



Concern Worldwide: developing a competency framework

Concern Worldwide works in over 30 different countries, and has almost 4,000 employees. So reinforcing a shared sense of common understanding and expectations between all staff was bound to be challenging. Find out how =mc worked with Concern to design a competency framework that would unite and engage staff across the organisation.

Background

Concern Worldwide is an international non-governmental organisation “working for a world where no one lives in fear, poverty or oppression.” Established over 40 years it works in over 30 countries. As well as responding to humanitarian emergencies, **Concern** also provides longer-term assistance in the areas of education, health, HIV/AIDS and livelihood security. Their mission is to enable people in absolute poverty to achieve major improvements in their lifestyles, which are sustainable without ongoing support from **Concern**.

Challenge

As a worldwide organisation with close to 4000 employees, **Concern** is keen to reinforce a sense of connection and common understanding between all staff. This includes expectations around performance for managers and staff, and common language and consistency of practice across **Concern**.

Like all challenges of this nature, the tricky part was defining and agreeing *what it means* to be part of **Concern Worldwide**. This is where the competency framework comes in. A competency framework would not only define what it means to work for **Concern**, but it would also offer a clear structure and reference point for staff for wider areas including:

- recruitment and selection
- training and development
- performance management
- career development
- promotion and succession
- job evaluation

Concern needed to identify a baseline of behaviour that fitted across all staff, all countries and all cultures. They also needed to ensure that the baseline of behaviour accurately reflected present and future needs. Equally important, was ensuring buy-in from all staff.

=mc's brief

=mc was asked to help in four key areas:

- Manage a staff consultation process to design the competency framework
- Set up and lead a project working group to act as internal change agents
- Produce a simple and user-friendly competency framework design that reflected the consultation process
- Make recommendations for implementing the framework

What we did

A wide a range of staff and managers were involved to create buy-in, and to ensure that cultural and contextual nuances – the realities of work 'on the ground' – were reflected.

We set up a working group that included representatives from across the organisation – a range of different roles and positions and locations from Dublin and internationally. This group was connected together and kept up to date via a live wiki (an online platform for sharing information).

We ran focus groups in Dublin, with local staff and country directors, and for senior managers and local staff in Nepal, Ethiopia and Bangladesh. Participants were asked to explore a range of questions, including:

- what is the essence of being part of **Concern**? What is the DNA of the organisation?
- what do your best managers *do*? What do your best staff *do*? How do they behave? What do your beneficiaries and other partners say about their contact with the best managers?

From these discussions we:

- devised an outline framework including the behaviours that staff and managers wanted to see
- interviewed key managers across the organisation to reshape and refine the framework
- checked that the language was simple enough to apply across the various cultural nuances within **Concern**, without losing the richness of what individuals had shared
- conducted an online survey with hundreds of representatives from 29 countries contributing

The project working group were involved throughout the process in bringing all the data and ideas together.

Result

Concern now have a user friendly competency framework with a high level of buy-in from across the organisation and a momentum where staff and managers are seeing how it can be used.

The behaviours identified within the framework are reflective of **Concern's** unique culture and varied operating environments. Feedback from staff and managers suggests that the new framework provides a solid structure for team development planning and personal performance appraisals. And at an international level, various country programmes now have a reference point for agreed expectations and aspirations to work to. They can then work to develop relevant examples appropriate to different cultures and ways of expressing these behaviours in their unique contexts.

Concern are currently developing competency based recruitment guidelines for managers to use that embeds this framework. They are now planning to implement the framework gradually through the performance management and personal development process.

“We’ve been through a comprehensive – and challenging – project with =mc in the design of our organisational competency framework. I have been particularly impressed by the way in which =mc created a truly consultative process. Everyone in Concern has had the opportunity to contribute to the design and, as a result, we have a development tool that is genuinely aligned with our values and mission.”

Anthony Brennan, Director of Human Resources, Concern Worldwide

Further help

<http://www.concern.net> – for the worldwide site.

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