



The Very Model of a Modern Senior Manager

Should all executives be cut from the same cloth? The head of HR thinks so—she's already creating a competency model for the organization—but the rest of the leadership team isn't so sure.

by Mike Morrison

"HE'S LEAVING THE BUILDING, and he's taking Sweetie and Scotty with him," reported the deep male voice coming through the cell phone in Anne Baxter's hands. The HR director shot a quizzical look at Barker Foods' CEO, Colin Anthony, who was sitting directly across from her, rifling through the papers strewn across his desk. Colin waved a hand dismissively—the universal sign for "Let him go, let him go"—and Anne relayed the message. Doug Lothian, the just-fired national sales director of Barker's chocolates and confections division, was being escorted out of the building by a security guard and a junior member of the human resources staff. Among the personal belongings he was carrying out were framed animation reels of Sweetie and Scotty, the characters Barker Foods had featured in its ad campaigns in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Several senior executives—the highest-performing managers in 2004—had received the collectibles as part of a holiday bonus,

HBR's cases, which are fictional, present common managerial dilemmas and offer concrete solutions from experts.

and the prints were prized among the leadership group, mostly because only a dozen or so existed.

"I'd just better not see them on eBay," Colin remarked before turning his attention back to the matter at hand. Anne was there to debrief him on the schism in Sales, the company's latest leadership crisis.

Doug had come up through the ranks. Since he had impressed his supervisors as an aggressive local sales rep, they had put him through leadership training and promoted him to regional manager. After six years in that

jotted down a few more notes in Doug's personnel file.

"We've taken a hit on Valentine's Day sales - I don't want the same thing to happen with Easter," Colin said with equal parts annoyance and resignation. "Who's on deck?"

Kian Hesemeyer, the assistant director of national sales, looked like a good candidate for the interim. He'd been trained and championed by Doug, but his management style was less abrasive, more inclusive. He'd fielded a lot of the sales reps' complaints about Doug anyway; and, Anne pointed out, Kian

one, was interested in getting more data before making any decisions.

"It does get back to what we were talking about several months ago," he responded. "There are simply too many senior managers operating on their own agendas. The cowboy mentality might have worked ten years ago, but we've grown exponentially since then, and the market is much more competitive. There's just no room for rogue leaders."

Despite the company's recent personnel issues, there was no doubt that Cleveland-based Barker was continuing to grow. Over the past 35 years, it had expanded from a local confectioner with 40 employees to a multinational packaged-foods producer with some 65,000 employees in multiple offices and manufacturing plants worldwide. Barker was one of the top three chocolate makers in the world but also claimed hefty shares of the markets for breakfast cereals and granola bars, fruit juices, ice cream novelties, and prepared frozen meals. The company (the chocolates and confections division in particular) was continually pursuing new branding partnerships - for instance, Barker's recent lucrative placement of BigBark candies in the animated film *Hondo's Big Adventures*, and the associated merchandising. In the past year and a half, Barker had also acquired two smaller, family-owned candy companies (one in Michigan and another in Nevada), hoping to use their plants and technologies to launch a separate manufacturing and services unit that would cater to private-label brands.

Because of the attempts to expand quickly, Barker's leadership development process had been reduced to traditional training - which meant there wasn't enough emphasis on *how* results should be achieved. Barker offered comprehensive executive education courses and had created an in-depth company values document that was part of every employee's orientation packet. But, from Anne's perspective, there was nothing in the leadership development framework that explicitly

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role, eight product launches, and one regime change, Doug was heading up national sales, where his creativity and impulsivity were considered both managerial strengths and potential weaknesses. Just a year or so into Doug's tenure as national sales director, Barker had decided to relaunch several of its classic candy bars in a series of limited-edition flavors, hoping to breathe life into the brand. As different functions in the organization worked overtime to implement the new strategy, Doug's impulsive nature backfired on him: He made a batch of bad decisions about how to market the new products, engaged in some questionable selling behaviors, and lost the confidence of his customers and his sales team. Ultimately, he also lost his job.

