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Identifying Collaborative Competencies

Heather Getha-Taylor
University of South Carolina

Increasingly, federal organizations must work together with other organizations to jointly produce public value. Thus, it is important for public employees to develop critical collaborative skills. The National Academy of Public Administration affirmed this by calling for a focus on collaborative competencies, but the question remained: What are collaborative competencies? Many skills are theoretically connected to collaboration, but these links have not been tested empirically. Following the methodology developed by McClelland and furthered by Spencer and Spencer, this article presents the results of a collaborative competency study. This investigation involved the use of matched criterion samples (superior versus average collaborators) from the federal government. Individuals in the criterion samples were interviewed using the behavioral event interview design to identify differentiating competencies and create a competency model for future validation.

Keywords: *collaboration; competencies; behavioral event interview*

The National Academy of Public Administration's (2002) report on the evolving role of federal managers illustrated several trends changing the nature of public sector work, including increased technical complexity, a shrinking managerial workforce, flatter organizational structures, and demands for improved performance. Scholars such as Kamarck (2003) and Kettl (2005) discussed additional trends that are transforming the nature of governance, including the "blurring of the sectors." This "blurring" was discussed as part of the National Performance Review's efforts to integrate business practices into the public sector, but today reflects the need for governmental agencies (and, thus, the people within them) to collaborate with other public, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations to solve "wicked problems," or those problems where no single organization has all the necessary resources or answers and the cost of failure is enormous. Similarly, the growth in the "hollow state" as described by such scholars as Milward & Provan (2000) and Light (2006) further illustrates the need for public sector managers to span boundaries to ensure that an ever-growing number of third-party contractors are held accountable for results. Together, these complex trends speak to a changing public sector environment where collaborative action is replacing traditional hierarchical authority for achieving public sector goals and creating public value.

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Boundary-spanning, or collaborative, public management is now formally recognized in the President's Management Agenda. One section of the President's Management Agenda, the Human Capital Scorecard, focuses on the need for public managers to span organizational boundaries to "share best practices and learn about new developments" (U.S. Office of Personnel Management [OPM], n.d.). According to a related report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), organizations can encourage collaboration by creating Performance Management Systems that identify and reward the competencies related to collaboration (U.S. GAO, 2005). However, a very basic, yet crucial, question remains: What are collaborative competencies? Although the OPM indicates that the set of Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) captures essential collaborative skills, this research suggests that disagreement exists between human resource experts and experienced collaborators when it comes to identifying which skills, attributes, and attitudes are collaborative in nature. This disconnect has serious implications. If such a gap persists in an environment where collaboration is critical for performance, the federal government risks recognizing and rewarding behaviors that do not necessarily contribute to the creation of a more collaborative federal workforce.

Given the centrality of collaboration to this study, a review of the literature revealed that a number of authors have already attempted to identify collaborative competencies. According to Goldsmith and Eggers (2004), managing across boundaries can take time and "requires attitudes and behaviors not commonly developed as part of the typical public manager's experience," (p. 165). The authors provide a list of skills necessary for working across boundaries, including big-picture thinking, coaching, mediation, negotiation, risk analysis, contract management, strategic thinking, interpersonal communications, and teambuilding (p. 158).

Besides the list of skills identified by Goldsmith and Eggers (2004), Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, and Allen (2001) identify a number of core competencies that members need to bring to a collaborative effort, including ability to resolve conflict, communication skills, ability to understand other perspectives, and expertise in the problem area(s). According to Chrislip and Larson (1994), excellent collaborators are those who convene others to solve joint problems, energize around a problem, facilitate the work of others, create vision, and solve problems. Bardach (1998) adds listening skills to the list of competencies needed for effective collaboration (p. 44).

Similarly, the U.S. OPM has identified a list of competencies as part of the ECQs described as critical to "building coalitions" across organizational boundaries. These competencies include partnering, political savvy, and influencing/negotiating. Although these lists are insightful, most are anecdotal and some are contradictory. Regardless of the lack of consensus on what constitutes collaborative competencies, one thing is certain: "People with network skills—collaborative skills not currently highly sought nor valued by government—need to be recruited, rewarded, and promoted," (Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004, p. 159).

