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ABSTRACT

One major objective of the Special Education Supervisor Training (SEST) project was to develop a model for competency specification that would be appropriate for both preservice and inservice preparation of any leadership personnel. This involved the two problems of specifying competencies in valid and utilitarian ways, and assessing competence. A competency specification model was developed for identifying and describing competencies as complex patterns of task-related performance. Twenty-four critical competencies within seven broad leadership task areas were specified and verified for professional supervisory personnel. A competency assessment system for providing diagnostic outcomes through heavy emphasis on the self-assessment process was also developed and is being tested. (Author/JG)

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The Competency Based Curriculum

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Responses from the July issue of the Notebook were highly favorable to the emphasis on competency-based staff development. Both higher education and public school people expressed strong support for competency-based staff development as the route to program improvement in pre-service and in-service preparation of educational administrators.

The August meeting of the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration focused upon efforts to assess competence. Ben Harris, The University of Texas, Austin, Al Wilson, Kansas State University, and Vivian Smith, Quebec, have prepared articles to include assessment procedures developed in the projects centered at their institutions. Dave Erlandson, Queen's College, describes the work of the Interest Group on Competency Based Education in his editorial.

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

COMPETENCY SPECIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Funding of the Special Education Supervisor Training Project by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, HEW, from 1972-1975 permitted an interdisciplinary staff* at The University of Texas at Austin to undertake two endeavors. First, we were committed to the development of a competency-guided program for the preparation of instructional supervisors to work in the area of special education. The second endeavor was to generate a model for competency specification that might be appropriate to both pre-service and in-service preparation of any leadership personnel.

Competencies were specified in seven leadership task areas in this project. Training groups were utilized in testing the competency statements. Training program modifications adopted for project purposes included extensive use of field experiences, adaptation of formal course structures, development of an independent study laboratory, special short courses, field trips, and special projects.

Publications growing out of this project provide details on field training activities, independent study materials evaluated, and self-instructional modules produced in limited numbers. A variety of field experiences were made an integral part of the training program facilitating tests of the use of competency specifications for guiding and improving field training.

Perhaps the unique contributions of this project are to be found in two efforts at program development which depart somewhat from current practice. One effort was to define competencies as a limited, selected, array of complex performance patterns directly related to specified job tasks.(3:5) A second effort was to develop a competency assessment system with diagnostic capabilities despite the extremely complex character of the competencies. These efforts are briefly described below, without attempting to describe many other aspects of the project.

Competency Specifications

Figure 1 provides a highly abbreviated outline of the competencies as specified. Seven job task areas were defined as those within which professional

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*The SEST project was a cooperative venture of the Texas Education Agency, and the Departments of Educational Administration and Special Education at UTA. Co-Directors were the author and Professor John D. King.

supervisory personnel were presumed to perform if they function as change agents. The seven task areas although not unlike the "ten tasks of supervision" previously identified by Harris (1963), were verified by literature searches[6] and field surveys.[2]

Critical Competency statements were written within each job task area. Twenty-seven of these complex performance patterns were specified originally. They were later revised and reduced to twenty-four in number. Not all conceivable performances were included in this array of twenty-four. On the contrary, the project was committed to selecting those that seemed most "critical" in the sense of being almost universally desired from supervisors where changes toward the improvement of instruction were expected. Only highly, directly, instructionally relevant competencies were included.

Major Competency statements were written as a subset of each Critical Competency. These Major Competencies were specified as rather complex performances, but somewhat more limited in scope. Eighty-one Major Competencies were selected, three or four associated with each of the Critical Competencies. These, too, were obviously selected from among a broader array. Their selection has not been carefully validated.

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF CRITICAL AND MAJOR COMPETENCY STATEMENTS BY JOB TASK AREAS

Job Task Areas	Number of Competencies	
	Critical	Major
A. Developing Curriculum	3	12
B. Developing Learning Resources	3	9
C. Staffing for Instruction	3	9
D. Organizing for Instruction	3	9
E. Utilizing Supporting Services	4	13
F. Providing In-Service Education	5	20
G. Relating to Publics	3	9
Total	24	81

An illustration of a single Critical Competency with associated, selected Major Competency statements is shown in Figure 2. Neither type of competency statement is as fragmentary nor as precisely stated as a performance objective. This is intentional. The competency specifications are such that the smallest unit of performance is sufficiently large, task relevant, and reality-oriented to assure a professionally worthy product as a resultant. The need to segment major competencies still further for training purposes is fully recognized, but individual students and instructors are delegated this responsibility.

