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Norma Oldfield
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A Competency Model for Video Relay Service Interpreters

Norma Lee Oldfield[1]

Performance Improvement, LLC

Abstract

The development of Video Relay Services (VRS) has resulted in a new specialization in the field of sign language interpreting. However, the supply of highly skilled practitioners falls short of the increasing demand. Though interpreters are being placed in VRS call centers, there is no standardized model by which to measure VRS interpreter performance. This study uses a classic competency model design to guide the development of a competency model that identifies and describes sign language video interpreter competencies related to VRS work. A VRS competency dictionary and rating tool were created and used to measure current practitioners, and both were successfully validated. Further research for future development of VRS interpreters is specified.

Keywords: sign language interpreting; video relay services; VRS; competency studies; expert development; assessment; training; performance improvement

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[1] *Correspondence to: normaleeoldfield@hotmail.com*

A Competency Model for Video Relay Service Interpreters

1.   Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to create a video relay service (VRS) competency model to be used by educators, trainers, and VRS providers to evaluate current and future video interpreters, as well as guide the development of those video interpreters toward expert performance. The study uses a continuum of expertise to benchmark the differences between novice, competent, and expert VRS performers. The study also identifies and describes the behaviors and competencies of VRS interpreters.

1.1. VRS creates demand

A situational analysis shows that sign language interpreter education and development are not producing the number of practitioners needed to keep up with current demands, much less the predicted demands for the near future. There is also an existing competency gap for general interpreters who successfully complete an interpreter training program yet are not ready to begin a successful practice (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). This means a graduate of an interpreter training program is not considered part of the qualified talent pool for general interpreting practice, much less for a specialization such as VRS.

   It is estimated that VRS centers throughout the United States employ over 4000 interpreters on either a full- or part-time basis to provide millions of minutes of interpreting services per month. VRS providers compete for the most qualified, experienced, and highly certified interpreters across the country (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2006). The recognized need for more interpreters is industry-wide.

1.2. Interpreter education: Moving from deontological to teleological

There are numerous studies surrounding expert development, and there is evidence in the literature to suggest that experts do things differently than novices (Benner, 1984; Ericsson & Smith, 1991). For instance, experts employ different problem solving strategies in complex environments.   They exhibit deeper understanding of the principals of the subject matter in which they are experts. They have automated many of the simpler tasks, and this allows more attention to be directed to new challenges. Furthermore, experts are more aware of how they do things, as well as when they are right or wrong. The process of expertise development involves the learning of more effective problem-solving and metacognitive strategies, as well as a heroic effort over and above what normal learning requires (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). Yet, instructional models in traditional interpreter training programs continue to emphasize low-level cognitive and practical skill development: "earlier models often discouraged practitioners from exploring the implications of decision-making on communication outcomes and offered limited direction in how to apply critical thinking to resolve demands associated with the work of interpreters" (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 1998, in Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005, p. 24).

Models of interpretation used in sign language interpreter training programs were designed to structure content and text so that interpreters could process the information in a way that led to a semantically equivalent translation (Gish, 1996).
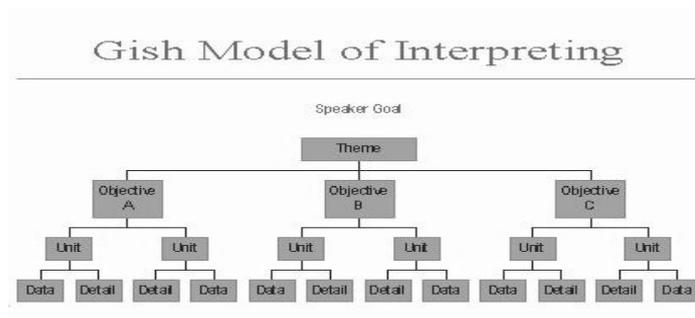

Figure 1. Gish model of interpreting.

Sign language interpreter training has been predominantly a transfer of knowledge, comprehension, and application surrounding linguistic skills and message equivalencies. However, sign language interpreter training is changing.

