

Important Competencies for Medical Representatives: Scale Development and Validation

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Abstract: The purpose of this research paper is to identify important dimensions of medical representatives' competency. This research adopts the dimensions of competency of sales people and roles & skills of sales people to develop a framework that can be used to measure competency of medical representatives. Data for the research was collected from a sample of 550 medical representatives and sales manager of pharmaceutical companies. Research model for competency of medical representatives is confirmed and validated using confirmatory factor analysis and ten important dimensions of medical representatives' competency were identified.

These include performance competency, technology competency, learning competency, relationship management competency, communication competency, leadership competency, administrative competency, selling competency and time management competency. A pool of indicators for the antecedent factors of medical representatives' competency stood out, acting as a guide for Indian pharmaceutical companies in improve their human resource policy and performance appraisal process.

Keywords: Medical Representatives, Pharmaceutical Industry, competency, CFA, Scale Development and Validation.

Problem Statement

The ability of medical representatives to increase revenues through new customer acquisition efforts or by leveraging existing customer relationships can contribute to competitive advantage of pharmaceutical companies. So medical representative's strengths should be identified and developed in support of performance in each specific job function. Identifying important competency for medical representatives is important for improving performance of medical representatives and giving them proper training. A rigorous measurement instrument is also required for medical representatives' competency.

Objectives of the Study

The following research objectives were formulated:

1. To identify important competency criteria related to competencies of medical representatives.
2. To develop reliable and valid model for measuring competencies of medical representatives.

Scale Development Framework

This research followed the scale development framework that was established by Menor and Roth (2007), as illustrated in figure 1.

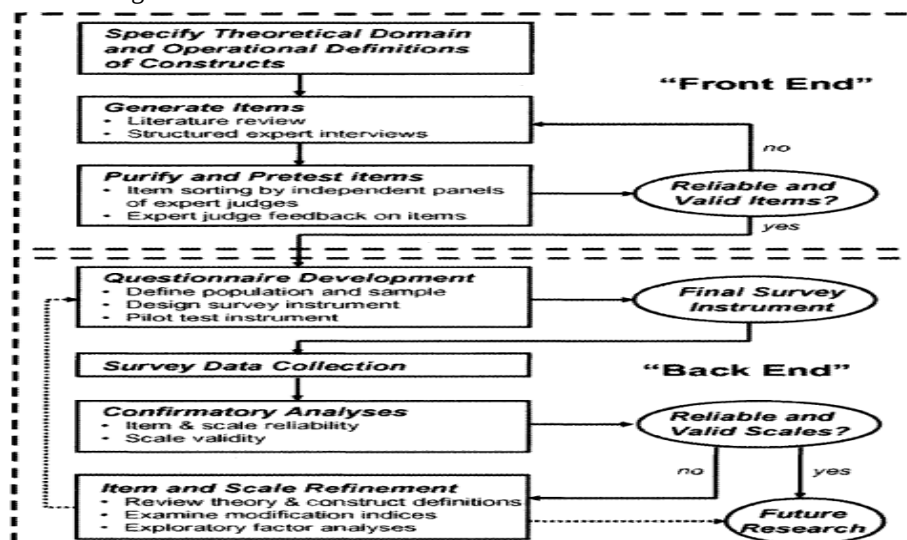


Figure 1: Framework for Developing Measurement Scales (by Menor and Roth, 2007)

Scale Development

There is no specific structure for the competencies of Medical Representatives so exploratory research is considered as a base for developing competency model. Logical competency grouping is done by considering literature review which includes various skills and competencies require for sales people. Literature review in area of role of salesman, important skills and competencies for sales people and medical representatives in pharmaceutical industry was conducted for finding out important dimensions related to medical representatives' competencies and items related to constructs. Medical representatives' competencies criteria are adopted from the study of Walker et al. (1975), Moncrief (1986), Sumrall (1992), Deeter-Schmetz and Ramsey (1995), Belasko (1996), Sharma (2001), Vittala (2005 and Canadian Professional Sales Association Report (2013). Total 10 competencies criteria and 119 statements of competencies were identified from literature review. Competency statements which were not important for medical representatives are eliminated after taking feedback from medical representatives and sales managers. After qualitative research, total 10 competency criteria and 94 competency statements were identified for reliability and validity testing.

