since he was a small child. He is in excellent health and physical condition and has good grades. He is trying to decide on a post-secondary education program and has asked his mother for advice. Betty downloads a number of police hiring documents and explains how requirements and competencies are connected to the hiring process. She then suggests that Alex meet with his high school guidance counsellor to review post-secondary certificate, diploma, and degree programs to determine which program will help him learn, develop, and demonstrate police competencies. After meeting with the counsellor, Alex conducts his own thorough research. He reviews the curriculum, faculty profiles, instructional supports, and extracurricular activities for a number of college and university programs, and he picks the three that seem most promising.

He then attends the program open house for each. At every open house, he meets with faculty and asks them to explain how their curriculum, instructional supports, and extracurricular activities might help him master and demonstrate mastery of police competencies to prepare him for a successful career. He uses this information to make an informed choice. When he reflects on this process with his mother, she points out that he has already successfully demonstrated a number of the personal cognitive competencies in his approach—namely, analytical thinking, information-seeking, and work organization.

Bela: Affective Competencies (Flexibility)

Bela is 19 years old and a first-year post-secondary student, living in residence, who is going through a big personal adjustment. She was born in Canada two years after her family relocated from their homeland to the Canadian suburbs. She has had a highly structured and supportive upbringing as part of a large extended family. She grew up in a quadruplex owned by her grandfather, with her grandparents, parents, siblings, and numerous cousins all living under one roof. Many in the family work in the family business, a large-scale importer and distributor of foods and other goods from her homeland.

Most of the people in her neighbourhood are from her homeland, and it almost seems at times that everyone is related to her or connected with her

family in some way. She did well in school and the numerous cultural activities that she was encouraged to pursue. She is fluent in several languages besides English and highly regarded for her abilities in traditional music and dance. As the oldest child in her family, it had been assumed that she would go into the family business and study commerce.

The family was taken aback when she announced that she wanted to pursue a career in policing and that she had been accepted into a highly regarded post-secondary program at a school 400 km north of her home. In the end, everyone was more or less supportive, and six months ago, she moved out of the family home and into a student residence in a mid-sized mining and forestry town surrounded by several Indigenous and francophone communities. While everyone in the school was welcoming and supportive, she initially felt adrift because there was no one with her background to relate to, and she was homesick. She felt lonely and unable to connect, and it bothered her.

Bela's roommate, Trisha, was a second-year student from a western agricultural community, also interested in policing. As they got to know each other, Bela realized that Trisha had gone through a similar experience the year before. Trisha seemed to be quite happy in her new community and explained to Bela her process of adjustment, which included a year of volunteering at the local hospital. She invited Bela to join her, explaining that in a small community, the hospital was a centre of social activity, which involved everyone at one time or another.

The young volunteers assisted the nursing staff with patient registration in the emergency department. In addition to the medical staff, Bela got to know all of the emergency services workers, including the local police and many other people in the area. She also began to appreciate the realities of human life from the perspectives of a very diverse community. There were very old and very young sick and injured people and others in crisis. Bela began to pick up some conversational French and the local Indigenous languages and a sincere appreciation for a wide variety of cultures. She felt that a large window had opened in her and broadened her understanding of humanity and that she was becoming more understanding, patient, inclusive, and confident.

In one of her courses, Bela was required to write a paper explaining the competencies of “flexibility and valuing diversity” in the context of policing. As she reflected on her half-year in the north, she knew she had much to write about.

Chris: Affective Competencies (Character)

Chris was a 21-year-old graduate of a post-secondary program who was preparing for an employment interview with a large police agency. He was also a very talented hockey player and coach. When he was 18 and 19, he had been the coach of a house league team of 14-year-old boys and had done so well that he was offered the job of assistant coach of the community “rep” team a year later. The rep team represented the community, playing in tournaments all

over the province, and competition among house league players for the 15 or so spots on the team was intense. The rep team was sponsored by a wealthy and powerful community leader who owned several local restaurants.

Midway through the current season, the head coach of the rep team and his son, one of the players, moved out of town, and Chris was appointed head coach of the 14-year-old boys' rep team. One of his first jobs was to fill the vacancy left by the departure of the coach's son. He set up a selection committee composed of the league convenor and one of the parents, with himself acting as chairperson, and advertised the vacancy to the house league teams. The selection committee held a practice game and invited the 12 candidates who applied for the vacancy. After the practice game, the selection committee interviewed each of the boys and ranked them individually based on ability, motivation, and knowledge of the game. One of the candidates was the sponsor's son, who scored near the bottom on all three criteria.

The committee took a short break to consider their decision. Just then Chris received a phone call from the team sponsor. The sponsor started by telling Chris what a great job he was doing and how he admired him. He went on to talk about his belief that his son was the best fit for the rep team and how proud it would make him to have him on the team he sponsored. He told Chris that he really hoped the committee would select his son for the team. He went on to say that he had a number of opportunities in his business and wondered if Chris might like a part-time job.