Current cognitive models are beginning to account for the potential demands of the environment and the participants of an interpreted event. There is a movement to move the critical thinking of sign language interpreters from a *deontological*, or rule-based approach, to a more *teleological*, or goal-based approach. The work of Robyn Dean and Robert Pollard is responsible for this shift in approach. Dean and Pollard (2006) use a demand-control schema theory to analyze interpreting work. Practitioners are introduced to the complete spectrum of interpreting work challenges and are taught to consider specific factors within the interpreting work environments that affect them, their consumers, and their resulting translations. This demand-control schema, as a work analysis tool, allows interpreters to incorporate the development of higher levels of cognitive and metacognitive skills, such as evaluation, synthesis, and judgment, as they analyze their own work.

Dean and Pollard's introduction of demand-control schema and the application of a teleological approach to interpreting requires practitioners to consider multi-layered decision-making processes, the psychological stresses surrounding the demands, and responsibility for the results of the work as it is performed. The result is a much more complex, multilayered environment requiring higher order cognitive processing skills in which the application of a specialized VRS skill set would be centered (see Figure 2).

In such complex environments, expertise is both acquired and required. Superior performers manage and excel, sometimes without knowing what or how they do it. In complex jobs, competencies are relatively more important in predicting superior performance than are task-related skills, intelligence, or credentials (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Interpreting for a VRS is a complex job, and identifying competencies to measure levels of expertise is foundational.
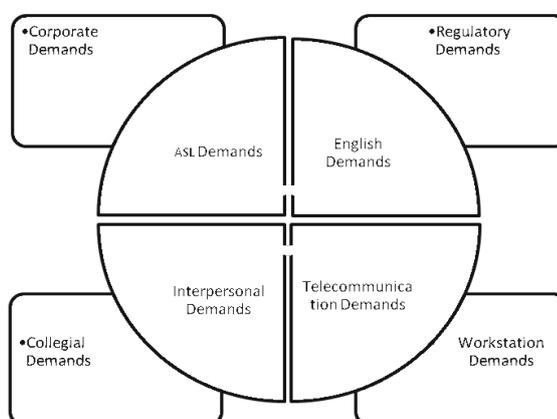
Figure 2: Areas of expertise required for VRS

2. Competency study design

This study uses a classic competency model design (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) as a guide:

Performance effectiveness criteria were defined. Three groups of VRS managers and trainers made up the expert panels. Each group brainstormed ultimate video interpreter (VI) behaviors that they recognized in their superior performers. The groups prioritized the behaviors according to the importance to job success.

The first criterion sample was identified and invited to participate. The groups of VRS managers and trainers were asked to nominate interpreters in three categories: novice, competent and expert practitioners.

Data were collected from nominated practitioners. Behavioral event interviews (BEI) were conducted with nominated VIs from four different call centers. These interviews provided the language for how the competencies are expressed in specific industry or organizational cultures. The BEIs provided very specific descriptions of effective and ineffective job behaviors that can be used to show and teach others what to do, and what not to do, on the job.

Data were analyzed and a competency model was developed. Data were analyzed from all four groups (i.e., managers and three levels of VIs) to quantify the behaviors of VIs, as described in their transcribed interviews. The numbers were analyzed to identify any significant correlations between the groups' rankings of each competency and its salience to the job.

The competency model was validated. Two managers and one trainer were asked to rate and rank members of a second criterion sample on competencies, using a rating form developed from the competency model. In this type of research, if the competency model and the rating form are valid, superstars in the second sample should get higher scores on these rating forms than the average or novice performers. This satisfied the concurrent construct validation.

2.1. Thematic analysis

There were four occurrences of data analysis during this study. The first occurred in the process of developing the competency statements. The information gathered from the expert panels was used to establish competency statements. By carefully examining the data generated in the facilitated discussion, themes were identified and clusters of competencies became the competency dictionary. The second data analysis occurred during the rating

of the BEIs. Each time an example of a listed competency was identified, it was noted and counted toward a final score for each VI interview. The third analysis occurred when the quantitative data were compared across groups to establish significance. And the fourth analysis was accomplished by tallying the rating sheets that were filled out by VRS managers and a VRS trainer in order to validate the competency model.