Table 1: Definitions of constructs for medical representatives' competencies

Performance Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representatives to manage individual outputs and results to proactively and continuously improve the sales processes.
Technology Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representatives to effectively choose, implement, and manage information technology and other technology related to the sales process, product or industry.
Learning Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representatives learning about relevant industry knowledge, product knowledge, and selling skills while keeping abreast of changes or trends in the market or the customer relationship.
Relationship Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representatives to identify, build, and sustain key business relationships both internally and externally.
Leadership Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representatives to achieve aspirations, manage his or self, maintain an appropriate attitude, maintain a positive attitude, and lead others.
Customer Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representatives to synchronize to customer buying processes, systems, and requirements while helping the selling organization deliver on the promise of the business relationship.
Communication Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representatives to effectively listen, speak, persuade, question and write within appropriate business norms while representing the interest of the selling company.
Administrative Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representatives to maintain corporate systems while adhering to corporate policies and procedures reporting and tracking needs and conducting other non-selling activities in support of sales goals.
Selling Competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representative to identify, engage, move, close, and protect sales opportunities.
Time management competencies: Competencies required in order for medical representative to utilize his time effectively by scheduling, allocating, prioritize his time to achieve sales growth.

Reliability of scale

The adequacy of the measurement model was assessed by evaluating the reliability of the individual items, the internal consistency among items expected to measure the same construct, convergent validity, and the discriminant validity among the various constructs (Hulland, 1999; White et al., 2003). Reliability was gauged via the standardized Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). Hair et al. (2007) recommended that 0.6 Cronbach's alpha value is the lower limit of acceptability. Here, Cronbach alpha was computed for each distinct construct of competencies of medical representatives. The final Cronbach's alpha values of all items range from 0.617 to 0.775 (see table 1), suggesting good internal consistency among items within each construct and the reliability of the constructs.

Table 2: Reliability of the Scale

Sr. No.	Dimension Name	Cronbach's Alpha Scores
1.	Performance competency	0.748
2.	Technology Competency	0.759
3.	Learning Competency	0.733
4.	Relationship Management Competency	0.734
5.	Customer Competency	0.765
6.	Communication Competency	0.725
7.	Leadership competency	0.617
8.	Administrative Competency	0.775
9.	Selling Competencies	0.755

10.	Time management competency	0.619
11.	Reliability of Overall Scale	0.863

Validity of the scale

Validity is an extent to which research is accurate. The types of validity which are generally referred in research literature include face/content, criterion, and construct validity (Sureshchander et al., 2002). There are many methods for assessing validity like, coefficient of correlation, regression, EFA, CFA, SEM, Multiple Regression, etc.. (Ahire et al., 1996; Tian et al., 2001). CFA was used in this research for assessing validity of the scale.

Content Validity

The degree to which the measure spans the domain of the construct's theoretical definition is defined as the construct's content validity (Rungtusanatham, 1998). Medical representatives' competency dimensions were identified from literature and content validity of the instrument used in the present study is ensured by professionals of pharmaceutical sector and academicians of marketing area. Instrument for measuring face validity of the scale is attached in annexure.

Construct Validity

Construct validity is "the vertical correspondence between the construct which is at an un-observable, conceptual level and a purported measure of it which is the operational level" (Peter, 1981). Construct validity is further divided into convergent, discriminant and nomological validity (Churchill, 1979). Construct validity can be established by empirically assessing uni-dimensionality of constructs (O'Leary-Kelly and Vokurka, 1998).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) provides better control for assessing uni-dimensionality. In this research study, convergent and discriminant validity were assessed using confirmatory factor analysis.

