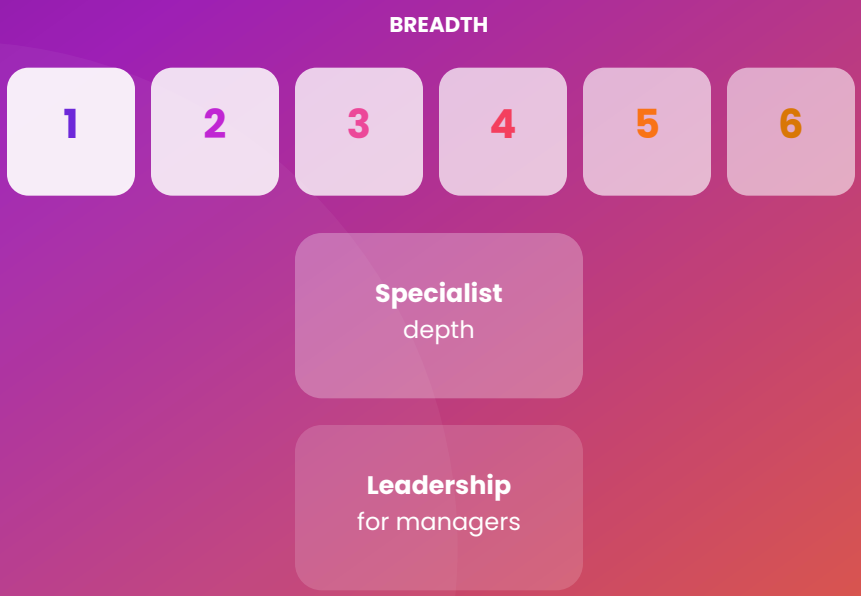
PROTALENT ADVISORY | HR & PEOPLE ADVISORY

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK · 2026

The T-Shaped HR Competency Framework

A practical guide to the capabilities modern HR professionals need, and how to build them across your team.





Janvi Mistry
Managing Director, ProTalent Advisory · Ajman, UAE

THE MODEL

Breadth across the whole function, depth where it counts



Breadth

Everyone builds all six core competencies, whatever their role or seniority.

Depth

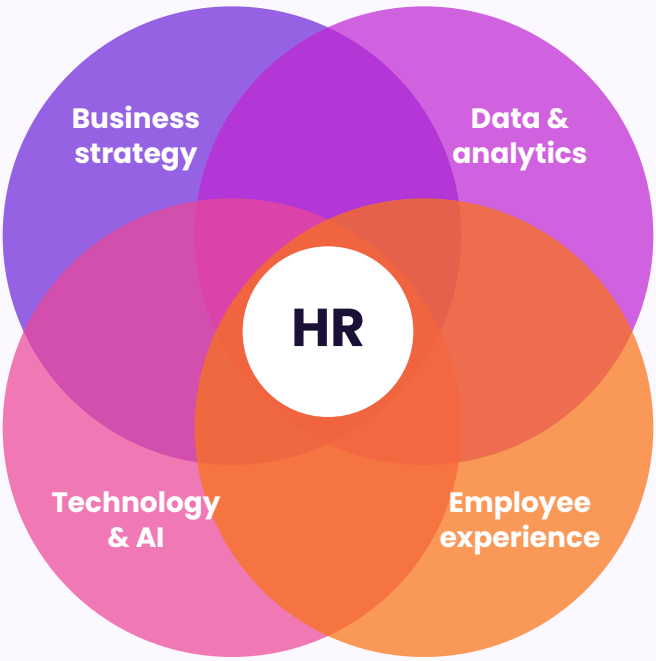
Then go deep: pick one or more specialist domains, and add leadership if you manage people.

WHY IT MATTERS

HR is no longer a one-corner job

HR now sits where strategy, data, technology and employee experience meet. Most problems cut across those lines, so knowing one HR area well is not enough.