Following the qualitative methodology developed by McClelland (1973, 1975, 1976) and further illuminated by Spencer and Spencer (1993), this research presents

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a study designed to distill collaborative competencies. This manuscript focuses on *differentiating competencies*, or those competencies that distinguish superior performers from average performers (Spencer, McClelland, & Spencer, 1990). This investigation involved the use of criterion samples (superior versus average collaborators) from the U.S. federal government. Individuals in the criterion samples were interviewed using the behavioral event interview (BEI) design. Findings were validated statistically and used to create a competency model to be verified through the use of additional criterion samples in future research.

This study contributes to public management scholarship and practice in several important ways. First, it illustrates the importance of connecting competencies to future needs. This connection was stressed in a 2003 U.S. GAO report, which noted the importance of determining "the critical skills and competencies that will be needed to achieve current and future programmatic results." Given the trends driving collaborative public management, it is estimated that collaborative competencies will be in even greater demand in the future. In addition, this study helps to answer the question, "How do we know good performance when we see it?" The empirical verification of collaborative competencies can inform current human resource management practices, including hiring, training, and rewarding federal employees who can collaborate effectively. Finally, this study has important scholarly implications. As collaborative governance gains increasing attention in the scholarly literature, identifying those individual behaviors that correspond with collaboration could not be a more pressing task. Such an investigation opens new avenues for future competency-based research.

Learning From the Past: Competency Studies

The empirical study of competencies originated with David McClelland's pioneering article in *American Psychologist* in 1973. This article began a movement that argued that exams and IQ tests, then the standards of hiring, were useless in predicting job success. Competencies were suggested as another means to predict success in the workplace. The first efforts to identify and develop competencies took place in the U.S. State Department. In the early 1970s, McClelland worked with the Department to identify the characteristics of outstanding Foreign Service Information Officers. The results from this study were used to select hires with the greatest potential for success. This experiment was the first use of McClelland's BEI technique, which is now considered standard procedure for all competency studies.

The BEI technique allows researchers to identify differentiating competencies, or those competencies that separate outstanding from average performers on a particular behavior of interest. In the case of the U.S. State Department, outstanding officers were compared with average officers, identifying the differentiating characteristics that separated the two groups. The results were used to develop a competency model and a related test to administer to potential hires. Although deemed very

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Table 1
Competency Clusters and Competencies of Interest

Achievement	Helping/Service	Influence	Managerial	Cognitive Thinking/ Problem Solving	Personal Effectiveness
Achievement orientation	**Interpersonal understanding**	Impact and influence	Directiveness	Technical expertise	Self-control
Concern for quality and order	Customer service orientation	**Organizational awareness**	**Teamwork and cooperation**	**Information seeking**	**Self-confidence**
Initiative		**Relationship building**	Developing others	**Analytical thinking**	**Organizational commitment**
			Team leadership	**Conceptual thinking**	**Flexibility**

Source: Boyatzis (1982) and Spencer et al. (1994).

effective, the approach was short-lived. In a 1997 interview with Adams, McClelland suggested that the short tenure of competency-based tests was due in part to resistance among those making the hiring decisions: They preferred to use existing tools and methods. However, hiring based on the "usual things," including resumes and academic achievements, says Asch (2005), may result in selecting for characteristics that do not necessarily fit the job at hand.

Despite the short-lived use of competency studies in the U.S. State Department, McClelland's work took hold among organizational psychologists, who have been fine-tuning the method in the 35 years since it was first introduced and implemented. Based on McClelland's groundbreaking work, Boyatzis (1982) compiled a list of 19 competencies common to outstanding managers across sectors. Spencer, McClelland, and Spencer (1994) adapted Boyatzis' work (see Table 1) to illustrate the categories of managerial competencies present in outstanding performers.