2.2. Measures

In developing themes and codes from raw data, researchers must have a great deal of faith in the process because they typically do not know what the destination will be or what it will look like or how long it will take (Boyatzis, 1998). Data driven codes are constructed inductively from the raw information. Working directly with the raw information enhanced an appreciation of the information and allowed the researcher to appreciate the gross (i.e., easily evident) as well as the intricate (i.e., difficult to discern) aspects of the information. For example, in the present research, the phrases "I can keep an appropriate emotional distance." or, "I know how to deal with people in general." and "I'm helpful to others." might be labelled as "customer service orientation." These phrases could be said to have a unifying theme and a notation would be made in this category each time any of these phrases are mentioned in an interview story.

Transcribed interviews were coded and each time a competency was mentioned, it was marked for frequency of occurrence. That data were transferred onto one of three master tables: one for performers identified as being superior, one for performers identified as being average, and one for performers identified as being novices. The data collected on the three master tables were used to create charts comparing the three groups.

The outcome of this step was a set of qualitative categories (i.e., competency dictionary with examples of phrases) and a rating sheet for VRS skills assessment (see Appendix).

2.3. Limitations of methodology

There was a potential for contamination of performance and responses due to the familiarity of some of the participants with the researcher. Participants outside of the researcher's own workplace were included. The volume of information collected by way of BEIs had to be transcribed and analyzed for each interview, which was time and cost intensive.

The final number of VI participants was thirteen. A greater number of respondents would have been desirable, in order to have more application and generalization of the findings. However, it proved to be quite difficult to recruit individual participants. VRS providers are competing for the same number of qualified interpreters, therefore the nature of the industry is proprietary and information is fiercely guarded. Asking interpreters to participate in discussions with other interpreters from other VRS providers required reassurance that the discussions would be in general about the work, never specifically about a company or any company's processes. Some interpreters declined to participate due to the potential conflict of interest.

2.4. Data collection

Data collection for this study was completed in two parts. Part one of the data was collected from VRS managers. These management group discussions resulted in a clustering and ranking of competencies that supervisors and trainers found to be important in VRS interpreting. This portion of the data served as the foundation for a competency dictionary and a starting place for organizing behaviors into clusters. A benefit of collecting data from management is the ability to identify the potential rhetoric versus identifying de facto phenomenon. It can happen in a practice profession that a "prevailing schema or belief of how that profession conducts its work fails to adequately account for the realities encountered in the professional practice" (Marchark, Peterson, Winston & Sapere, 2005, p. 264). Gathering descriptions of a superior VRS performance from a management perspective

followed by data collection from the practitioners themselves illuminated some gaps between what is believed to be effective and what VRS practitioners actually do in their jobs.

Part two of the data was collected from three levels of practitioners who were nominated by the management group as novice, competent, or expert. The Dreyfus and Dreyfus skill development model describes these levels as: (a) *novice*, those who follow rules with some flexibility; (b) *competent*, those who are able to apply goal-directed plans and strategies; and (c) *experts*, those who have reached a point where decision making becomes unnecessary and they naturally do the right thing, without having to think about it (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993).

From the participant group, the data showed that the average VRS interpreter in this study was female, in her thirties, is not a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults), holds a degree in interpreting, has been nationally certified for an average of six years, and has been professionally interpreting for an average of 11.5 years with just under two years of VRS experience (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Summary Statistics

	Mean	Median	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Age	34.75	31.50	27.00	23.00	50.00
Years interpreting	11.50	10.00	23.00	2.00	25.00
Years certified	6.00	6.50	15.00	0.00	15.00
Years VRS Experience	1.90	1.75	5.00	0.04	5.00

		Total	Male	Female	
CODA	Yes	3	2	1	
	No	9	1	8	
	Total	12	3	9	

The individual behavioral event interviews were coded by number of times each competency was mentioned. Spencer and Spencer (1993) explain that the BEI method identifies competencies needed to do the job well. Interviewees tend to tell vivid "short stories" about how they handle the toughest, most important parts of their jobs and, in doings so, reveal their competencies to do the job (p. 98). Competencies were counted each time they appeared in the BEI, providing data on frequency per expert level, as well as an order of importance.