"The next person in will have a lot of bridging to do, externally and internally," Anne remarked as she finished up her summary of the situation and

was the one who brought HR in when things were breaking down. "The team seems to trust him," she said. She had more resumes and phone numbers in hand but set them aside. She admitted to Colin that she was wondering if she might be able to use Doug's situation as proof of concept for her ongoing leadership development project "Here's a perfect example of why we need to define exactly what we're looking for from our people at the top."

Colin had been in on the initial discussions about building a leadership competency model at Barker Foods - a framework that would not only highlight the critical values, knowledge, and skills necessary to lead any of the divisions of the consumer-packaged-goods company but also identify the corresponding tasks, behaviors, and measures of success. There was mixed support for such a plan among the members of the senior team. Colin, for

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tied the ways executives acted to the revenues they generated within their divisions.

Doug Lothian's problems demonstrated precisely why there should be such a framework. Doug's natural aggressiveness translated into impatience: He hadn't paid enough attention to Marketing's carefully designed

Colin wondered how easy it would be to codify the higher-level capabilities necessary to successfully head up any of Barker's diverse global units. Just thinking about his own ascendancy at the company gave him pause; he'd worked for a wide variety of senior managers, all with their own styles of communicating and negotiating. But

dropped Kian's file on Colin's desk and then headed back toward her office. She'd have to schedule and reschedule a lot of interviews.

Filling the Mold

A few days later, Anne found herself in Grand Rapids, Michigan, about 300 miles away from her office, hypnotized by the sounds and glimmer of the extrusion and enrobing machines and conveyor belts, all in perpetual synchronized motion, and by the sweet smells of warm sugar and vanilla. In the interest of time, she probably could have interviewed the executive from the recently acquired Colonial Sweets & Nuts over the phone. But the call of the cocoa was too much to resist; plus she'd have an opportunity to better acquaint herself with one of the latest additions to the Barker Foods family. Colonial was of particular interest to Anne because, before it had been acquired, the company had been using what she considered a modified competency model, mostly as a mechanism for assessing line workers' skills. That model focused less on high-level leadership concepts and more on the specific tasks and logistics involved with manufacturing.

She'd just had time to take in the atmosphere - less Wonkalike and more widgetlike than she'd hoped for-when the receptionist came over to escort her to the executive offices. They marched past the tour group standing by the huge picture windows ("Why can't they hurry through this part and get to the samples?" Anne overheard one teenager whisper to his friend) and up several short flights of stairs to the office of Zachary Colleton, chief operations officer at Colonial. While Colin was laid back and Doug had been high-strung, Zachary was all business. As Anne entered the office, she tried a little small talk, joking that she'd never get anything done if she worked at the plant. Zachary responded with a polite smile and guided her to a chair across from his at the small round table in his office. "What was it you wanted to go over?"

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plan for a slow rollout of Barker's new dark-chocolate-and-cherry BigBarkbars. Additionally, his loose definition of dynamic pricing confused retail customers and created ill will between the manager and his sales reps. The sales team was required to sell at premium prices, while Doug was giving deep discounts to customers he considered critical. Some stores canceled their orders; the bars weren't selling well anyway because, the retailers thought, Barker hadn't built enough buzz. And increasingly, none of the sales reps felt they could have a productive conversation with their manager.

As Colin sat there thinking about Doug's missteps and the company's pursuit of a bigger share of the global market, it became more and more obvious to him that the organization's understanding of "leadership" needed some refinement. The goal was to improve the quality of leadership - to enhance individual and organizational performance and to attract even more high-level talent in the future. As Anne had said in a meeting with the top team, the company couldn't use general characteristics such as "ability to lead change" to define leadership competencies; the language Barker used to talk about its executives' development had to be more precise, tied to specific behaviors and outcomes, and embedded in the culture.

then, he reasoned, coming up with the list was HR's problem, not his.