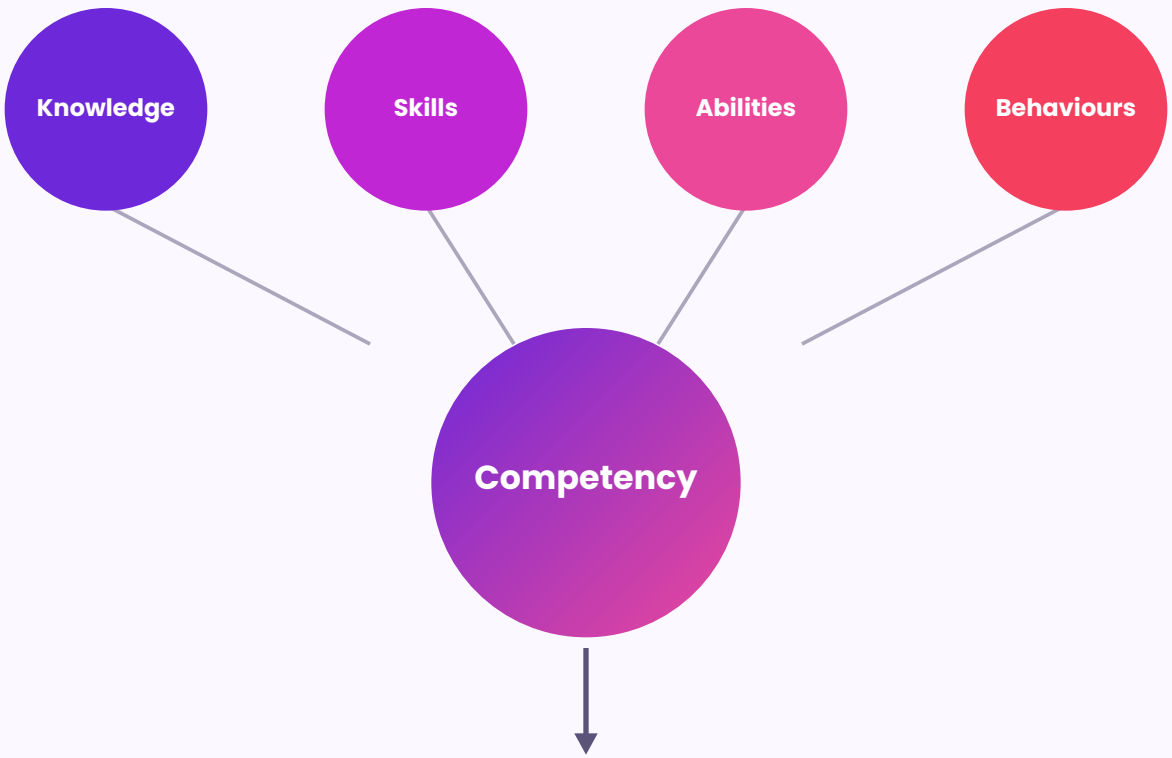
- **Fewer hand-offs**
  HR professionals who grasp the wider context move work forward without waiting on others.
- **Stronger influence**
  They translate HR priorities into the language leaders care about.
- **Clearer growth**
  One shared yardstick for hiring, appraisals and career paths.



THE BASICS

What is a competency framework?

A competency is the mix of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours needed to do a role well. A framework gathers the competencies that matter most for a function, such as HR, and describes what strong performance looks like.



Competency framework

The set of competencies that matter for a role or function, and what good looks like at every level.

Development planning

Shows what to learn next

Skills-gap analysis

Reveals where capability is thin

Performance management

Sets a fair, clear standard

HOW IT IS BUILT

From competency to behaviour

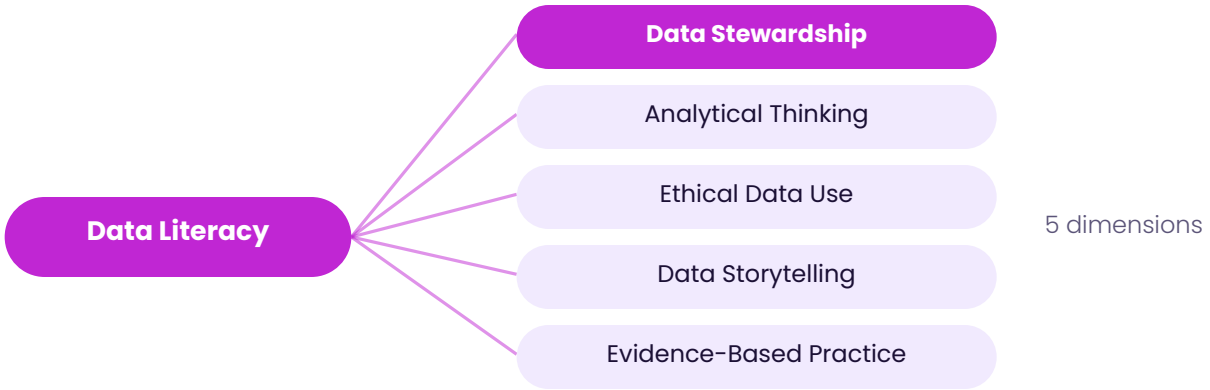
Competency — The broad capability, e.g. Data Literacy