Counting and ordering the competencies by number of times they were mentioned reflected, first, a differential between expert levels and, second, an ordinal ranking of individual practitioners' beliefs of what is most important for the job. The management group ranked each competency from highest to lowest in order of importance for the job. If the individual VIs had mentioned the use of these competencies along the same lines of priority as the management group, the highest number of times this occurred would map out at 1A while the next highest number of mentions would be 1B, and then 1C, and so on, throughout the list of 23 competencies. If the work that was being done (de facto) aligned with what management thinks is being done (rhetoric), the managers and practitioners would have ranked the list of competencies identically. However, the three groups of VIs (i.e., novice, competent and expert) rated each competency and its perceived importance to the work differently from the management group.

3.   Findings

3.1. Population sample

The variance of participants was averaged to create a profile; however, the dispersion of their ages, years of experience, and years of certification was noticeable (see Table 1). A larger sample would have been necessary to provide greater estimation precision. This will have an impact on a generalization of the findings. The assumption that a proportionate percentage of the general interpreting population would be represented in the sample did prove true. A majority of professional interpreters are female and have a degree; the majority of respondents were female and did have a degree.

   An interesting finding is that of the participants: two-thirds of the sample were native sign language users (i.e., CODAs—Children of Deaf Adults) and two-thirds of the CODAs were male.   It may be significant that in VRS, the gender item did figure into the CODA population sample. This issue will be addressed in the implications/ recommendations section.

3.2. Ranking of competencies

The managers and practitioners agreed on the salience of 11 items, which is almost 50%. This means that half of what the managers believe their top performers are doing is what they are indeed doing. The rhetoric versus defacto is in alignment half of the time. The only differences in the top 50% of agreed upon competencies are the ranked order. Managers ranked the clusters ordinally: #1: personal effectiveness, #2: customer service, and #3: interpreting skills. The novice group ranked them: #1, #3, #2. The competent group ranked them: #2, #1, #3. And, the expert group ranked them: #1, with #2 and #3 tied. The expert group most aligned what they do with what the managers say they do.

   The differences in ranking were in the latter 50% of the competencies. None of the groups ranked the latter half of the competencies similarly. However, each group had evidence of each competency and cluster being salient to the job, so, though there are differences in the rankings of the competencies, the competencies overall were found to be appropriate.

3.3. Comparison between groups

In this sample, the correlations between group rankings proved to be significant. There was a correlation (at .01cv) between the managers' and the practitioners' rankings of competencies. There was a correlation (at .01cv) between the managers' and the novices' rankings of competencies. There was a correlation (at. 01cv) between the managers' and the experts' rankings of competencies. There was a significant correlation (at .01cv) between the novice, competent, and expert groups rankings of competencies. There was not a correlation (at either the .05cv or .01cv) between the managers' and the competent groups' rankings of competency clusters. This means that the correlations between management/novice and management/experts are driving the overall finding of significance between management and all practitioners. The greatest difference in correlation and ranking was between the managers and the competent group. The description of performance leading to expertise lists characteristics of competent performers to be one that relies on trial and error to resolve problems and still requires guidance from more skilled individuals to improve (McCarthy & Senebald, 2000). If the competent VIs in this study were furthest from the managers', experts', and novices' ranking of competency order of importance, they might be the group that needs more formal induction into VRS so that the weighted values of the competencies can be emphasized. If they understand that their own personal effectiveness and customer service skills are valued above their interpreting or technology skills, then trial and error might be minimized. Comparing rankings between groups of expertise shows where each group aligns with the stated goals of management and where the gaps

occur. A question posited by Gilbert (1996) in his behavioral engineering model (BEM), box number one (see Figure 3), is whether individuals know what is expected of them.