Three months earlier, Anne and a small team of colleagues from HR had been given the green light by the executive committee to research and create a prototype competency model. (The time seemed right, since a different leadership crisis had recently gotten everyone's attention: The head of IT's bungling of the new inventory management system rollout in the beverages division had left retailers understocked and under fire by customers demanding their bottles of Peachy Punch.) Anne's group had been interviewing the 100 highest-performing midlevel and senior managers across the organization and drafting a list of competencies required for success at Barker - skills that would hopefully mesh with whatever strategic goals Barker set forth. They were slated to present their findings to Colin and the rest of the executive committee by the end of the month.

"Competency models, leadership scorecards, personality profiles - hell, bring in the tarot cards if you want," Colin told Anne. "Do you think you could do your presentation early? I'd really like to make this a priority," he said as he pinged his assistant to set up an Outlook appointment with Kian Hesemeyer.

"I'll have something prepared by the end of next week," Anne promised. She

When Anne asked Zachary about his competency checklist, he replied, "People on the floor understand what's expected of them and how what they do is helping the company. When they fail in a task, there is a clear understanding of the why, when, and how. Similarly, when we're hiring or promoting, we know exactly what we're looking for." The checklist had been fairly easy to compile: To add value to the organization, factory workers needed to be on time, pay attention to detail, and communicate well with supervisors and colleagues; other skills were involved too, of course, but those were the core competencies. Because the production work was relatively predictable, Zachary explained, the company rarely had to make adjustments to the list.

"If you were going to create a similar checklist for someone at your level - a functional manager, someone with P&L responsibility and direct reports - what would you put on it?" Anne asked.

Zachary paused for a second - after all, he'd been under Barker's umbrella only a short time, and this was his first time meeting the HR executive in person. "I'm not sure I'd put anything on it," he said. "I think it's dangerous to overdefine the capabilities a leader should have-especially when the company is trying to establish or reestablish itself in a bunch of different areas." As someone being charged with basically creating a new business for Barker Foods, Zachary felt strongly about this point. A competency model might make sense in certain divisions or functions, he said, but not in others. "I don't think it's wise to oversimplify the work senior executives do. At my level, it's a different ball game."

Anne had gotten similar feedback from others - not just about the loss of flexibility organization-wide but also about the loss of flexibility individual managers would have in grooming leaders within their units. "You'll undermine the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation that got us here and that we need more of," Barker's CFO

had told her when she'd spoken with him a month before.

Even so, other executives were as passionate as Anne about the idea of creating a competency framework that could align organizational performance with leaders' selection, development, compensation and rewards, and succession planning. The competencies could never be perfectly defined, the supporters admitted, but the framework represented an important starting point.

Many of the senior executives wanted to avoid talking details. Their idea of a competency framework was one centered on values, like "commitment" and "respect," not on specific behaviors in those categories. Or they wanted to talk about high-level concepts like "continuous learning" and

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"strategic thinking." Some managers said that a willingness to learn and the ability to quickly integrate any new knowledge into emerging-product development and marketing plans were critical for success. Unfortunately, this kind of discipline was largely absent from the urgent day-to-day realities of the business.

Anne was betting she could get the naysayers to come aboard once they took a closer look at the proposed model. It included traditional leadership capabilities - being self-aware, setting direction, leading change - as well as the unique knowledge and skills required of leaders in the consumer-goods industry and at Barker in particular. Within each of these areas of competency, the group had delineated three levels of capability, from novice to expert, not just highlighting what to do but also describing real-world actions and measures of success.

"I know there is concern about loss of flexibility-but believe it or not, some of that can actually be built into the framework," Anne told Zachary. "Don't you think it could be helpful, particularly as we're expanding overseas, to give our people in the senior ranks specific guidelines and expectations for growth?"

Zachary raised his eyebrows slightly, thinking about how difficult it would be to factor in the cultural differences of leaders, along with their individual functional and unit responsibilities, when defining "the successful leader" at Barker Foods. But he said nothing more.

Anne noticed that it was coming up on 3:00. She thanked Zachary for his time and feedback. In return, he graciously offered the complete Colonial

factory tour, but a disappointed Anne knew she had a plane to catch. "Maybe we can just skip the tour part - and get to the samples?" she asked hopefully.