Dimension — A key component of that capability

Behaviour — What you can actually observe someone doing

Level — How far that behaviour has developed

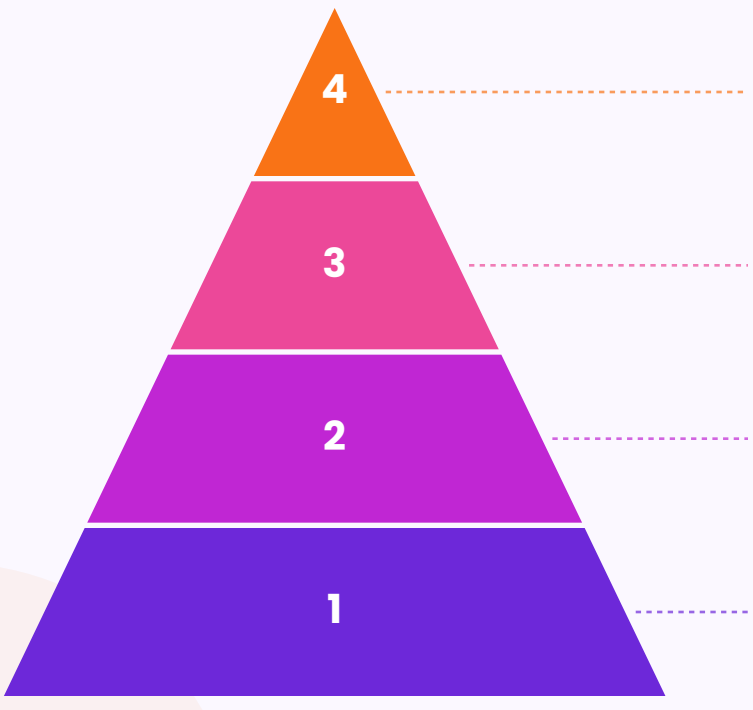
Worked example: Data Literacy



Zoom in: Data Stewardship breaks down into three observable behaviours.

- Keeps data accurate and complete
- Applies governance rules
- Owns data quality

Four proficiency levels



4 — Expert · Strategic
Shapes practice across the whole organisation

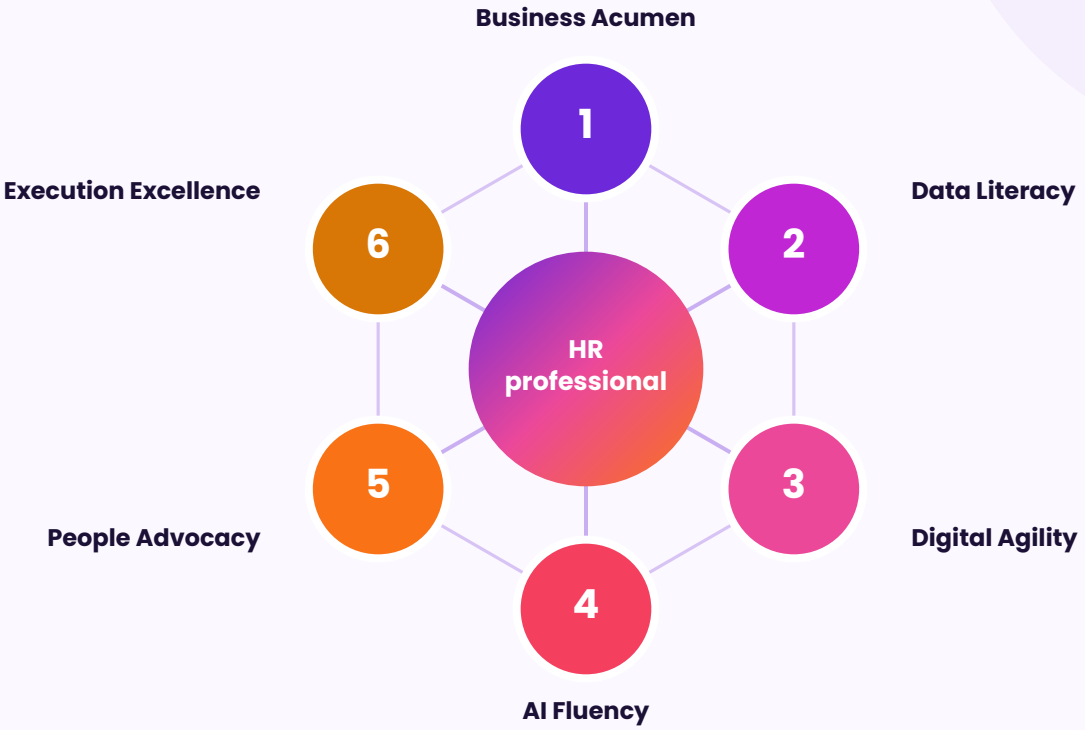
3 — Advanced · Integrated
Blends it into wider work and systems