In addition to identifying the competencies shared by effective managers, it was Boyatzis who first coined a definition for the term *competency*. A competency, says Boyatzis (1982), is "an underlying characteristic of an individual which is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job" (p. 21). The focus on competencies differs from the traditional approach to human resource management, which centers on knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). The competency approach expands this focus to include motives, traits, and self-concepts that are job-related (Daley, 2002; Tucker & Cofsky, 1994). When considering the differences between competencies and KSAs, it is important to note that the two are intertwined. The OPM stresses that KSAs and competencies are not "mutually exclusive, but can complement and build upon each other to reinforce desired behaviors," (U.S. OPM, 1999, p. 9).

At the same time, competencies are distinguished from traditional KSAs in some important ways. First, competencies focus on future, not just current, performance

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goals. This approach speaks to the government-wide interest in strategic human resource management that attempts to match today's resources with tomorrow's needs and emphasizes "line of sight," or how individual effort contributes to organizational performance. Second, competencies expand beyond KSAs to include the traits, motives, and behaviors that influence performance. Understanding the drivers of performance is a necessary first step in designing appropriate evaluation and reward strategies that support desired behaviors. Unfortunately, Daley (2002) suggests that careful consideration of job-related competencies is generally regarded as "an afterthought" (p. 87).

Additionally, validated competencies can help answer the question "How do we know good performance when we see it?" If public employees are to be held accountable for performance, it is necessary to provide guides for distinguishing levels of performance on a particular outcome of interest. Regrettably, Daley (2002) finds that such guides are rare. Instead, other measures are substituted. Position descriptions are often "conducted in a slipshod fashion," offering candidates little information on performance metrics. Successful performance on the job is instead linked to "academic degrees and other credentials along with years of prior experience in similar or related jobs" (Daley, 2002, p. 87). These approaches, continues Daley, "are virtually worthless"—a point echoed by McClelland at the State Department nearly 30 years earlier.

Finally, competency models can serve as the foundation for hiring, training, and developing outstanding employees. As noted in a 1999 report from the U.S. OPM, "Competencies can offer [HR practitioners] an opportunity to define excellence," (p. 2). However, Daley (2002) offers the following reminder: "Job tasks do not remain fixed" (p. 88). Therefore, it is important to continually revisit competency models to determine their job-relatedness. "Unfortunately, many organizations do not make the effort to carry out the validation studies that establish the competency link to performance" (Daley, 2002, p. 86). The costs associated with such efforts—both in terms of time and money—prohibit most organizations from a careful reassessment on a regular basis. Neglecting this task is not without consequence. Without ongoing reassessment, human resource managers risk using outdated metrics to gauge performance in a changing environment.

In 2006, the OPM and the Chief Human Capital Officer Council (CHCOC) revised the federal government's ECQs that are considered central to leadership effectiveness in the federal government (see Table 2). Together, OPM and the CHCOC identified six competencies that they deemed "fundamental competencies" (interpersonal skills, oral and written communication, continual learning, integrity/honesty, public service motivation) that serve as the foundation for five functional areas: leading change, leading people, results driven, business acumen, and building coalitions (U.S. OPM, 2007a).

According to OPM, these ECQs "define the competencies needed to build a federal corporate culture that drives for results, serves customers, and *builds successful teams and coalitions within and outside the organization*," (OPM, 2007a, italics added). Although the U.S. OPM contends that the ECQs capture coalition building

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Table 2
Executive Core Qualifications

Leading Change	Leading People	Results Driven	Business Acumen	Building Coalitions/ Communications	Fundamental Competencies
Creativity/ innovation	Conflict management	Accountability	Financial management	Partnering	Interpersonal skills
External awareness	Leveraging diversity	Customer service	Human capital management	Political savvy	Oral communication
Flexibility	Developing others	Decisiveness	Technology management	Influencing/ negotiating	Continual learning
Resilience	Team building	Entrepreneurship			Written communication
Strategic thinking		Problem solving			Integrity/ honesty
Vision		Technical credibility			Public service motivation

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2007a).

(or what may be considered collaborative skills), this connection is questionable. According to Adams's 1997 interview with the founding scholar on competency research, David McClelland, too often researchers rely on experts alone to identify competencies of interest. However, McClelland cautioned against this approach. Although interviewing experts may save money and time in the short run, this approach does not provide the complete competency picture. BEIs are required to identify the full spectrum of competencies necessary to perform a job successfully. Thus, it is important to interview public managers who are actively engaged in collaboration to distill collaborative competencies in an empirically sound fashion.