Breaking the Mold

"Flexible. Intelligent. Snappy dresser," Olivia Deckers scribbled on her yellow notepad before vehemently crossing out the line. The VP of supply chain for Barker's chocolates and confections unit was sitting by herself at Rafe's Pub, a popular downtown lunch destination for Barker employees, only a short walk from the offices. "Kian's late - as usual," she thought, watching the steady flow of tables emptying and refilling with people. She was gearing up for a powwow that afternoon with Anne Baxter to talk competencies. They'd had to reschedule the appointment twice already-once because Anne was traveling, and again because, well,

Olivia had hidden behind a "necessary" vendor meeting to put off the discussion. Truth be told, she wasn't looking forward to it.

She wasn't against the concept of bringing more consistency to the company's leadership development process. She just wondered if the payoff would be worth all the work: A competency framework would require constant monitoring to determine who

"This whole exercise is just another oversized solution. We're all supposed to feel like we're doing something important for our future - blah, blah, blah. In the end, it will have absolutely no impact on the business," Olivia declared. Obviously, the HR department would have to take the lead in managing any activities around the competency model, she reasoned - and Anne, especially, stood to gain because

predecessors. Kian, for instance, had impressed the CEO with his calm, rational, intelligent decision making - quite a contrast to Doug's hotheaded nature. But then, before personality flaws had caught up with Doug, the chocolates and confections division had been posting terrific results under his leadership. Doug had been an effective leader at some level, for some period of time, Colin thought.

The bell rang, and the black elevator doors slid open. As he stepped on to the eighth floor, Colin noticed the fairly large print in front of him, hanging opposite the bank of elevators. It was a picture of Barker Foods founder and former CEO Paulus Barker; he was flanked by two employees - one dressed as Sweetie, the other as Scotty - smiling and waving benevolently as they posed in front of corporate headquarters, circa 1963. Paulus Barker was a brilliant but painfully shy man who always used go-betweens (a secretary, an assistant VP, his limo driver) to communicate with others. His employees were loyal to him, however. Through his proxies, Paulus was remarkably fair and generous, handing out bonus checks and boxes of sweets for employees to take home to their families, as well as other perks. He always encouraged and celebrated people's innovative ideas for new products and processes - even if he wasn't always the one to shake hands.

Colin studied the print on the wall for a minute and wondered: What would Paulus Barker have thought about competency modeling? If such a leadership development tool had existed 40 or 50 years ago, would the man who built Barker Foods from local player to multinational giant have even made the cut?

Colin kept turning those questions round and round in his head as he strode into the conference room.

Should Barker go forward with competency modeling? • Four commentators offer their expert advice beginning on page 34.

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was living up to the standards. There would have to be 360-degree feedback, interim discussions, and frequent updates - which would require even more data gathering - all while the company's leadership needs kept changing. Frankly, she thought, there was just too much *real* work to do, with real deadlines and dollars involved, to be sidelined by what would seemingly be a Sisyphean task.

When Kian finally showed up ten minutes later, the two executives put their order in right away - a cheeseburger and fries for Kian, and a Cobb salad for Olivia.

Olivia shared her concerns about the competency model. "You've been talking directly to Colin - how serious do you think he is about this whole thing?" she asked.

"The executive committee thought enough of the plan to have the meeting moved up," Kian said. "I'm not sure where Colin's coming from, but I do know the whole Doug thing really ticked him off. As we were going over next steps and I was telling him my plans for mending fences, I could tell he was trying really hard not to curse out Doug and put a hex on him forever."

"I have my theories..." Olivia began.

"I'm not surprised," Kian responded with a chuckle.

of that. "She'd be right there, at the head of the table," Olivia said.

"This is about creating a systematic process for developing leaders," Kian said, playing devil's advocate. "You can't blame Anne for positioning her department, and herself, as a kind of partner in strategy. That's what HR is supposed to do - hire and develop the right people so the company can execute its strategy. Nothing wrong with that."