2 — Intermediate · Applied
Applies it reliably in the day-to-day job

1 — Foundational · Aware
Understands the basics and good practice

THE FOUNDATION

The six core competencies



1 Business Acumen

Reads the business and steers people strategy toward its performance and growth.

2 Data Literacy

Uses evidence to guide people decisions and to show what HR delivers.

3 Digital Agility

Applies digital tools and a change-ready mindset to be faster and better connected.

4 AI Fluency

Applies AI responsibly to improve HR results and business value.

5 People Advocacy

Builds human-centred cultures balancing wellbeing, performance, ethics and sustainability.

6 Execution Excellence

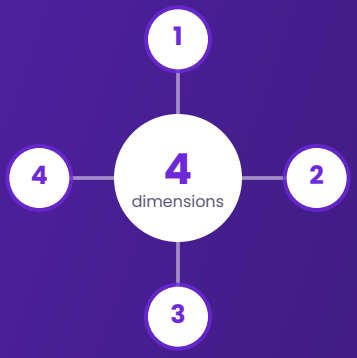
Delivers dependable results through planning, problem-solving and teamwork.

CORE COMPETENCY 01

01

Business Acumen

Reading the business and shaping people strategy so it lifts performance and growth.



Dimensions and what they look like in practice

1. Context Reading

Turns market and organisational signals into HR priorities.

- Follows industry and macro trends to anticipate what the business will need
- Knows how the company creates value and where HR adds to it
- Fits HR practice to the business model and value chain

2. Commercial Fluency

Brings financial thinking to HR choices.

- Reads financial and performance numbers to judge business health
- Plans and controls HR budgets with cost discipline and clear payoff

3. Customer Insight

Designs HR around the people it serves.

- Listens closely to what employees and internal clients need
- Builds solutions that improve experience and show business value
- Refines services using feedback loops

4. Strategy Partnership

Keeps HR strategy in step with business goals.

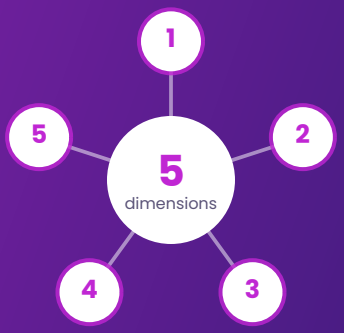
- Turns business strategy into HR priorities and influences decisions
- Links every initiative to a business outcome
- Proves HR's contribution with meaningful metrics

CORE COMPETENCY 02

02

Data Literacy

Using evidence to make people decisions and to show what HR delivers.



Dimensions and what they look like in practice

1. Data Stewardship

Looks after the quality and responsible handling of people data.

- Sets standards and runs regular quality checks
- Builds privacy and governance rules into daily work
- Steps in when data is misused or wrong

2. Analytical Thinking

Gets insight out of data in a structured way.

- Spots patterns and relationships in workforce data
- Blends numbers with qualitative input
- Tests conclusions against operational reality

3. Ethical Data Use

Checks data is sound, fair and used responsibly.

- Questions sources, assumptions and limitations
- Looks for bias and corrects it
- Weighs ethical risk before new data practices

4. Data Storytelling

Makes complex analysis clear and persuasive.

- Picks visuals that simplify the message
- Wraps findings in a narrative tied to priorities
- Adjusts detail and tone for each audience

5. Evidence-Based Practice

Uses insight to drive decisions and prove impact.