The Collaborative Competency Study

There are three primary ways to distill differentiating competencies. The first method, the classic study design, uses criterion samples to distinguish average from superior performers. The second method is an abbreviated study, which relies on expert panels to determine competencies of interest. The final method is used when there are not enough jobholders in a particular job to offer comparisons. This final method focuses on single case studies of incumbents to offer insights on future needs (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 93). The study presented here employed the first method: the classic protocol as presented by Spencer and Spencer (1993). This approach is based on McClelland's pioneering work (1973, 1975, 1976) and has been used by human resource management experts at such organizations as the U.S. OPM (Anonymous, personal communication, June 29, 2006) and the Internal Revenue Service (Thompson & Rainey, 2003) to identify competencies that differentiate superior from average performers with regard to a

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desired behavior. The comparison between superior and average performers refers to "criterion reference," which is critical to the validity of this study. Detailed description of each step employed in the competency study is provided below. These descriptions not only illustrate the methods used in this study, but also provide guidance for future competency studies.

Before embarking on any competency study, it is important for the researcher to first engage in preparatory work. Scholars must first gain an understanding of organizational (or sectorwide) needs. This must first be considered to decide which behaviors are of interest now and in the future (such as collaboration). In addition to reviewing the literature to identify areas of need, Spencer and Spencer (1993) recommend conducting interviews to determine the value of the proposed competency study. For this study, a group of 13 federal human resource management experts was interviewed to understand the concept of collaboration in contemporary performance assessment. These interviews revealed that (a) the current set of ECQs are generally considered the guideline for assessing collaborative ability, and (b) there is no single federal recognition for collaborative success.

After completing the necessary background work, the first step in the classic competency study protocol is defining performance effectiveness criteria. Spencer and Spencer (1993) indicate that criteria should generally be "hard outcome measures, such as sales or profit data" (p. 94). In the absence of such criteria, "nominations or ratings by bosses, peers, subordinates, and/or customers and clients can be used" (p. 96). Given that there exists no single "hard" measure for collaborative success, it was important to identify a means to identify outstanding federal collaborators. As the "building coalitions" portion of the ECQs is used as a proxy for collaborative ability, the Presidential Rank Award was identified as a viable way to identify such outstanding collaborators. These awards recognize career senior executives "who have demonstrated exceptional performance over an extended period of time" (U.S. OPM, 2007a). Presidential Rank Award selection criteria are equally weighted on four components: leading change, being results driven, stature in professional field, and finally, *building coalitions*—the ability to work across organizational boundaries to achieve results (U.S. OPM, 2007b). Because there are not government-wide awards given for collaboration, the Presidential Rank Awards thus represent the next best metric for collaborative ability.

The second step in a classic competency study, identifying a criterion sample, is directly related to the first step. According to Spencer and Spencer (1993), superior performers should be selected who are defined "statistically as one standard deviation above average performance, roughly the level achieved by the top 1 person out of 10 in a given working situation" (p. 13). As the Presidential Rank Awards may only be conferred on 1% of the Senior Executive Service each year, this award is a fitting metric for superior performance. In March 2006, e-mail addresses were obtained for 69 of the 213 current (2005) Presidential Rank Awardees. Of the remaining 144 awardees, phone numbers were obtained for 67 individuals. Via e-mail invitations and telephone requests for interviews, 21 awardees agreed to participate in the study, although one interviewee

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later rescinded her offer based on the emergence of an organizational crisis. In addition, two additional high-ranking public leaders who had been identified as outstanding federal collaborators by external reviewers/reports were added to this sample. A comparison sample included 23 public managers who were purposively selected based on their collaborative experience. Telephone interviews with all participants averaged 1 hr in length. Together, the 45 individuals interviewed represented 12 federal agencies: Commerce, Agriculture, Homeland Security, Navy, Energy, NASA, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Transportation, National Science Foundation, Health and Human Services, National Labor Relations Board, and Maritime. The gender composition was representative of the population of the federal Senior Executive Service, with 24% women and 76% men.