"I just don't want to become a Stepford executive."

"I don't think there's any chance of that happening," Kian said, subtly guiding his colleague's hand away from his plate of fries.

Colin was on his way to the eighth-floor conference room, where Anne and her staff would be holding court. The CEO had only barely had time to go over the PowerPoint presentation and other materials the HR team had circulated in advance. He did know from casual conversations with colleagues on the senior team that they were pretty evenly split between supporting and opposing the use of a senior-level competency model.

As he stepped into the elevator, Colin reflected on Barker's recent leadership crises - and how the managers who'd stepped in to fix the messes in Sales and IT had differed so greatly from their



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The central characters in this case study are addressing the wrong problem. They're worried about "leadership competencies" - business jargon for the skills, behaviors, and experiences managers need to succeed at an organization. Instead they should be looking more closely at the culture of Barker Foods: How do employees relate to one another? Are they honest with one another and with customers? Do the company's leaders manage with respect?

Strong, successful leaders will flourish, at every level of the organization and in every division, in a caring and consistent culture. Certainly, a checklist of desired behaviors can be a practical tool. It can help people understand what's expected of them; it can also help managers and supervisors coach people and grow their careers. We use competencies at our company. But if you're Colin Anthony or Anne Baxter and you try to suddenly impose a competency model-or, for that matter, any leadership development tool or technique-on a cracked cultural foundation, the model will never take hold.

Over the past few decades at Colgate-Palmolive, we have developed a framework for

Competencies are the glue that joins all of our HR processes; they factor into our various employee training and development programs (about 110 worldwide) as well as our promotion and compensation decisions. But our framework wasn't created in a vacuum, nor does it stand alone; it is grounded in our culture, the central tenet of which I've expressed at times as "Love is a better motivator than fear." The sought-after skills, behaviors, and experiences uphold our core values of caring, global teamwork, and continuous improvement, and our workplace principle of managing with respect. They change as the business does-twice in the past dozen years, in fact-but they are always aligned with the culture.

The characters in this case study seem to overlook the importance of culture and values. The CEO is worried mostly about Valentine's Day and Easter and seems less concerned about why he knows so little about what's going on in Sales. Zachary Colleton offers Anne a tour of the Colonial factory, and she declines because she doesn't want to miss her plane-yet she's still wondering about getting candy samples. Anne is essentially saying, "My schedule is more important than those of the hundreds of people who work at this plant, and I don't really care." The inclusive and respectful culture that the founder of Barker Foods built over time is quickly being destroyed because of Colin's inattention to it. If the CEO wants to create a culture of continuous improvement, he needs to make that, not competencies, his top priority. He must take a closer look at how people act and interact - and surround himself with individuals who share his beliefs about the importance of organizational culture. He might be able to work with Anne on this front.

In the English countryside, there are these beautiful green lawns that look as smooth as billiard tables. A visitor asks a groundskeeper, "How can I get my lawn to look like yours?" And the groundskeeper says, "Well, first you roll it for 50 years." Organizations are like that. Legacy and consistency matter. Competency modeling, unless it's rooted in an underlying philosophical belief, will be perceived as-and will be - nothing more than business jargon.

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what we call "personal leadership." Within this framework are two general types of organizational competencies, defined with help from managers in most of our subsidiaries around the world. There are the technical competencies, or the areas of functional and technical expertise, which differ from one job or department to the next. Then there are the leadership competencies, or the skills that managers need to create strategies, inspire and motivate people, bounce back from disappointments, and get results. The leadership competencies are common across all functions. They include behaviors such as "Set the example" and "Value unique contributions."



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If Colin Anthony wants to build a leadership competency model just for the sake of it or to appease HR, he shouldn't even bother walking into that conference room. If, however, he's looking for a mechanism to help drive a conversation about what kinds of leaders Barker Foods needs and wants; to align the senior team's expectations for its managers; and to create a common language the top team can use to seek, train, and assess high-performing executives—then he should be an active participant in the meeting.