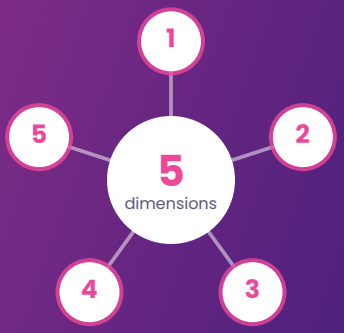
- Challenges assumptions with validated evidence
- Defines success measures before launch and tracks them
- Encourages others to use data with confidence

CORE COMPETENCY 03

03

Digital Agility

Using digital tools and a change-ready mindset to work faster and together.



Dimensions and what they look like in practice

1. Digital Awareness

Sees how technology will reshape work and people.

- Watches emerging technologies and trends
- Judges their effect on strategy and workforce before recommending
- Keeps learning and trialling new tools

2. Technology Use

Puts digital tools to work for scale and efficiency.

- Gets full value out of HR systems and platforms
- Connects tools and automates repeat tasks for a smooth experience

3. Security & Ethics

Protects people, systems and data.

- Practises sound privacy and cybersecurity
- Builds fairness and accountability into digital initiatives
- Explains how technology is used to earn trust

4. Digital Collaboration

Works well with others through digital platforms.

- Uses collaboration tools with intent to stay aligned
- Makes tools accessible to every employee group
- Builds partnerships that extend impact

5. Readiness & Capability

Prepares the organisation to adopt and scale change.

- Links technology spend to business and people outcomes
- Models digital confidence and encourages experimenting
- Builds skills, support and systems for lasting change

CORE COMPETENCY 04

04

AI Fluency

Understanding and applying AI responsibly to lift HR outcomes and business value.



Dimensions and what they look like in practice

1. Confident Application

Uses AI know-how to improve everyday HR work.

- Knows where AI helps across the employee lifecycle, and where it does not
- Chooses the right tools for accuracy, scale and speed
- Writes clear, contextual prompts and refines them

2. Responsible Practice

Keeps AI ethical, transparent and trusted.

- Pairs AI insight with human judgment
- Checks tools for fairness and bias before rollout
- Is open about how AI uses data
- Spots compliance risks early and applies governance

3. Adoption Advocacy

Spreads AI confidence across the organisation.

- Shares practical use cases and lessons learned
- Pilots in low-risk settings, then scales on feedback
- Argues for a strategy that balances innovation and responsibility

4. Work Integration

Builds AI into how HR actually runs.

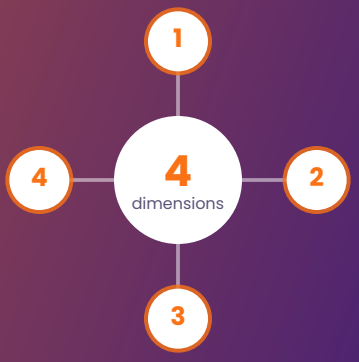
- Co-designs AI solutions with stakeholders to tackle root causes
- Embeds AI in existing workflows without hurting experience

CORE COMPETENCY 05

05

People Advocacy

Building human-centred cultures that balance wellbeing, performance, ethics and sustainability.



Dimensions and what they look like in practice

1. Culture Shaping

Builds a high-performance culture rooted in inclusion and wellbeing.

- Connects daily work to purpose and shared accountability
- Sets clear expectations, recognises results, protects wellbeing
- Lives company values in decisions and makes room for every voice

2. Change & Resilience

Leads change with empathy and foresight.

- Designs change with milestones and ongoing reinforcement
- Involves stakeholders early for shared ownership
- Equips leaders and teams to cope with uncertainty

3. Ethics & Risk Ownership

Protects trust through principled conduct.

- Anticipates cultural and workforce risk
- Decides and communicates with integrity
- Builds compliance into daily processes with regular review

4. Sustainability & Social Impact

Uses HR influence for lasting good.

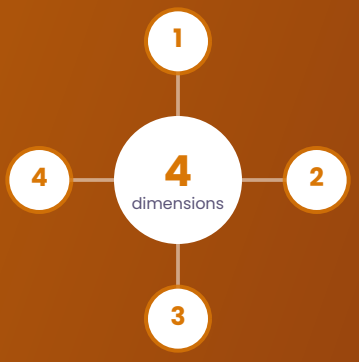
- Creates partnerships that benefit employees and communities
- Weaves ESG principles into HR strategy
- Champions equity and dignity at work

CORE COMPETENCY 06

06

Execution Excellence

Delivering dependable results through planning, problem-solving and collaboration.