As Chris hung up the phone and returned to the selection committee, he felt very uncomfortable. He took a deep breath, cleared his mind, and reconvened the meeting. Together, the committee members tallied their individual rankings, talked about their supporting observations, and selected the boy with the highest score, not the sponsor's son. After the decision was announced, Chris asked to speak with the convenor privately and told him about the phone call from the sponsor. The convenor listened politely and then asked Chris if he felt that they had made a valid and principled decision, fair to all concerned. Chris said that he felt they had, and the convenor agreed, commending him. He also told Chris that he was glad that Chris had informed him and that he would ensure that there were no repercussions.

Sometime later, as Chris prepared for his police hiring interview, he noticed that part of the process required him to select one of police service's core values and give an example of how he applied the value in his daily life. Chris decided to talk about "integrity" and hockey.

Denise: Psychomotor Competencies (Performance)

Denise was a 19-year-old post-secondary student pursuing her dream of preparing for a career in policing. She was healthy and physically fit, and her marks were very good. Based on vision requirements, she worried that she might not be hired. While she felt that her eyesight was fine, she was having trouble understanding the medical language in the hiring criteria.

She asked one of her professors what she should do, and the professor gave her a copy of the vision requirements and suggested that Denise make an appointment with her doctor. The professor asked Denise to give the doctor a copy of the requirements and ask for a specific medical examination to see if she met the criteria. After a careful examination, including an assessment from an eye-care professional, Denise was assured that she did, in fact, meet the police vision standards.

Developing Personal Competencies

The examples above illustrate how potential police applicants might learn, develop, and demonstrate required competencies. Competencies can be developed by formal education programs that involve reading, in-class lectures and discussion, online research, study assignments, practice simulations, job placements, and individual coaching. They can also be developed by extra-curricular activities, including relevant volunteer activities and part-time work. It is important to understand and appreciate the competencies and frequently reflect on your continuous progress toward mastery. Here are some practice exercises for self-study or class discussion:

1. Review a police service job posting. List each of the requirements or qualifications for the job.
2. Review your list of the requirements or qualifications and put it in the form of a checklist. Beside each item on the list add a check box for “yes,” “in progress,” or “no.” Assess yourself against the checklist.
3. Review a police service job posting. Make a list of each of the required competencies.
4. Review a police service job posting. Make a list of any developmental competencies.
5. For each of the listed competencies, prepare a short summary of your present abilities and how you might learn and develop that competency.

Suggested Websites and Publications

Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). Border services officer. <https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/job-emploi/bso-asf/menu-eng.html>

Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP). Certificate Testing, <https://oacpcertificate.ca/>

Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Qualifications and standards to become an RCMP officer. <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/qualifications-and-requirements>

Key Terms

adverse impact discrimination Discrimination that occurs when a rule or practice unintentionally singles out particular people and results in unequal treatment.

affective competency A competency that involves a person's feelings, confidence, and self-control—that is, a person's emotional ability.

bona fide occupational requirement (BFOR) A legitimate job qualification that is necessary to fulfill the job's purpose.

cognitive competency A competency that involves a person's capacity to think—for example, a person's mental ability to think analytically, seek out information, or adapt to different situations.

competency Any skill, knowledge, ability, motive, behaviour, or attitude required for the successful performance of a job.

developmental competency A competency for which applicants demonstrate a strong potential to meet prior to being hired.

essential competency A competency that must be met by all applicants.

personal competency An individual and inwardly focused competency, such as thinking and personal character.

psychomotor competency A competency that concerns a person's performance—that is, a person's physical ability and skills.

Career Goals and Skills Tracker

For the week of: _____

A. Skills Summary Log for the Previous Week

Be sure to consider a range of skills, including any physical and technical skills relevant to law enforcement, as well as highly transferable “soft skills” (e.g., communications, teamwork, problem-solving, etc.)

Over the previous week, in all my courses, volunteer/paid work, and extracurricular and personal activities, I have practised the following skills:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. Personal Goal-Setting for the Coming Week

These goals may be anything related to your career preparation: volunteering, physical fitness, interpersonal and communication skills, networking, researching, reading, etc. Try to set goals that are realistic, achievable, and measurable. Some goals may need to be spread across multiple weeks.

I have set the following goal(s) for the coming week:

1. _____ _____ Completed?

2. _____ _____ Completed?

3. _____ _____ Completed?

C. Volunteering Log

Use this space to keep track of your volunteering activities and opportunities each week.

Agency/Organization	Contact Information	Client Group	Hours	Notes or Additional Requirements

Total hours this week: _____

Transferable skills from your volunteering and other activities:

List here any specific transferable skills that you demonstrated or worked on this week.

Specific Skill	Description/Notes

D. Networking Log

Use this space weekly to track your career contacts and future volunteering/job application opportunities.

Agency/Organization	Name and Position	Contact Information	Notes

E. Journal

Use this space to write down current thoughts on your career goals and skills development, what you have learned in the past week, and challenges or problems you have faced.

Additional Thought-Provoking Questions

1. Do you understand the requirements for the position you are seeking?

2. Do you believe that you can meet all of the requirements by the time that you apply for the position?

3. Thinking ahead to your application for the job, are you confident in your ability to demonstrate that you have the essential competencies for the position?

4. What abilities must you improve in order to meet the required job competencies?

F. Portfolio Notes

Use this space to keep track of ideas and items to include in your career preparation portfolio (see also Chapter 10, Resumés, Interviews, and Portfolios). Be sure to keep any important files or documents in a secure but accessible place.

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