An effective competency model considers two important dimensions: the "what" and the "how." The "what" can look different at different levels of an organization. On the factory floor, a competency model can link job performance to quantifiable standards—line workers need to be able to, say, move a specified number of cartons with a certain percentage of accuracy. When you're talking about the development of senior-level talent, the model has to be more complex. It should still define skills, behaviors, and metrics but also carry additional attributes or principles. For instance, if skill in achieving optimal results is one of the competencies captured in the model, it needs to be accompanied by a competency that enables it, such as proficiency in cultivating collaboration and consensus. If a leadership competency

Meanwhile, an organization shouldn't constantly tinker with its competency model. It's best to give a model time to settle in, to see what it looks like once it's embedded and manifested in different processes. Consistency over time is crucial.

If you build your competency model in-house, with some help from external professionals and based on a comprehensive body of research, you're more likely to gain high rates of participation and buy-in from senior leaders. You're getting the top team to articulate its hopes and expectations for the company—and its best ideas for finding and shaping successors. Before joining MasterCard, I helped sales organizations assess, place, and train candidates in retail branch-manager positions on Wall Street. To the degree that our programs were successful, it was because our frameworks reflected both the talent-development and frontline-execution perspectives.

Finally, the evangelism for a behavioral competency model must start from the top, with a CEO who publicly supports such a model and is able to articulate its business value. MasterCard Worldwide built its competency model on existing leadership attributes and values before going public in May 2006. We wanted to align our new strategy and the competency model. Our president and CEO, Bob

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model addresses both dimensions, it becomes an effective tool for holding people accountable and managing performance. If it doesn't, a company can end up with mediocre performers and sagging bottom-line results.

Even as it denotes a fixed set of leadership requirements, a competency model can be built to accommodate different managerial styles—for instance, multiple ways of inspiring others or mentoring junior staffers. It can also recognize various types of "how." (Paulus Barker might very well have passed muster had he been assessed under a competency framework.)

Selander, not only helped build the model but also discussed it in-depth after the company went public, explaining to employees how our talent-development strategy meshed with our overarching goals and values. He and our CFO, Chris McWilton, then jointly championed interactive sessions so that employees would understand our strategy, our financial models, and the MasterCard competency model.

Colin could learn a thing or two from best practices. He needs to get out of his current reactionary mode and start thinking more strategically about the company's processes for developing senior talent.



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Enough about Barker Foods has changed in its recent past - growth through acquisitions, an increasingly diverse product mix, and greater reach into international markets-that the requirements for successful leadership at the organization have probably changed, too. The acquisition of several smaller companies, for instance, has injected new skills, personalities, bad habits, and best practices into the business. The influx of new leadership talent has its obvious upside but can also present steep challenges if that talent is not cultivated and managed appropriately.

CEO Colin Anthony and the executive committee need to take a closer look at Barker's senior-level bench strength and develop a leadership competency model. Otherwise, the leadership crises will continue to mount, and the company will be drawn into a never-ending cycle of subpar performance. Evidence of that is the likely appointment of Kian Hesemeyer to the national sales manager's slot. This is nothing more than "satisficing"-settling for a B-level leader when what's truly needed is an A player. A competency model that cuts across lines of business and functions would provide the appropriate data for identifying A-level leaders

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(both internal and external candidates) and a more reliable framework for making decisions about who advances in the hierarchy, who gets hired, and who gets fired.

Anne Baxter's one-off, research-heavy approach to creating a competency model may be eliciting useful information about which leadership requirements to include in the tool, but her process isn't engendering enough dialogue among the senior team about why leadership needs to be an agenda item right now. It may not be too late for her to change course: She could gather together Barker's senior leaders to talk about the company's major strategic challenges, how well-equipped the leaders

across the organization are to handle those challenges, and how prepared they will be for any future challenges. This kind of collaboration would undoubtedly result in more buy-in for a leadership competency model than would even a stellar presentation by Anne.