	Information	Instrumentation	Motivation
Environment	**1. Data, information** Do performers know what is expected?	**2. Resources, tools, environmental support** Do performers have what they need to perform?	**3. Consequences, rewards, incentives** Do performers get appropriate feedback?
Individual Characteristics	**4. Knowledge, skills** Do performers have the knowledge or skills to perform?	**5. Capacity** Are performers capable of performing?	**6. Motivation** Do the performers care about the job or their performance? Are recruiting objectives matching the realities of the job?

Figure 3: Gilbert's behavior engineering model (1996.)

Helping the competent VI understand what management expects them to prioritize in the workstation would be a human performance improvement application. Box number four (see Figure 3) in Gilbert's model suggests that specific training could be designed and applied to the competent group to match performance requirements.

3.4. *Rating sheet to validate the competency model*

A score sheet was designed and sent to two VRS managers and one VRS trainer to rate VIs in each of the skill groups: novice, competent and expert. Analysis of the rating sheets indicated that the managers and the trainer did rate expert VIs higher than competent VIs, and that they rated competent VIs higher than novice VIs. The ratings were clearly entry level scores in the novice group (at the 1- and 2-point levels on a 5-point scale) and clearly expert level scores with the expert group (at the 4- and 5-point levels on a 5-point scale). It was the competent ratings that tended to be higher than average (at the 4- and 5-point levels on a 5-point Likert scale). In spite of the higher scores, this group was still categorized as competent by the raters. Again, the perception of the competent VIs having to use trial and error as a problem resolution technique might be underdeveloped in the opinions of the managers. Use of the demand-control schema as a work analysis tool might allow this group of interpreters to incorporate the development of higher levels of cognitive and metacognitive skills such as evaluation, synthesis, and judgment as they analyze their own work. Identifying the gaps and designing training protocol for human performance improvement could be focused on this group of practitioners.
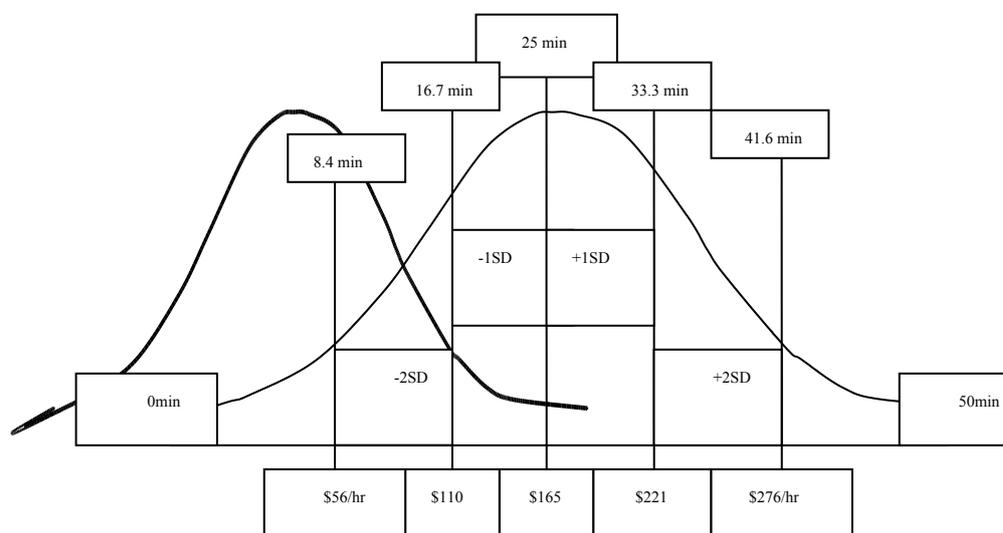
4.   Implications and recommendations

In consideration of the population sample for this study, it may be significant that in VRS, the gender item did figure into the CODA population sample. VRS is a lucrative specialization compared to the historically classified social service of general sign language interpreting. Men who were primary income streams for families might not have made a good living as a general practitioner in the past, nor would they have had much opportunity for upward mobility. Now, with respectable wages in VRS and positions of management in corporate organizations, there may be more men, and therefore, more male CODAs entering the field. Further research might compare the number of male general interpreters and the number of male VRS interpreters with an emphasis on male CODAs working in VRS. Also, there might be an interest in how a VRS environment and managers' assessments of competencies differ across genders.