A Competency Assessment System

The system consists of an integrated set of instruments and procedures for assessing instructional supervisory competencies. Initial efforts to develop elaborate simulations for use in assessing were abandoned in early stages of the project for lack of feasibility in both on-campus and in-service settings. The overly simplistic use of tests of knowledge and ratings were rejected from the

very beginning for obvious reasons. What has emerged is a multi-variate analysis process which relies perhaps too heavily on self-assessments, but involves rigorous, systematic, logical use of several kinds of data.

FIGURE 2: ILLUSTRATIVE CRITICAL AND MAJOR COMPETENCY STATEMENTS WITHIN ONE JOB TASK AREA

TASK AREA - Providing In-Service Education: The process of improving the quality of instructional practice within the staff by providing opportunities for professional growth.

CRITICAL COMPETENCY - F-4 Conducting In-Service Training Sessions: Given a description of a specific staff group, the supervisor can select an appropriate training plan, make arrangements, and lead participants through a sequence of meaningful learning activities.

MAJOR COMPETENCIES - F-4a - Can establish in participants a psychological "set" or readiness for the activities and events associated with a program.

F-4b - Can guide and direct activities in ways that maintain participant interest and involvement.

F-4c - Can demonstrate sensitivity to participants' feelings and personal concerns during a session, without being diverted from planned activities and outcomes.

F-4d - Can build group cohesion, encourage and support spontaneous interactions, and project enthusiasm.

The instruments and procedures constituting the assessment system have been designed for use at three different points in an in-service or pre-service training sequence. Pre-assessment, in-progress assessment and post-assessment procedures are detailed in two manuals.(1) Both manuals contain a set of detailed instructions for data collection and competency analysis. The person being assessed assumes responsibility for both gathering and analyzing all data.

Assessment Instruments. Four different assessment instruments are used to obtain estimates of the assessee's level of professional performance on each of the twenty-four Critical Competencies. A fifth instrument, an interest scale, is used to obtain the assessee's perceptions of the relative importance of each Critical Competency in his or her particular professional situation.

The five instruments are described briefly as follows:

1. Critical Competency Performance Inventory (CCPI). The CCPI contains a set of twenty-four sheets describing the Critical Competencies in performance terms. Each sheet provides a statement of a competency, a rationale, and an illustrative example. The directions call for the assessor to sort these competencies into six categories that reflect the assessee's performance levels. (Time:30-45 minutes)

2. Major Competency Assessment Inventory (MCAI). The MCAI is an instrument used to assess performances on a set of eighty-one Major Competencies that have been identified as logical components or

subdivisions of the complex behavior patterns comprised by the Critical Competencies. The individual Major Competency statements are contained on eighty-one cards that are sorted into six categories reflecting the assessee's performance levels. These performance estimates are recorded on a score sheet used to produce a performance designation for each Critical Competency. (Time: 60-80 minutes)

3. Competency-Keyed Experience Inventory (CKEI). The CKEI consists of a checklist of 158 different activities related to the twenty-four Critical Competencies. The person being assessed uses the checklist to report his or her level of past experience with each activity. These activity scores are then combined on a score sheet to produce a performance designation for each Critical Competency. (Time: 60-75 minutes)

4. Knowledge Assessment Test (KAT). The KAT is a multiple-choice, paper-and-pencil test of cognition, consisting of items keyed to the Critical Competencies. It provides two performance designations, one for each Major Competency, and another for each Critical Competency. (Time: 80-90 minutes)

5. Critical Competency Interest Scale (CCIS). The CCIS is an interest scale for rank ordering the twenty-four Critical Competencies. The person being assessed reports his or her judgments of the importance of each competency in planning his or her professional growth program. (Time: 15-20 minutes)

While each of these instruments is completed by the assessee as a self-report, the Critical Competency Performance Inventory is also prepared by "other assessors" as a limited validity check.

Competency Analysis. The assessment manuals guide the use of data generated by the various instruments. A workbook is provided for completing all analyses. Each step in the analysis process is carefully programmed to assure both easy and accurate analysis of all data.

Competency analysis, in brief, consists of three stages--estimation of competence levels, determination of priorities, and diagnosis of needs. In Figure 3, a flowchart provides an overview of the steps in the analysis process.