Dimensions and what they look like in practice

1. Agility & Responsiveness

Balances structure with flexibility.

- Turns goals into action plans and revisits priorities
- Owns outcomes and follows through on commitments
- Adjusts course when conditions shift and reallocates resources

2. Problem-Solving & Decisions

Thinks clearly and decides well.

- Challenges assumptions and digs to root causes
- Holds competing priorities in balance
- Decides on evidence, weighing risk and long-term impact
- Reviews results and learns

3. Cross-Functional Collaboration

Aligns people across boundaries.

- Communicates expectations clearly for each audience
- Builds trust and shared accountability
- Influences through credibility, empathy and data
- Forms partnerships that remove barriers

4. Systems Thinking

Sees how the parts of the business connect.

- Maps links between teams, processes and systems
- Notices recurring patterns and feedback loops
- Weighs second- and third-order effects before acting

THE DEEP STEM

Six specialist domains

Awareness & Attraction

Builds an employer brand and hiring engine that attracts, engages and converts strong talent.

- Employer brand & value proposition
- Sourcing & recruitment marketing
- Selection & hiring process
- Onboarding & early-career pathways

Business Transformation

Aligns structures, processes and people plans with business and financial priorities.

- Organisation design & development
- Change leadership & governance
- Workforce & scenario planning
- Financial insight & business cases
- Project & process excellence

HR Technology & Analytics

Uses data, technology and automation to sharpen HR processes, insight and digital change.

- People analytics & data science
- Data foundations, quality & metrics
- Insight, dashboards & decisions
- HR platforms & automation
- AI tools, design & governance

People Experience & Culture

Designs inclusive, engaging workplaces that lift experience, connection and wellbeing.

- Employee experience journeys
- Engagement & internal communication
- DEI strategy & measurement
- Wellbeing programmes
- Performance management

People Operations

Runs reliable, compliant, efficient HR operations that protect trust and cut risk.

- Total rewards & benefits
- Payroll operations
- HR policy & compliance
- Employee & labour relations
- Exit management
- People risk & crisis readiness

Talent Growth

Builds organisational capability through learning, leadership and career development.

- Learning programme design
- Leadership development & coaching
- Succession & career management
- Talent mobility & pipelines

FOR PEOPLE MANAGERS

Leadership competencies: six pillars



Strategic Impact

Sets an HR direction that creates measurable value.

- Strategic foresight
- Vision alignment
- Influence & storytelling

Sound Judgment

Makes timely, ethical decisions that balance risk and opportunity.

- Decision quality
- Governance & accountability
- Ethical stewardship

Credibility & Trust

Earns confidence through authenticity and consistent delivery.

- Authenticity & integrity
- Relationship building
- Reputation & influence

Talent Empowerment

Builds capability and ownership so people and teams thrive.

- Coaching & development
- Engagement & motivation
- Inclusion & belonging

Change Leadership

Leads transformation with clarity, agility and foresight.

- Change execution
- Agility & experimentation
- Resilience & sustainability

Self-Mastery

Leads with self-awareness, discipline and integrity.

- Self-awareness
- Empathetic leadership
- Personal accountability

Great HR leaders build on all six

IN PRACTICE

Meet Meera: the framework in a single working week



Team of six: 2 recruiters, 1 HR administrator, 2 HR business partners, 1 learning facilitator · HR Manager at a mid-sized manufacturer

Business Acumen

Reads market shifts and turns them into focused HR actions that protect production targets and workforce stability.

Execution Excellence

Rolls out a revised total-rewards approach across functions, using structured problem-solving and KPIs to prove it works.

Data Literacy

Digs into turnover patterns, interprets them in context and gives leadership clear, evidence-based recommendations.

AI Fluency

Uses AI to model reward scenarios and analyse attrition drivers, then checks outputs for bias and gaps before acting.

Leadership

Coaches the team and resets direction as priorities shift.

Illustrative scenario

Meera is a fictional example showing how breadth (core competencies) and leadership combine in one role.