   Pertaining to specific VI skill levels and their alignment with management expectations for VRS, the competent group was most out of alignment with management in ranking of competencies, as well as in how they were rated in the validation step. If the expert and novice group are in general alignment with managers' expectations, then why is the competent group's ranking not in alignment? And why is the competent group scored high in skill sets but not considered expert by management on the continuum of expertise? Consider the process of interpreter development; the novice VI would be coming out of recent training and education programs fully loaded with VRS jargon and managers' expectations (rhetoric) while the expert VIs have accumulated the requisite number of years and experience and have the confidence of performance (de facto). It might be the competent VI who has general interpreting experience, perhaps some VRS experience, but enters this specialization without formal induction and is left to his or her own devices. Perhaps each group is learning on the job by trial and error; however, the novice group would be held to entry level expectations and the expert group is setting the standards. The groups at either end, novices and experts, have a comfortable level of expectation as they align with what their managers value. Competent VIs may be experiencing discomfort or conflict, as it would seem that their values do not completely align with expected social values. This conflict may lead to frustration and dissatisfaction and, eventually, attrition.

   Human performance improvement interventions could be used to reduce the time and frustration spent at this level of performance. Another question to consider as per the behavioral engineering model (see Figure 3), box number three is whether there are career development opportunities available in order to attain desired accomplishments from human resources (Gilbert, 1996). Moving competent practitioners to the expert level might be considered a career development opportunity, especially if that kind of development is rewarded with financial incentives. The gap between what the competent group valued and what was socially valued could be addressed directly by way of coaching and guidance about their performance. It is possible that without intervention the competent practitioner could remain competent without advancement. On the whole, that is an expensive difference for the VRS provider (see Figure 4).

25 min

16.7 min

33.3 min

8.4 min

41.6 min

-1SD +1SD

-2SD

+2SD

0min

50min

$56/hr	$110	$165	$221	$276/hr

Each VRS hour caps at 50 minutes
Each conversation minute is worth $6.64 in reimbursement
50% or 25 minutes would be an average performance
-1 SD is potentially worth $110/hr
+1 SD is potentially worth $220/hr
Or, 100% more potential productivity from an above average performance
than a below average performance

Figure 4: Potential productivity value of 1 standard deviation.

The economic example of one superior performer capturing up to $2380 in reimbursable minutes per shift versus an average performer capturing $1322 in reimbursable minutes per shift is a substantial difference. From the company's perspective, the employee costs could be the same for both VIs but the returns are significantly different. Not only are there potential revenue losses for the company, but stagnancy and lack of development could be a potentially unsatisfactory career path for the competent individual as well. Turn-over costs would have to be estimated along with the potential per-minute revenue loss of an average performer. If this assumption were accurate, the competent group might be best served with a human performance improvement intervention of VRS coaching to promote immediate structured development.

Another speculation about the competent group is that, according to the results of the rating sheet, the competent group is doing what the managers think they should be doing but perhaps are not able to articulate or sustain it. If they are performing the higher skills sets (Managers did tend to rate them at the higher end on the Likert scale.) but not able to recognize it in their own work, training toward expertise might not be complicated or lengthy. Targeted training to identify the skills, label them, and show current application and effectiveness might be enough to move competent VIs to an expert level.

It is often assumed that only the most experienced interpreters are successful VRS practitioners. The profile of the average VI included 11.5 years of professional experience. However, in this study, recent graduates from interpreter training programs reduced the average noticeably, as they offset the 20-plus years of professional practice by each of the CODA VIs. The novice VIs were placed in VRS call centers and were doing the work at least at entry level and some at a competent level. Using the rating sheet, VRS managers and trainers could target a novice VI's training and development.

To address human performance improvement for professional development of current VIs, VRS providers could use the rating sheet to objectively categorize their VRS staff and know where to begin addressing each VI's

professional development. Because each competency is described in the competency dictionary, it might be in each VRS provider's best interest to establish a rating sheet training to standardize assessment results.

