

Latin America and Caribbean Region and Competencies

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

The Latin American and Caribbean region was and continues to be a pioneer in the implementation of competencies as a key management tool for organizational change. While CARE USA's HR Division has led this work for the organization as a whole, the Latin American and Caribbean region has spearheaded it at field level. While the region is still in the process of applying its competency-based management system, its experiences and learning to date can serve other regions as they face difficult organizational changes.

At the start of 2000, the LAC region officially launched its regional management framework for 2000-2015. The management framework stated that progress toward the region's strategic goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015 would depend on the organization's capability in five breakthrough arenas:

- Development and promotion of learning processes
- Influence on public policies and attitudes
- Broadening and strengthening of inter-institutional relations
- Integration in civil society
- Mobilization of new and diverse resources.

To strengthen CARE's capabilities in these areas, the region introduced the idea of a management system based on competencies. It did so in the belief that to enact CARE's new vision and mission, the organization needed to become more a facilitator of social change than an implementer of programmatic activities, and this required a different set of skills and competencies. In a document detailing the conceptual framework for developing a management system based on competencies, LARMU stated:

“The central idea of a management system based on competencies is to identify and develop observable individual and collective behaviors that will permit the organization to be more efficient and effective in the five breakthrough arenas associated with organizational ability.”

LARMU also pointed out that the competency-based “system places human resources management in a strategic position, since the impact of people on organizational results is evident.” The region considered that such a system permits a more integral approach to CARE's people, including their management, administration and development.

The region also saw a competencies-based approach to management as a way to reduce subjectivity in selection and evaluation of staff given that the competencies are based on observable behaviors.

As part of its competencies initiative, LARMU set out to identify core organizational competencies as well as individual competencies, assess where the region stood in both these areas, design and implement strategies to update, develop or strengthen individual

and organizational competencies, examine management processes and systems in light of competencies, and, finally, define and implement a monitoring and evaluation system for the process. The region also stated that a coaching program to help create favorable conditions for this change process was needed.

This regional process unfolded at the same time, during 2001 and 2002, that the Human Resources Division at CARE USA headquarters was pursuing a competency model for the organization as a whole. Rather than pursue a regional competency model separately, the LARMU used the CARE USA model for the competencies survey and involved not just international but also national staff.

The region chose to embed the initiative in the region, rather than have it seen as emanating from HQ or the RMU. It created a small group in the region to shepherd its competency initiative, and by February 2002, LARMU had an overall regional action plan with measures of success. Having defined what they needed to do, the focus then became how to do it.

ROLLING OUT A COMPETENCIES MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

With much of the preparatory work done in fiscal years 2001 and 2002, in FY03 the region placed strategic priority on two activities for implementing a competency-based management system. These were:

1. Socializing the model developed by CARE USA
2. Identification of key capabilities for staff development based on a gap analysis of core organizational competencies and those of the management staff in LAC country offices. A plan was also to be prepared to strengthen the identified competencies needed for success, and an evaluation system introduced to determine progress in fostering the desirable behaviors and attitudes and reducing the undesirable ones.

Countries in the region have progressed unevenly in these areas. Most have, at a minimum, advanced the staff's familiarity with the concept of competencies. The COs have tended, however, to focus on different pieces of the competencies work. For example, some compared the CARE USA defined competencies with locally defined competencies and others translated and circulated the CARE USA competency model as their socialization effort.

A few country offices wanted to design their own competency models, but were discouraged from recreating the wheel. The region struggled to use—adopt and adapt—the information that was already developed by CARE USA. In the end, the region defined three categories of competencies: basic, technical and social/managerial.

Two countries emerged as leaders for implementing competency-based management: El Salvador and Ecuador. (See the El Salvador and Ecuador cases' highlights below.) While their trail-blazing was welcomed, the RMU urged these COs to ensure that their

learning was passed on to others in the region. The RMU's emphasis was for the region as a whole to have a common understanding, if not a common system of implementation that moved at the same pace.