The third step in the competency study protocol involves collecting data. Data collection for this study included personal telephone interviews with the 45 individuals in the criterion samples, using the BEI method, as described by Spencer and Spencer (1993). BEI methodology differs significantly from traditional interviewing methods. Simply asking about an individual's strengths and weaknesses does not adequately reveal differentiating competencies. As noted by Argyris and Schon (1974), participants' "espoused theories of action," or what they say they do, does not match to their "theories in use," or what they actually do. Thus, as summarized by Spencer and Spencer (1993), "the basic principle of the competency approach is that what people think or say about their motives or skills is not credible. Only what they actually do, in the most critical incidents they have faced, is to be believed" (p. 115). As a result, the BEI methodology asks people to describe how they actually behaved in situations. The five-step BEI protocol, developed by McClelland (1976, 1998) and adapted for this study, is fully detailed in Table 3.

According to the BEI protocol, the interviewer should focus primarily on Step 3, behavioral events, which should include both major successes and key failures. These descriptions help the researcher identify the competencies necessary to address critical situations and thus distinguish average from superior performers. Although the BEI approach is expensive and time-consuming, it is considered to be a superior interview method for distilling competencies based on its success in generating data that are necessary for assessment, training, and developing career paths (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 98).

Following the interviews, the fourth step in the protocol was addressed: data analysis. To begin, interview transcripts were coded to inductively identify differentiating competencies. To begin analyzing the interview data, an open coding approach was employed to identify shared themes among interviews. The transcripts were coded a second time by the same coder using an axial coding approach (Strauss, 1987) to code data around 12 dimensions that were theoretically linked to collaborative performance.

Twelve of Boyatzis' (1982) competency dimensions were selected for analysis: initiative, information seeking, interpersonal understanding, organizational awareness, relationship building, teamwork and cooperation, team leadership, analytical thinking,

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Table 3
Behavioral Event Interview Steps

Behavioral Event Interview Methodology	Specific Questions Asked in the Interviews
1 Introduction and explanation	The purpose of this interview is to find out what it takes to collaborate, or work well with others across organizational boundaries. The best way to do this is by asking experts like you—the ones who are actually collaborating—how you do it. I would like to learn about the most important collaborative incidents you have encountered on your job. I will ask you to describe (a) a successful collaborative experience and (b) a difficult collaborative experience. Everything you say in this interview will be kept strictly confidential.
2 Job responsibilities	Please tell me how you got your current job. What are your major tasks or responsibilities? How much of your time is devoted to collaborative activities each week?
3 Behavioral events	Plase recall a specific collaborative experience that went particularly well for you (a high point). I'm interested in learning from the best collaborative experience you've had. Please walk me through it from beginning to end. Please recall a collaborative experience in which you felt you weren't as effective as you could be, when things didn't go well, or when you were particularly frustrated (a low point). I'm interested in learning from the toughest collaborative experience you've had to face. Please walk me through it from beginning to end.
4 Characteristics needed to do the job	What did you *want* to do? What did you *actually* do?
5 Conclusion and summary	The data from this interview will be transcribed "blind" without your name attached. Do you have any questions? Thank you for your time and insights.

conceptual thinking, organizational commitment, self-confidence, and flexibility. These 12 dimensions were selected based on the work of Spencer et al. (1994), who indicated that these competencies were linked to boundary-spanning behaviors such as cooperation and team building.

This second round of axial coding relied on Spencer and Spencer's (1993) competency dictionary that included definitions, behavioral indicators, and scale measures for each of Boyatzis' (1982) competencies. The authors provided scores for each dimension, which can be assigned to each interviewee, based on the presence or absence of key behaviors. Thus, these 12 competencies of interest served as the "axes" around which the data were coded during the second round of analysis. The associated behaviors and scores for each dimension of interest are detailed in Table 4.