Convergent Validity

The items that are indicators of a specific construct should coverage or share a high proportion of variance in common, known as convergent validity (Hair et al., 2007). There are mainly three methods to measure convergent validity and these methods are factor loading, average variance extracted and construct reliability (Hair et al., 2007). In this study convergent validity was measured using the following methods:

- 1) Analysis of factor loading
- 2) Average variance extracted
- 3) Construct reliability

In the case of high convergent validity, high loading on a factor would indicate that they converge on some common point and factor loading more than 0.5 indicates good convergent validity (Hair et al., 2007). The factor loading of all the items of the medical representatives' competency scale are given in the table below. The values of factor loading for all the items are near to or greater than 0.5 and it indicates good convergent validity of the scale.

Hair et al. (2007) noted that convergent validity can also be determined by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) value of the construct. AVE should be near or above 0.4 to indicate convergent validity. Fornell and Larcker said that if AVE is less than 0.5, but composite reliability is higher than 0.6, the convergent validity of the construct is still adequate. Here, all constructs have construct reliability more than 0.6 and most of the constructs have AVE value 0.4 or more than 0.4.

Reliability is also an indicator of convergent validity. Construct reliability value (CR) is often used in conjunction with structural equation modeling. High construct reliability indicates that internal consistency exists, meaning that the measures all consistently represent the same latent construct. The rule of thumb for construct reliability estimate is that 0.7 or higher suggests good construct reliability.

Performance Competency		Factor Loading	CR	AVE
1	Accurately forecasts demand for products or services	0.545	0.817	0.50
2	Predicts closing rates on new sales opportunities	0.758		
3	Regularly conducts review meetings with key interest holder	0.786		
4	Possess decision making ability	0.784		
5	Always prepared for upcoming obstacles to sales success	0.541		
Technology Competency				
1	Knows how to use email & mobile to communicate properly	0.633	0.766	0.40
2	Effectively uses appropriate software tools, packages and internate to achieve goals	0.598		
3	Effectively leverages personal devices to manage information (i.e. laptop; cell phone; tablet etc...)	0.653		
4	Uses proper technology when appropriate to send documentation	0.590		
5	Uses video conference technology	0.518		

6	Increases sales effectiveness by using technology	0.571		
Learning Competency				
1	Comprehends mixture, dosage and benefits of the drugs.	0.595	0.728	0.40
2	Conducts adequate background research on doctors, pharmaceutical industry and competitors	0.649		
3	Reads company literature and relates content appropriately	0.634		
4	Attends and actively engages in periodic sales training	0.538		
5	Able to acquire and leverage information from multiple sources	0.535		
Relationship Management Competency				
1	Safely and securely takes doctors on-site	0.548	0.824	0.5
2	Always takes follow up to individual meetings	0.534		
3	Effectively praises doctors to support end goal	0.500		
4	Formulates and implements strategies to build rapport with doctors.	0.774		
5	Proactively attends networking opportunities and builds important key contacts	0.780		
6	Maintains transparency and show honesty and integrity while becoming a trusted advisor to doctors	0.804		
Customer Competency				
1	Handles orders and backorders effectively and expedites as necessary	0.633	0.872	0.40
2	Handles distribution problems as required to keep customers happy	0.544		
3	Facilitates delivery by communicating orders to support personal	0.563		
4	Organizes and operates seminar or exhibition booth	0.646		
5	Monitors competitor products or services	0.684		
6	Addresses doctors issues and concern smartly	0.634		
7	Smartly deals with competitive threats	0.674		
8	Setup displays	0.641		
9	Deliver product samples	0.863		
Communication Competency				
1	Possess skill in preparing documents and presentations	0.628	0.733	0.40
2	Effectively and passionately delivers sales presentations to doctors	0.612		
3	Identifies processes for creating compelling sales presentations that differentiate from competitor	0.637		
4	Gathers and relevant feedback from doctors	0.569		
5	Maintains communication with others by telephoning the office	0.527		
Leadership competency				
1	Displays confidence and a sense of self-worth in own capabilities	0.862	0.927	0.8
2	Positively sees the upside in events and maintains a positive attitude	0.871		
3	Takes personal responsibility for failures or problems	0.838		
4	Takes calculated risks	0.916		
Administrative Competency				
1	Gathers appropriate information in order to effectively complete data entry	0.532	0.70	0.32
2	Updates customer files in an effective manner	0.688		
3	Maintains a viable and working virtual office	0.482		
4	Stick to policies for keeping track of invoices	0.550		
5	Prioritizes applicable corporate policies	0.523		
Selling Competencies				
1	Acquires and implements adaptive or consultative selling behaviors	0.500	0.839	0.44
2	Sells the unique competencies and value of the company	0.415		
3	Effectively follows up on doctors orders	0.834		
4	Aggressively finds leads on new prospects	0.458		
5	Possesses skill at closing opportunities and obtaining orders	0.742		
6	Actively and effectively sells additional value-added services or solutions	0.875		
7	Adequately targets personal activities towards important or key accounts	0.677		
Time management competency				