By the end of FY03, the region was well on its way to implementing its initiative, albeit not uniformly. In the case of Haiti, for example, there was no progress, while other COs had introduced competencies into their job descriptions and performance management systems, and some were completing competency gap analyses. Broadly, the region was advancing in the application of competencies, but it has continued to focus strategically on the matter during FY04.

In the region's FY04 Annual Operating Plan, under its strategic programming priority for aligning functions and structures to support the facilitator/catalyst role, it set as its strategic objective to ensure that management staff master the principal required competencies for the roles of manager as well as for facilitator/catalyst. To this end, the AOP contains four objectives related to competencies:

1. Clarify and differentiate the roles of executive, senior and middle managers and incorporate competencies into each job, using the development of IOPs and performance evaluations
2. Align administrative performance management systems with competencies
3. Align recruitment systems with competencies
4. Develop an evaluation scheme using the competency model for the region and the COs.

This last objective will take the region into FY05, and a key purpose will be examining if competencies have affected innovation and, consequently, strengthened organizational capability. In effect, this will mean the validation of the competencies initiative as a path toward implementing the management framework, and its required organizational—and programmatic—changes.

As of mid-FY04, Latin America's COs were using the competency dictionary for performance appraisals and 360 feedback, integrating competencies into more job descriptions, and beginning to use competencies in recruitment. Ecuador and El Salvador, for example, have begun to train staff in how to use competencies for recruitment processes.

The issues of gap analysis and staff development planning related to competencies are still evolving. A regional team on the competency initiative, with the participation of Atlanta HR's Regional Coordinator Cesar Duron, met in November 2003 to review progress. The team proposed that two countries, one from each of the sub-regions of Central America and South America, should take the lead on each of the four AOP objectives related to competencies. The two countries would each be known as a Center of Reference on the objectives.

The plan is for each Center of Reference to collect and share experiences on implementing the competency initiative, including the design of tools, methods, and models that could be of use to all of the region's COs.

CONCLUSION:

While the evaluation of the competencies initiative has yet to be done, the RMU clearly has a sense that there has been progress in the region on its original conceptual goal, that is, to strengthen organizational capabilities for carrying out the programmatic goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015.

The process also has raised important regional questions, such as how to leverage for the whole region the competency strengths of staff in one country or another. And, it has raised programmatic questions, such as how to link competencies to rights-based approaches. In all, the involvement of national staff has been a critical part of rolling out this initiative. Yet, says Regional Director, Rafael Callejas, the competencies initiative is only a starting point for leveraging change.

CARE EI Salvador: Highlights of Competency Implementation Process

Background:

CARE EI Salvador (CES) emerged as one of two lead countries for competency implementation in the LARMU region. It has made enormous progress over the last 15 months, but the groundwork for its competencies implementation was laid in the year and a half before starting the process.

In 2001, Mario Lima, as new Country Director, initiated a strategic change process that was highly participatory and focused on people as well as programming. He worked within the Latin American Management Framework that had been established and was heavily backed by the RMU. The management framework specifically mandated implementation of competencies as a vehicle to instituting organizational and programmatic change.

Now, with Mario's groundwork and 15 months into its implementation, the competency process is showing signs that it has been instrumental to the country office's shift in its capabilities and programs. Mario believes that he sees the competency profile of the CO shifting. While this is not yet quantified, significant anecdotal evidence suggests that the competency implementation is yielding genuine change.

Mario reports, "We now have some people with competencies that we would never have had a few years ago." These staff are opening doors to a different kind of programming. For example, one staff member, a former Civil Police officer, whose strengths are in advocacy, negotiation and influencing, was able to persuade six municipalities to work together in CARE-backed development programs. This staff member's credibility was especially high for the municipalities because he had been CARE's primary lobbyist in the Salvadorean Congress for aid to poor landholders after the 2001 earthquake. Through him, and over resistance from a powerful foreign donor, CARE was able to win access to aid for over 6,000 very poor families who otherwise would have been left out of the legislation. Previously, Mario notes, CARE EI Salvador would not have had the political skills, knowledge and contacts to negotiate these types of programming possibilities.