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Table 4
Competencies Linked to Collaborative Behavior

Competency	Scaled Indicators
Initiative	Avoids required work (−1)
	Requires constant supervision (0)
	Works independently (1)
	Makes extra effort (2)
	Does more than is required (3)
	Does much more than is required (4)
	Makes extraordinary efforts (5)
	Involves others in efforts (6)
Information seeking	Does not seek information (0)
	Asks questions (1)
	Personally investigates (2)
	Digs deeper to identify root causes (3)
	Contacts others (4)
	Does research (5)
	Uses ongoing systems of investigation (6)
	Involves others in efforts (7)
Interpersonal understanding	Misunderstands others (−1)
	Shows no evidence of misunderstanding (0)
	Understands emotion or content (1)
	Understands emotion and content (2)
	Understands meanings (3)
	Understands underlying issues (4)
	Understands complex underlying issues (5)
Organizational awareness	Misunderstands organizational structure (−1)
	Ignores/disdains organizational politics (0)
	Understands formal structure (1)
	Understands informal structure (2)
	Understands climate and culture (3)
	Understands organizational politics (4)
	Understands underlying organizational issues (5)
	Understands long-term underlying issues (6)
Relationship building	Avoids contact (0)
	Accepts invitations (1)
	Makes work related contacts (2)
	Makes occasional informal contact (3)
	Builds rapport (4)
	Makes occasional social contacts (5)
	Makes frequent social contacts (6)
	Makes home and family contacts (7)
	Makes close personal friendships (8)

(continued)

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Table 4 (continued)

Competency	Scaled Indicators
Teamwork and cooperation	Uncooperative (–1)
	Neutral (0)
	Cooperates (1)
	Shares information (2)
	Expresses positive expectations (3)
	Solicits input (4)
	Empowers others (5)
	Team-builds (6)
	Resolves conflicts (7)
Team leadership	Refuses or fails to lead (–1)
	Not applicable to job responsibilities (0)
	Manages meetings (1)
	Informs people (2)
	Uses authority fairly (3)
	Promotes team effectiveness (4)
	Takes care of the group (5)
	Positions self as the leader (6)
	Communicates a compelling vision (7)
Analytical thinking	No evidence of analytical thinking (0)
	Breaks down problems (1)
	Sees basic relationships (2)
	Sees multiple relationships (3)
	Makes complex plans or analyses (4)
	Makes very complex plans or analyses (5)
	Makes extremely complex plans or analyses (6)
Conceptual thinking	Uses no abstract concepts (0)
	Uses basic rules (1)
	Recognizes patterns (2)
	Applies complex concepts (3)
	Simplifies complexity (4)
	Creates new concepts (5)
	Creates new concepts for complex issues (6)
	Creates new models (7)
Organizational commitment	Disregards organizational norms (–1)
	Makes minimal effort to fit in (0)
	Active effort to fit in (1)
	Models “organizational citizenship behaviors” (2)
	Sense of purpose/states commitment (3)
	Makes personal or professional sacrifices (4)
	Makes unpopular decisions (5)
	Sacrifices own unit’s good for organization (6)
Self-confidence	Powerless (–1)
	Avoids challenges (0)
	Presents self confidently (1)
	Presents self forcefully or impressively (2)
	States confidence in own ability (3)

(continued)

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Table 4 (continued)

Competency	Scaled Indicators
	Justifies self-confident claims (4)
	Volunteers for challenges (5)
	Puts self in extremely challenging situations (6)
Flexibility	Counterproductively sticks to own opinion/tactics (−1)
	Always follows procedures (0)
	Sees situation objectively (1)
	Flexibly applies rules or procedures (2)
	Adapts tactics to situation or other's response (3)
	Adapts strategies, goals, or projects to situations (4)
	Makes organizational adaptations (5)
	Adapts organizational strategies (6)

Source: Spencer and Spencer (1993).

Data analysis continued as scores for participants in the comparison groups were statistically compared using ANOVA and independent sample *t* tests to identify competencies that differentiate average and superior collaborators. To ensure statistical validity, Spencer and Spencer (1993) indicate that study samples should include at least 20 individuals (12 superior and 8 average performers). As this study included nearly twice that number, statistical analysis is an appropriate tool for validation. Based on the statistical analysis, 3 of the 12 dimensions of interest demonstrated a significant statistical difference between the two groups. Table 5 presents the statistical analysis of the BEI data by competency.