The literature review asserted that studies using competency model designs can identify what needs to be taught to future practitioners and how it can be taught, as well as determine the most effective media for the delivery of instruction (Dubois, 1998). Interpreter education programs at the two- and four-year colleges can use this competency model to outline skill sets required and write curricula tailored to VRS as a specialization over and above their general sign language interpreting courses.

Brenda Seal's study (2004) identifying characteristics of general sign language interpreters showed that interpreters in her population scored strongly in six out of seven multiple intelligences and showed highly developed linguistic, spatial, logic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal abilities that apply to superior performers.   Using this competency model, future research in human performance improvement concerning the personal characteristics and strengths of VRS interpreters could be explored. Again, Gilbert's (1996) BEM box number six (see Figure 3) enables us to consider if people are being recruited to match the realities of the job. Matching personalities and characteristics to performance competencies, interpreter education programs could guide appropriate students toward VRS as a specialization and VRS providers could target recruiting opportunities.

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Competency Model for VRS Interpreters

6. Appendix

VRS Competency Scoresheet

VRS Manager or Trainer: _____ Date _____

VI Ranking (Circle One):   Novice   Competent   Expert

1. Personal Effectiveness Cluster	Least				Most
1A Self Control	1	2	3	4	5
1B Self Confidence/Low Fear of Rejection	1	2	3	4	5
1C Flexibility/Stamina	1	2	3	4	5
1D Accurate Self Assessment	1	2	3	4	5
1E Use of Socialized Power/Org Commitment	1	2	3	4	5

2. Customer Service Cluster	Least				Most
2A Pleasant Demeanor	1	2	3	4	5
2B Positive Regard/Concern for Close Relationships	1	2	3	4	5
2C Perceptual Objectivity	1	2	3	4	5
2D Use of Unilateral Power/Autonomy	1	2	3	4	5
2E Developing Others	1	2	3	4	5

3. Interpreting Skills Cluster	Least				Most
3A Fluency in ASL & English	1	2	3	4	5
3B Fluency in Range of Registers	1	2	3	4	5
3C Role Shifting	1	2	3	4	5
3D Stamina	1	2	3	4	5

3E Self Monitoring	1	2	3	4	5
3F Team Interpreting	1	2	3	4	5
3G Linguistic Multitasking	1	2	3	4	5

4. Technology Skills Cluster	Least				Most
4A Use of Workstation Equipment	1	2	3	4	5
4B Conceptual Understanding of Call Center Infrastructure	1	2	3	4	5
4C Sequential/Analytical Thinking	1	2	3	4	5

5. Telecommunications Skills Cluster	Least				Most
5A Call Management	1	2	3	4	5
5B Manage Group Process	1	2	3	4	5
5C Manage a Virtual Environment	1	2	3	4	5

Competency Model for VRS Interpreters

VRS Interpreting Competency Dictionary

1. Personal Effectiveness Cluster

1A. Competency: Self Control

Narrative Definition: I maintain composure under stress. I stay calm and am not easily provoked. I am able to manage stress. I was caught off-guard but handled it well. If the caller gets angry, I just keep doing my job. When I see a certain caller's name on the screen, I cringe, but I take the call and work with it. I maintain a high level of professionalism. I have the emotional maturity that comes with professionalism.

Behavioral Indicators: Controlled responses, responding instead of reacting. Calm responses to stressful situations.

1B. Competency: Self Confidence/Low Fear of Rejection

Narrative Definition: I am decisive. I take responsibility for my decisions. I am thick skinned and objective. I know what I am doing and do it well. I take calls/callers even when I know they will be hard. I know when its time to transfer the call. This is my job, I know what I'm doing. I've handled enough conflicts, I am ready to go through it again.

Behavioral Indicators: Problem solving, presents impressively, takes on challenging situations, learns from mistakes, quick recovery balance.