1	Allocate time to the task as per importance	0.523	0.707	0.40
2	Prioritize the work as per urgency	0.52		
3	Know Doctors peak time and buying cycle	0.748		
4	End of day, review day's activities & schedule next day	0.65		

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs thus, high discriminant validity provides evidence that a construct is unique and captures some phenomena other measures do not (Hair et al., 2007). Accordingly to Fornell and Larcker (1981) discriminant validity is established if the square root of AVE is larger than the correlation coefficient of each constructs. In table 12 shown that the square root of AVE values are larger than the correlation coefficient of each constructs so it can be concluded that all the constructs of competency for medical representatives scale supported discriminant validity.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Time management competency	0.62									
Leadership Competency	0.016	0.872								
Selling Competencies	0.049	0.018	0.67							
Communication Competency	0.068	0.081	0.116	0.61						
Customer Competency	0.079	0.052	0.069	0.079	0.66					
Administrative Competency	0.021	0.062	0.042	0.147	0.102	0.559				
Relationship Management Competency	0.059	0.021	0.182	0.119	0.135	0.003	0.7			
Learning Competency	0.068	0.041	0.079	0.051	0.058	0.07	0.033	0.6		
Technology Competency	0.158	0.017	0.103	0.051	0.03	0.193	0.034	0.043	0.6	
Performance competency	0.001	0.007	0.127	0.013	0.009	0.049	0.158	0.005	0.03	0.692

Model fit

To check model fit of medical representatives' competency model Chi square/df, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) value, Comparative Fit Index value (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value and expected cross-validation index (ECVI) were used.

Chi-square/df was used as an absolute fit index. As per Hu and Bentler (1999), value of Chi-square/df less than 2 indicate good model fit. For the model of medical representatives' competency Chi-square/df value was 1.72 and it indicates good model fit.