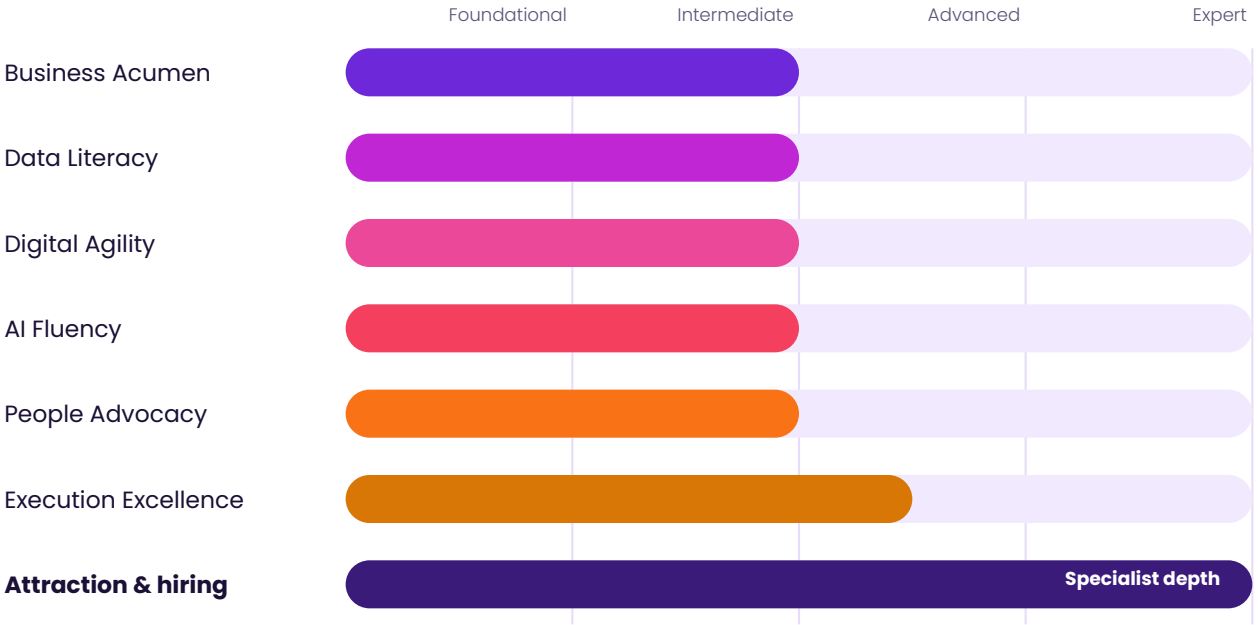
DEPTH DEPENDS ON THE ROLE

Nobody needs to be an expert at everything

Everyone builds capability across the six core competencies. How deep they go in each area depends on what the role demands.