In their individual interviews with Anne and her team, some Barker executives raised concerns about how competency models are built and used-chief among them, oversimplification and loss of flexibility. Experience and research demonstrate that leaders in today's large and complex businesses rely heavily on several types of proficiencies - including certain cognitive and intellectual capabilities (such as conceptual and analytical thinking), the ability to engage and motivate people, and the ability to execute strategy. You'll find these themes in practically any company's leadership competency model, but they are weighted differently in organizations, depending on strategy and culture. An executive competency in thinking creatively, for instance, figures prominently in high tech and media. In pharmaceutical firms, a competency in managing innovation processes is more important.

Moreover, companies that do an excellent job of building useful competency models drill deep when defining their terms-all the way down to a specific list of observable behaviors. The competency models of two companies that value innovation-process management may include substantially different desired behaviors. In one company, the critical leadership actions may be process oriented; in the other, they may be more socially oriented.

The "one size doesn't fit all" argument against competency models is often a red herring pulled out by units that feel threatened by the potential loss of autonomy. Companies as diverse as GE and PepsiCo have used internally consistent behavioral competency models to develop strong leaders-executives who show mastery of unit-specific competencies as well as organization- and industry-related skills.

Colin really needed this HR intervention. Through collaborative discussions facilitated by Anne, the executive team can develop a robust vision of how senior leaders at Barker Foods will need to behave to succeed.

Barker Foods needs to cultivate a systematic method for growing great leaders. The company's focus on individuals as leaders, rather than on leadership development as an organizational capability, has created mixed results: Some executives rise to the requirements of their jobs; others, like Doug Lothian, don't. When leaders fail, CEO Colin Anthony and the human resources team are left scrambling. Although an exceptional individual leader can deliver outstanding results for a while, he may not be very good at creating a process to help other people in his group grow and develop. Without a disciplined approach to creating next-generation leaders, organizational performance may suffer.

Top management would do well to adopt a senior-level competency model—one that denotes the essential knowledge, skills, and values required of those in leadership positions at Barker Foods, as well as the means for assessing and improving those attributes. Such a tool could have served as a valuable reality check before Doug moved up the ranks into management. His creativity and impulsivity helped him succeed in the field, but those same traits later prevented him from taking a broader view of his role as a team leader and building stability and continuity into his division.

A successful competency model has two parts. It certainly needs to specify the leadership fundamentals—that is, the particular personal attributes necessary for an individual to earn and maintain credibility and the abilities required to be a strategist, executor, talent manager, and human capital developer (often all at once). These fundamentals become the company's leadership code. But the model also needs to go beyond the basics to define and support the organization's "leadership brand"—that is, the company's standard for how leaders at all levels will turn customer expectations into employee and organization behaviors. So while it's important to engage internal constituencies in defining leadership competencies, as HR director Anne Baxter has done, it is just as important to engage customers in this process.

Anne should organize a meeting with customers who are critical to Barker's future and

ask how they expect Barker's leaders to behave. (For instance, they probably would have expected Doug to follow through with Marketing's plan for building buzz for the new line of BigBark candies rather than act on his own.) When customers' expectations are baked into the leadership brand and into the competency model, senior leaders will be encouraged to act in ways that will best serve customers and the organization in the long term. Involving customers in the process can therefore turn a generic competency model into a business proposition. The model then also becomes a useful decision-making tool for the senior team: who to hire, who to train, how to train, how to allocate compensation, and so on. With a complete competency model, Barker Foods would enjoy smoother transitions during leadership changes and a deep, highly skilled pool of talent.

Even if Anne's competency model is approved by the executive committee—and I'm not entirely sure she's built up enough support for it—there are signals that it may not be

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deployed effectively. Colin and the rest of the executive committee have been only minimally involved in its development, and the CEO made the issue a priority only in the wake of a crisis in Sales. Anne should not have to present a de facto model. Instead, she should be the facilitator of a collaborative effort—one owned by Colin but with input from the entire executive committee. The CEO can't afford to just assign others to draft a generic leadership competency model. He needs to be an active participant. 

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