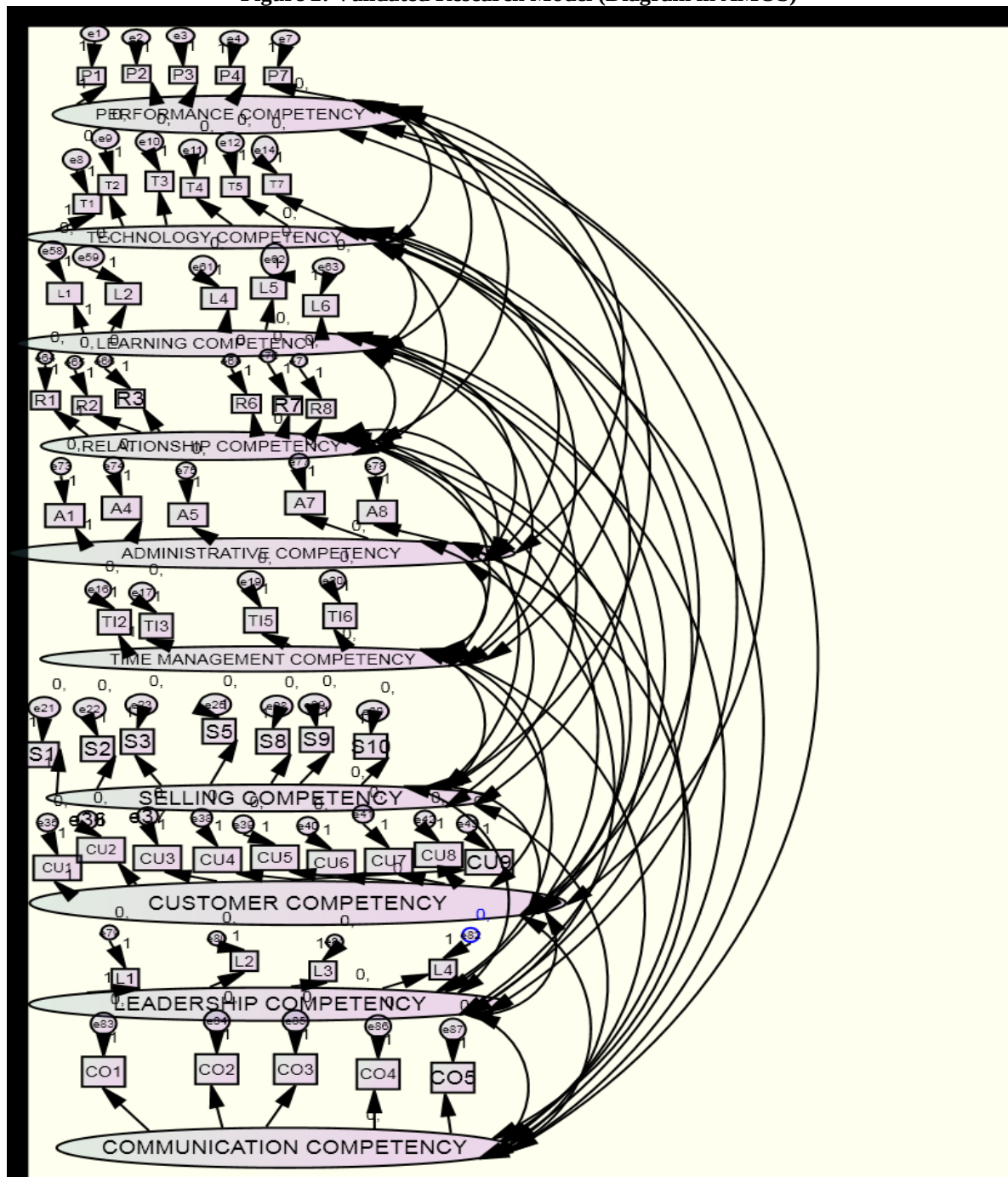
CFI and TLI values were used as relative measure indices of the model. As per Hair et al. (2007), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) value and Comparative Fit Index value (CFI) near to 0.9 indicates good model fit. The TLI and CFI values for the medical representatives' competency model were near to 0.9. So, these relative measures indicate good model fit.

RMSEA and ECVI values were use as residual matrix based indices. An empirical examination of several models found that the RMSEA best suited to use in confirmatory factor analysis as samples become larger and RMSEA value between 0.03 to 0.08 for CFA at 0.05 significant levels indicate good fit of model (Hair et al., 2007). RMSEA value for the model of competencies of medical representatives was 0.038 and it indicates good model fit. Another indication that the model fits well was that the expected cross-validation index (ECVI). The ECVI value for this model is 5.538. The ECVI value is within the 90% confidence interval, ranging from 5.273 to 5.819 and it was shown good model fit.

Research Model

The following model was validated after reliability and validity analysis.

Figure 2: Validated Research Model (Diagram in AMOS)



Detail of Number of Items after validating model

Table 4: Detail of Number of Items in each Competency

Sr. No.	Name of competency	Number of statements in the questionnaire	Number of statements deleted	Number of statements after scale validity analysis
1	Performance competency	7	2	5
2	Technology Competency	7	1	6
3	Learning Competency	6	1	5
4	Relationship Management Competency	9	3	6
5	Customer Competency	9	0	9
6	Communication Competency	14	9	5
7	Leadership competency	13	9	4
8	Administrative Competency	9	4	5
9	Selling Competency	14	7	7
10	Time management competency	6	2	4
Total number of statements		94	38	56

Conclusion of the Study

This empirical research provides reliable and valid scale to measure competency for medical representatives. The facets of medical representatives' competency were measured and validated using confirmatory factor analysis. Ten dimensions of medical representatives' competency were identified and these dimensions were: (1) Performance competency, (2) Technology Competency, (3) Learning Competency, (4) Relationship Management Competency, (5) Communication Competency, (6), (7) Leadership competency, (8) Administrative Competency, (9) Selling Competency and (10) Time management competency.