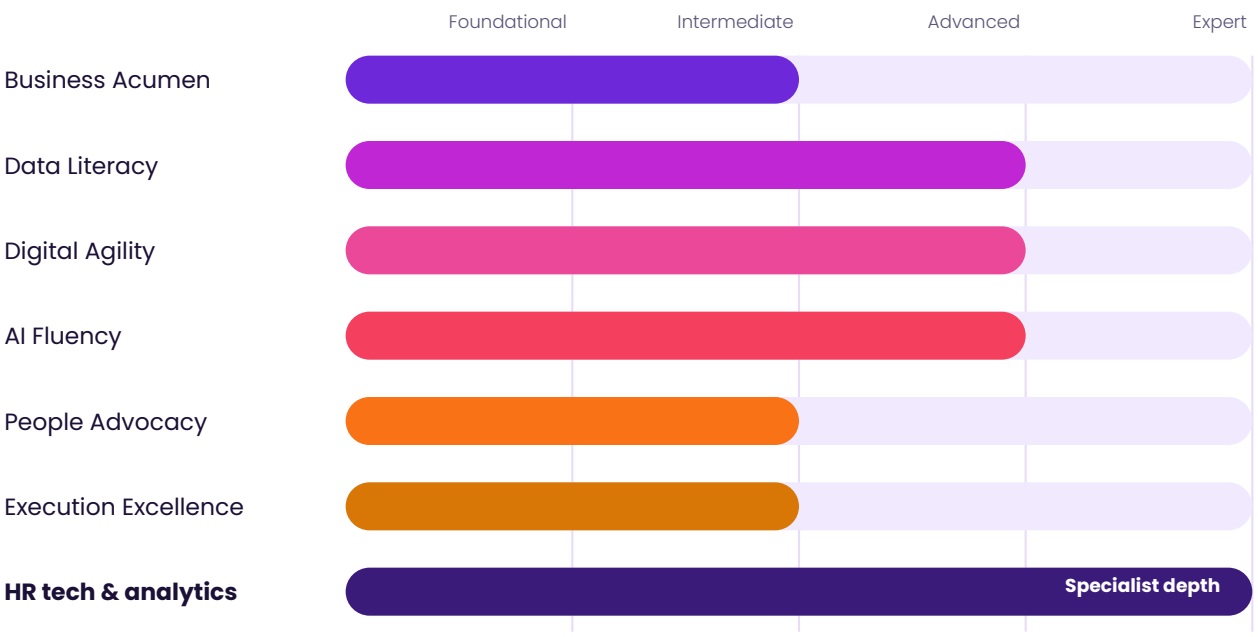
Talent Acquisition Specialist

Solid across the core, deep in hiring



HRIS Analyst

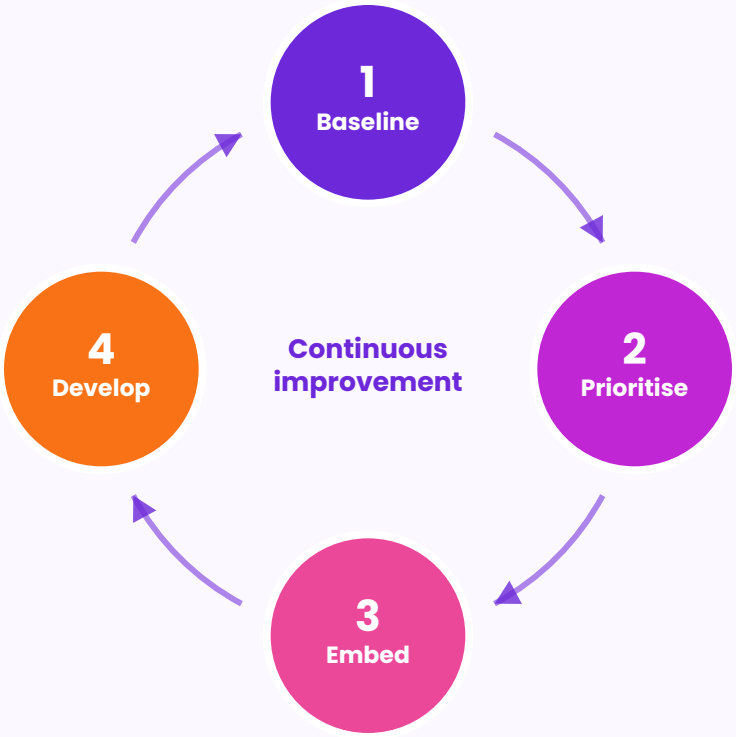
Strong in data and tech, solid elsewhere



Illustrative profiles, not assessment results.

PUTTING IT TO WORK

Four steps to adopt the framework



1

Baseline

Assess where individuals and the team stand today against each competency to reveal strengths and gaps.

2

Prioritise

Focus upskilling where it will move business results most.

3

Embed

Build the competencies into job descriptions, performance goals, feedback conversations, stakeholder reviews and career paths.

4

Develop

Combine formal learning with stretch assignments, cross-functional projects, peer learning and regular feedback.

HOW PROTALENT ADVISORY CAN HELP

Diagnose first, then solve

We help UAE and India teams turn a competency framework into everyday practice, from a clear baseline to capability that lasts.

1 Diagnose	Map current HR capability and gaps against the framework
2 Design	Create role profiles and a competency model that fits your business
3 Embed	Build it into hiring, appraisals, career paths and HR policy
4 Develop	Plan learning, coaching and stretch work for each role
5 Sustain	Review progress and support day-to-day HR delivery

What teams get from working with us

- **A shared language**
  One framework for hiring, appraisals and development.
- **Clear priorities**
  Upskilling focused where it moves results.
- **Practical tools**
  Role profiles, assessments and learning plans you can use.
- **Flexible support**
  From advisory projects to HR outsourcing.

ProTalent Advisory
HR & People Advisory · Ajman, UAE

Let's build your HR team's capability.

Talk to us about a competency baseline, role profiles or an HR capability roadmap for your business.



Janvi Mistry

Managing Director, ProTalent Advisory

Let's talk

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Framework adapted and rephrased from AIHR's T-Shaped HR Competency Model (aihr.com/hr-competency-model).