The statistical analysis of the BEI data speaks to the next step in the competency study process: identifying competencies for a competency model. The data analysis revealed that the most significant competencies for collaborative effectiveness are (a) interpersonal understanding, (b) teamwork and cooperation, and (c) team leadership. These results are significant in that they contrast to what OPM identifies as key competencies for building coalitions. U.S. OPM (2007a) identifies (a) political savvy, (b) negotiating/influencing, and (c) partnering as critical to building relationships outside an employee's organization. OPM's three collaborative competencies match most closely to the (a) organizational awareness, (b) team leadership, and (c) relationship building competencies described in the Spencer and Spencer (1993) competency dictionary.

Although there is a shared emphasis on team leadership both in this study and in OPM's list of ECQs, OPM's focus on organizational awareness and relationship building as the primary keys to collaborative success is not supported by these findings. Instead, organizational awareness and relationship building are trumped by interpersonal understanding and teamwork/cooperation as keys to collaborative effectiveness. These results suggest that there exists a disconnect between human resource managers and superior collaborators with regard to the necessary skills for

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Table 5
Statistical Analysis of Competency Strength

Competency	Criterion Group Mean (n = 22)	Comparison Group Mean (n = 23)	Significance: ANOVA	Significance: t test (Equal Variances Confirmed via Levene's Test)
Initiative	3.82	3.95	.839	–.205
Information seeking	3.95	3.22	.303	1.04
Interpersonal understanding	3.21	1.45	.003	3.15*
Organizational awareness	4.34	4.00	.456	.753
Relationship building	3.52	2.63	.266	1.12
Teamwork and cooperation	4.73	3.18	.004	3.07*
Team leadership	4.21	2.22	.008	2.76*
Analytical thinking	2.00	1.77	.675	.423
Conceptual thinking	2.34	2.50	.801	–.253
Organizational commitment	3.47	3.40	.793	.265
Self-confidence	2.65	2.77	.826	–.222
Flexibility	1.82	1.72	.873	.161

*$p < .01$, two-tailed.

effective collaboration in the federal government. The potential implications for this disconnect include ill-fitting selection, succession planning, and reward systems that may in fact select for skills that do not enhance the collaborative capacity of the federal government.

Based on the statistical findings, an original competency model for collaboration was developed based on the three key statistically significant dimensions of interest. In this model, negative and positive indicators of collaborative behavior are detailed, based on the interview data from this study. According to Horey and Fallesen (2004, p. 3), competency frameworks or models should serve as the roadmap to individual and organizational leader success. The value of competencies is in providing specific or at least sample actions and behaviors that demonstrate what leaders do that makes them successful. Therefore, the end goal of all frameworks or models should be to provide measurable actions and behaviors.

This suggests that competency models, such as the one offered here, are only useful when they offer guidelines for success based on evidence from superior performers. The original model presented in Table 6 is intended to accomplish that goal by capturing the differentiating behaviors that distinguish average and superior collaborators in this sample.

This model not only represents causal relationships based on data from this study, but it also allows the opportunity for validation and applications in the future. Once the model has been validated and applied, the collaborative competency study is considered complete. Validating the model is part of an agenda for future research. This

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Table 6
Competency Model of Effective Executive Collaborators