Implications of the Study

The interpretation of the research model developed in the study has potential to help indian pharmaceutical companies in knowing important factors regarding competency of medical representatives. A pool of indicators for the antecedent factors of medical representatives' competency stood out, acting as a guide for Indian pharmaceutical companies in improve their human resource policy and performance appraisal process. Similarly, items measuring medical representatives' competency dimensions were tested and refined. The reliable and valid instrument confirmed in this research can be used by further studies detecting the relationships among these constructs in an extended context.

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Annexure:

Instruments for measuring face validity

As an expert, Please Check the competency statements below and give your Valuable suggestion by considering the following points

1. Indicate improperly stated or inadequately grouped competencies,
2. Indicate if certain competencies should be collapsed into one,
3. Indicate if any competencies are grouped separately,
4. Indicate if any group is to be renamed.

1. Performance competency

1	Accurately forecasts demand for products or services	Proper	improper
2	Predicts closing rates on new sales opportunities	Proper	improper
3	Conducts review meetings with key interest holder	Proper	improper
4	Possess decision making ability	Proper	improper
5	Gathers key facts about a situation before acting	Proper	improper
6	Prepare and manages a personal development plan	Proper	improper
7	Prepares for obstacles to sales success	Proper	improper

2. Technology Competency

1	Effectively uses e-mail and mobile applications to communicate	Proper	improper
2	Effectively uses appropriate software tools , packages and internet to achieve goals	Proper	improper
3	Effectively leverages personal devices to manage information (i.e. laptop; cell phone; tablet etc....)	Proper	improper
4	Uses proper technology when appropriate to send documentation	Proper	improper
5	Uses video conference technology	Proper	improper
6	Have technical knowledge and relays it to customer	Proper	improper
7	Increases selling effectiveness by using technology	Proper	improper

3. Learning Competency

1	Comprehends mixture, dosage and benefits of the drugs.	Proper	improper
2	Conducts adequate background research on client, pharmaceutical industry and competitors.	Proper	improper
3	Fills personal gaps in knowledge or skill through most appropriate Approaches	Proper	improper
4	Reads company literature and relates content appropriately	Proper	improper
5	Attends and actively engages in periodic sales training	Proper	improper
6	Ability to acquire and leverage information from multiple sources	Proper	improper

4.Relationship Management Competency

1	Safely and securely takes clients on-site	Proper	Improper
2	Displays appropriate follow up to individual meetings	Proper	Improper
3	Effectively praises clients to support end goal	Proper	Improper
4	Responds appropriately to recommendations	Proper	Improper
5	Shows professionalism through writing thank you notes or emails	Proper	Improper
6	Formulates strategies for building appropriate key relationships	Proper	Improper
7	Formulates and implements strategies to build rapport with clients	Proper	Improper
8	Proactively attends networking opportunities and builds important key contacts	Proper	Improper
9	Maintains transparency and show honesty and integrity while becoming a trusted advisor to doctors	Proper	Improper
10	Gives constructive feedback to others	Proper	Improper

5.The Customer Competency

1	Provides relevant information to other internal medical representative	Proper	Improper
2	Handles orders and backorders effectively and expedites as necessary	Proper	Improper
3	Handles distribution problems as required to keep customers happy	Proper	Improper
4	Facilitates delivery by communicating orders to support personal	Proper	Improper
5	Organizes and operates seminar or exhibition booth	Proper	Improper
6	Monitors competitor products or services	Proper	Improper
7	Identifies appropriate time to deliver product or services	Proper	Improper
8	Addresses customer issues and concern	Proper	Improper
9	Smartly deals with competitive threats	Proper	Improper
10	Setup displays	Proper	Improper
11	Deliver product samples	Proper	Improper