Summary

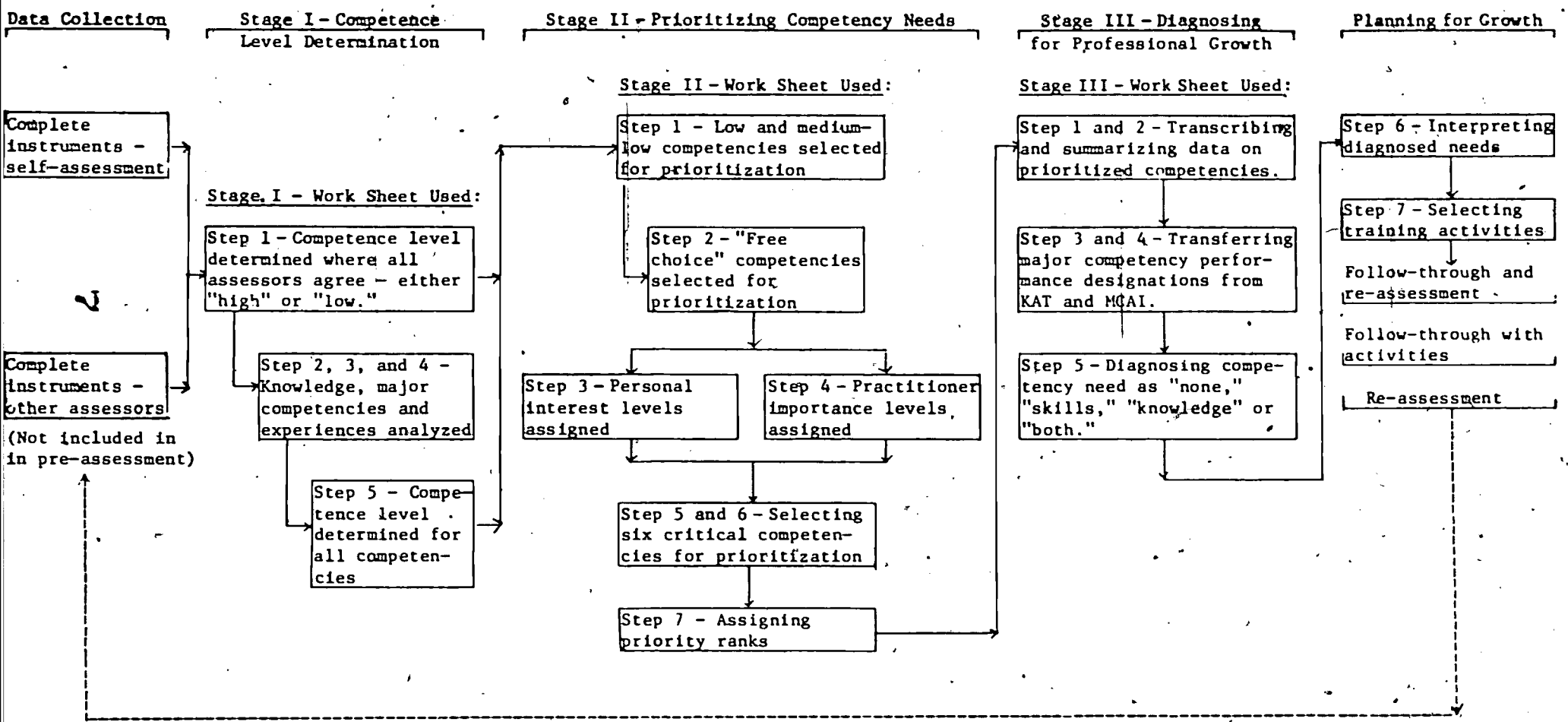
The SEST Project approached the problem of improving professional leadership training with the usual interest in specifying outcomes, individualizing experiences, and assessing results. Considerable attention was given to problems of training program design and materials for independent study.

The two problems of special concern, however, were those of specifying competencies in valid and utilitarian ways, and assessing competence. A competency specification model was developed for identifying and describing competencies as complex patterns of task related performance. Twenty-four such Critical Competencies were specified and verified for professional supervisory personnel.

A competency assessment system was developed and is being tested for providing diagnostic outcomes with heavy emphasis on the self-assessment process.

Figure 3

A FLOWCHART OF EVENTS FOR DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT



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