Another example of change is the staff member who was hired initially for communications work in advocacy after the 2001 earthquake. Today, this staffer works on shifting the image of CARE EI Salvador to build its constituency locally. His activities now include working with local private sector companies to create a list of organizations to which they may wish to contribute, and creating 30-second public service announcements about CARE's work in overcoming poverty. The Country Office hopes that this will begin to lay the foundation for local support, both in terms of volunteers and funding.

The results with respect to programming are "a new generation of projects that we would not have had before," said Mario.

The following traces the highlights of a five-stage process in CARE EI Salvador:

- I. **Laying the Groundwork April 2001-Sept. 2002**
 - CD Mario Lima arrived in 2001 and initiated a survey of the staff on the country office's organizational climate to identify ways to break away from old paradigms and initiate a change process.

- The LARMU Management Framework was circulated and discussed in workshops. The objective was to let staff see that there are new ways to think and do things.
- This was followed by the first highly participatory AOP process, which produced a plan that focused on organizational climate and organizational learning.
- In July 2002, CES identified three key themes for its objectives on organizational climate: Teamwork, Shared Leadership, and Horizontal Communication. These later helped pave the way for CES's definitions of its competencies.
- In August-September 2002, the CO revised its Long Range Strategic Plan and defined its new AOP. During this process, the LRSP and the AOP were linked to organizational competencies, and "People (Competencies)" was the first of its five strategic objectives. This set the stage for implementation of the region's competency initiative.

II. Preparing the People Team, Constituting a Learning Community, and Designing their Action Plan Sept.-Dec. 02

- CES called for voluntary teams to spearhead the LRSP objectives; participants defined the criteria for selection; and all of the teams met to establish ways for coordinating their work. In October 2002, the "People" team met to agree on their objectives and create a work plan that included their function as a learning community. Their task as a learning community was part of the CO's organizational learning initiative, which required all the strategic teams to engage in reflection and learning on their work.
- The team then undertook their own learning about competencies, using the CARE USA model and all of the other information available from HQ.
- By December 2002, the team designed its strategies and action plan for implementing competencies.

III. First Phase of Implementation: Awareness Campaign, Competency Definitions, Job Families, Competency-based Recruitment Training, and Preparation for a CO-wide 360 Jan.-June 03

- In January 2003, the team initiated an awareness campaign for all staff within the CO on competencies.
- In March, the team organized a workshop with external consultants to define organizational competencies for CES. CARE USA's competency definitions and model served as a basis of the discussion. The products of the workshop included: a first approximation of the CO's organizational competencies, operational definitions of those competencies, behaviors associated with them, identification of varying degrees to which competencies are expected to be demonstrated, and job families for the CO.
- In April, the team used an electronic survey of all staff to validate the earlier work in March. It asked for additional information on competencies, the associated behaviors, job families, and the degrees of expected demonstration of competencies.
- A second workshop using an outside consultancy was held in April to validate the organizational competencies and the expected level of demonstrated competence for two job families: Management and Coordination. The information from the staff survey was used as input. The People Team

learned the job family methodology and then applied it to the remaining four job families without use of external consultants.

- At a regional event in April, two CES staff were trained in “targeted selection,” the competency-based recruitment and interviewing method. They also shared their experience in competency implementation so far with regional counterparts.
- Between March and May, CES moved forward with its plan to institute a 360-degree feedback process for the entire staff. The team chose a vendor whose software would allow them to identify organizational and individual competency gaps.
- By June 2003, the CO was ready to review its strategic thinking, and decided to use the Balanced Scorecard method as a fresh approach to evaluating its organizational performance.

IV. Second Phase of Implementation June: Executing CO-wide 360, Identification of Organizational and Individual Gaps, Interpretation of Results for Staff, Development Plans Designed June-Oct 2003

- Between June and August 2003, CES implemented an organization-wide process of 360-degree feedback as part of its annual appraisal process. The goal is to identify organizational and individual competency gaps.
- In August, a workshop was held to help interpret the 360 results using external consultants. The results were also related to the CO’s strategic organizational performance under its Balanced Scorecard.
- Concerned about how staff would react to the 360 results, a meeting was called for all managers to assist them in interpreting the results and in encouraging them to focus on development plans. Managers are asked to call meetings with the staff to interpret their results and outline staff development possibilities.
- In September, the CES’s experience is shared at a sub-regional Central American meeting on competencies.
- Based on an analysis of organizational competency gaps, strategies and training are designed to address staff and organizational development needs. Two priority competencies were identified as “Developing Teams” and “Building Relationships.”