6.Communication Competency

1	Possess skill in preparing documents and presentations	Proper	Improper
2	Effectively and passionately delivers sales presentations to relevant decision makers or influencers	Proper	Improper
3	Identifies processes for creating compelling sales presentations that differentiate from competitor	Proper	Improper
4	Gathers and relevant feedback from clients	Proper	Improper
5	Maintains communication with others by telephoning the office	Proper	Improper
6	Generates phone calls or emails in order to setup appointments	Proper	Improper
7	Plans and conducts conference calls with key corporate and client team	Proper	Improper
8	Displays professionalism; poise; and speaking skill while make speeches	Proper	Improper
9	Creates and provides seminars to clients or prospects	Proper	Improper
10	Generates email or letters in proper business format with proper grammar and voice	Proper	Improper
11	Practices and develops skills in a second language or increases skill with vocabulary	Proper	Improper
12	Displays skill in adapting active listening	Proper	Improper
13	Constructs effective questions and asks those questions at appropriate times	Proper	Improper
14	Alters approach based on reading body language of others	Proper	Improper

7. Leadership competency

1	Displays confidence and a sense of self-worth in own capabilities	Proper	Improper
2	Positively sees the upside in events and maintains a positive attitude	Proper	Improper
3	Takes personal responsibility for failures or problems	Proper	Improper
4	Takes calculated entrepreneurial risks	Proper	Improper
5	Understands what motivates self and others	Proper	Improper
6	Enjoys attempting new or challenging tasks	Proper	Improper
7	Is an outgoing personality to others	Proper	Improper
8	Takes new challenges to support personal development or corporate goals	Proper	Improper
9	Is versatile and adaptable at many different tasks and processes	Proper	Improper
10	Applies a personal or professional ethical code to decision-making processes	Proper	Improper
11	Displays a competitive nature and seeks to consistently stay at the top	Proper	Improper
12	Maintains an agreeable persona and helps warm up new colleagues	Proper	Improper
13	Displays self-control and keeps disruptive emotions and impulses in check	Proper	Improper

8. Administrative Competency

1	Gathers appropriate information in order to effectively complete data entry	Proper	Improper
2	Organizes personal records	Proper	Improper
3	Displays organizational ability by keeping the office tidy	Proper	Improper
4	Updates customer files in an effective manner	Proper	Improper
5	Maintains a viable and working virtual office	Proper	Improper
6	Performs daily planning to determine most efficient routine	Proper	Improper
7	Adheres to policies for keeping track of invoices	Proper	Improper
8	Prioritizes applicable corporate policies	Proper	Improper
9	Conducts campaigning activities outside and inside the company	Proper	Improper
10	Fills out paperwork with accuracy and within an appropriate time frame	Proper	Improper

9. Selling Competencies

1	Acquires and implements adaptive or consultative selling behaviors	Proper	Improper
2	Sells the unique competencies and value of the company	Proper	Improper
3	Effectively follows up on client orders	Proper	Improper
4	Actively calls on (visits) new accounts	Proper	Improper
5	Aggressively finds leads on new prospects	Proper	Improper
6	Actively engages in cold call phone activity	Proper	Improper
7	Carry most appropriate materials to bring along on sales visits	Proper	Improper
8	Possesses skill at closing opportunities and obtaining orders	Proper	Improper
9	Actively and effectively sells additional value-added services or solutions	Proper	Improper
10	Adequately targets personal activities towards important or key accounts	Proper	Improper
11	Constructs scripted sales speech	Proper	Improper
12	Handover to other key team members after the sale is finalized	Proper	Improper
13	Determines the appropriate price for a product or service	Proper	Improper

10. Time management competency

1	Create daily, weekly, and monthly schedule	Proper	Improper
2	Allocate time to the task as per importance	Proper	Improper
3	Prioritize as per urgency	Proper	Improper
4	Know his peak performance time and schedule accordingly	Proper	Improper
5	Know client peak time and buying cycle	Proper	Improper
6	End of day, review day's activities & schedule next day	Proper	Improper