Competency	Indicators
Interpersonal understanding: Demonstrates empathy	(+) Listens to understand other perspectives and needs (+) Develops close relationships with people at all levels (–) Receptiveness to others is dependent on position, rank (–) Unable to understand perspectives outside own expertise
Interpersonal understanding: Understands motivation	(+) Understands needs for power, affiliation, and achievement (+) Adapts own strategies to motivate others effectively (–) Writes off unproductive collaborative members automatically (–) Seeks sanctions for unproductive collaborative members
Teamwork and cooperation: Inclusive perspective on achievements	(+) Inclusive achievement perspective: "We did this" (+) Identifies outcomes that benefit all involved partners (+) Reluctant to claim individual credit for collaborative outcomes (–) Individual achievement perspective: "I did this"
Teamwork and cooperation: Altruistic perspective on resource sharing	(+) Shares resources readily with others: Supports altruistic behavior via personal example (+) Balances needs of own organization with needs of others (+) Does not expect return on investment (–) Unwilling to commit resources until others commit first (–) Views resources as organization property, not public goods: Protects "turf"
Teamwork and cooperation: Collaborative conflict resolution	(+) Welcomes conflict for the purpose of gaining new perspective (+) Seeks win-win solutions to problems (+) Uses boundary-spanning language to find shared meaning (–) Avoids conflict to maintain peace (–) Maintains interest-based positions
Team leadership: Bridges diversity	(+) Values other perspectives on shared problems (+) Defers to others' expertise when appropriate (+) Treats others as equals, regardless of rank (–) Skeptical of strangers involved in the same collaborative effort (–) Prior negative relationships affect current collaboration
Team leadership: Creates line of sight	(+) Identifies opportunities for collaboration that connect organizational goals with public service goals (+) Connects collaborative effort with noble public sector outcomes (+) Demonstrates enthusiasm in connecting personal effort with larger outcomes (–) Unilaterally creates and communicates collaborative vision

next step should focus on cross-validation (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 105), which determines whether the model predicts superior performance in subsequent samples. The final step in completing the competency study is to apply the model to core human resource management functions, including interviews, tests, compensation, and succession planning. To determine whether the model has validity in this sense, it will need to be applied to practice.

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Limitations and Future Directions

Future competency studies may benefit from lessons learned through this example. First, the addition of multiple coders will strengthen the validity of future studies. In planning such studies, researchers should carefully consider both the costs and the benefits associated with adding additional coders. Although the addition of other coders will significantly strengthen the reliability of the findings, the time involved in coding BEI data is significant. For instance, interview transcripts for this study numbered more than 700 pages. In addition, future efforts should consider that the BEI questions used in this study focused exclusively on the outcome of interest: collaboration. Researchers may want to consider expanding the interview questions to help eliminate any bias that may be present in the responses.

This study is the first step in a long-term research agenda. Although this study focuses exclusively on public sector leaders in the United States, future efforts will examine collaborative competencies as exhibited by leaders from the nonprofit and private sectors. Connected to this is an effort to understand how leaders across cultural and national boundaries conceptualize collaborative success, as well. By examining how collaborative competencies cross boundaries, public managers will gain a more comprehensive understanding of how to effectively and jointly solve problems and create public value.

Finally, another connected part of this research agenda is to examine the emergence of collaborative rewards in the public sector. The Presidential Rank Award is, at best, a proxy fit for collaborative success. Although it does include a measure for building coalitions, this research suggests a disconnect between what human resource managers perceive are collaborative behaviors and what experienced collaborators perceive as collaborative behaviors. More appropriate criteria of superior collaborative performance may emerge in the years to come, which will offer researchers an opportunity to further investigate the question of collaborative competencies.

Conclusion

This study does not attempt to add additional competencies to the already superhuman list of ECQs offered by the OPM. Rather, it attempts to test whether there is agreement between what human resource managers believe collaborative competencies to be, and what exemplary collaborators demonstrate. The data analysis reveals that there is a disconnect between these two approaches. This finding is significant. First, if there exists disagreement between what human resource managers define as collaborative competencies and what is actually needed to collaborate effectively, we risk rewarding behaviors that do not help create a more collaborative workforce and ignoring those that do.

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Second, these findings suggest that the most basic and critical factor of collaboration is interpersonal understanding, which only comes through time and experience. However, as long as the federal personnel management system is structured to assess and reward results, competency development will fall to the wayside. Interpersonal understanding, although proven to be critical to collaborative effectiveness, is difficult to assess, and thus, reward. As we move toward diffuse implementation of performance-based pay systems in the federal government that focus on short-term observable results, we may in fact move further away from the goal of enhancing and supporting collaborative governance.

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Heather Getha-Taylor (GethaTay@gwm.sc.edu) is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of South Carolina. She is the 2006 recipient of the Volcker Junior Scholar Research Award, which supported this research.

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