V. Final Phase of Implementation: Revising Job Descriptions, Implementing Competency-based Hiring; Sharing Learning within the Region Oct.-Jan. 2004

- During this phase, the team began to assist other countries in the Central American region with competency implementation through offering their process and learning.
- A key facet of the implementation—the revision of all job descriptions to incorporate competencies—was undertaken. Nearly all JDs are revised by January 04.
- In addition, training in the targeted selection process was carried out at country level and is now being consistently applied.
- The People Team meets as a knowledge management group to reflect on and analyze its process of competency implementation. It will present its work at the June 2004 Knowledge Fair in CARE El Salvador with the possibility of participation in the CARE-wide Knowledge Fair organized by LARMU in Sept. 2004.

CARE EI Ecuador: Highlights of Competency Implementation Process

Steps:

As a sub-regional leader on LARMU's competency initiative, CARE Ecuador has sought to model and create a methodology for strengthening the capabilities of the organization using competencies.

As part of its preparation for this role, it carried out a country office climate survey in March and April of 2002 in order to understand the staff's perceptions about the working atmosphere, conduct of staff, and opportunities to improve the image of CARE. And, in July that year, CARE Ecuador carried out a GED gap analysis.

The country office's FY03 operating plan, elaborated that April 2002, set out as a strategic objective to "develop the structure, climate and competencies needed to reduce poverty." In fulfilling that objective, the country office restructured, delineating more clearly the roles, responsibilities and authority of the executive team, senior management and line management. Later in that fiscal year, CARE Ecuador reworked its job descriptions to incorporate competencies by job families.

At the start of calendar year 2003, a team was formed to support the competencies initiative. It proceeded to "socialize," or internally promote, the competencies to all staff through distribution of a Spanish-language version of the competency development guide and other materials from regional management on competencies. It followed up with two workshops, the first for senior staff, the second for all staff in the main office in Quito.

As part of the roll-out, senior staff were asked in February 2003 to identify two competencies to include on their IOPs. Later that year, all staff were asked to incorporate competencies into their IOPs.

Between March and June 2003, CARE Ecuador also revised its compensation and rewards policies, as well as its contracting practices, to fit its new structure and to ensure greater equity.

CARE Ecuador has also made progress in advancing competencies in its human resources processes. Between October 2003 and March 2004, the country office held four workshops on the competency-based recruitment techniques for what is called "targeted selection." This focuses on interviewing job candidates, and 75 percent of the staff participated in these training workshops. The country office is currently revising its performance management processes and tools to incorporate competencies.

CARE Ecuador has shared its experiences with other South American CARE offices to support their implementation of the competencies initiative.

Results So Far:

The implementation of competencies has had three results in terms of staff changes. First, performance evaluations are showing that staff have increased their competency levels in areas where they have focused in their IOPs. Second, staff feel greater confidence in the competency-based candidate selection process because they believe

it is more objective and equitable. And, lastly, CARE Ecuador's senior team feels that its members can already observe higher competency levels with respect to their facilitating role on policy issues with local governments. A key marker for the Latin American management framework was to shift to a more facilitating role in fostering change to reduce poverty.

CARE Ecuador also sees a change in the design of its projects, which now incorporate elements of gender equity and diversity, social justice and rights.

In addition, the country office has taken the competency initiative to partners. Two partner organizations, with which CARE Ecuador is working on institutional strengthening, were invited and took part in the competency training workshops inside CARE Ecuador. They are now interested in developing their own competency-based human resources practices with CARE's assistance. And, later this year, CARE Ecuador will work with the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Vice Presidency of the Republic on a model to ensure universal health care, part of which will be devoted to human resources practices based on competencies.