1C. Competency: Flexibility/Stamina

Narrative Definition: I adapt easily. I can change my behavior to suit the situation. I can stay on the call when necessary. The situations are always different and it keeps me on my toes. I'm able to handle things that come my way. My brain can switch on a dime. VRS is an ever changing environment. I can deal with new rules and different ways of doing things. I don't wear out easily.

Behavioral Indicators: Makes long or short term adaptations on the spot, has strong coping skills. Can maintain high levels of performance for long periods of time.

1D. Competency: Accurate Self Assessment

Narrative Definition: I know my strengths and weaknesses. I know when to switch, I know when I'm out of my league; I can't be perfect for every caller and that's ok.

…those calls are not fun for me. I know when I need to debrief. I love that callers come to me. I can take constructive criticism.

Behavioral Indicators: Able to identify own strengths and weaknesses.

1E. Competency: Use of Socialized Power/Organizational Commitment

Narrative Definition: I am a member of a team. I understand the need for cooperation to achieve larger organizational objectives. The company depends on me. I take care of my co-workers. I have responsibilities to my bosses and my co-workers. I show up on time. I am willing to back up other interpreters. We all process together after calls, asking each other what they did when this happened.

Behavioral Indicators: Puts organizational needs first, has loyalty toward co-workers, "fits in". Understands the relationship between employee performance, customer satisfaction and a sustainable job opportunity.

Competency Model for VRS Interpreters

2. Customer Service Cluster

2A. Competency: Pleasant Demeanor

Narrative Definition: I am friendly, crisp and clean, professional. I have a good attitude. I'm friendly, smiling and everyone feels good at the end of the call. I have a fun demeanor, I smile a lot.

Behavioral Indicator: smiles easily, well groomed, good posture.

2B. Competency: Positive Regard/Concern for Close Relationships

Narrative Definition: I am good. I am likable and caring. I'm a team-player. I feel some responsibility for removing the barrier between the Deaf and hearing callers. I like it when the callers thank me for doing a good job. I feel honored to be a part of their lives. I'm there for my teamers and know what they need to be supported. Having a caller who is willing to work with me makes a difference. I know how to respect people and treat callers on the videophone. I really like it when the callers and I work together as a team.

Behavioral Indicators: Has verbal and non-verbal skills that result in people feeling valued.

2C. Competency: Perceptual Objectivity

Narrative Definition: I keep an appropriate emotional distance. I don't take things personally. Calls are harder when callers aren't friendly or polite. Our customers could have more training on how to treat interpreters. I know how to deal with people in general. I made a rookie mistake. I am thick skinned. I can't own everything in the process.

Behavioral Indicators: Uses effective distancing skills, doesn't internalize failure.

2D. Competency: Use of Unilateral Power/Autonomy

*Narrative Definiti*on: I am in charge. I can make decisions within my scope of authority. I make sure the customer is getting the service. I have to pick and decide what to address. I decide if this person is just ticked off or if this is a power play. I'll give instructions to get the most out of this. I know which comments to ignore and which to include in order to make it all make sense. I have good judgment.

Behavioral Indicators: Problem solving skills, effective decision-making.

2E. Competency: Developing Others

Narrative Definition: I am helpful to others/callers. I gently coach or tutor as needed.

Behavioral Indicators: Able to give feedback to facilitate development.

3. Interpreting Skills

3A. Competency: Fluency in ASL and English

Narrative Description: I am highly skilled. I read ASL well. I produce ASL well. I voice well.

Behavioral Indicators: Greater than 80% interpreting accuracy with a variety of signers in a variety of situations.

3B. Competency: Fluency in a Range of Registers

Narrative Description: I can flow from formal to intimate register. I know when the register is intimate and when the call is "inside information".

Behavioral Indicators: Can seamlessly change sign or word choice, and can just pass along dialogue that doesn't make sense to a third person.

3C. Competency: Role Shifting

Narrative Description: I know when to jump in/out of various roles during a call.

Behavioral Indicators: knows how to perform as an operator, interpreter, ally, coach or customer service provider.

3D. Competency: Stamina

Narrative Description: I can tolerate stressful situation for extended periods of time.

Behavioral Indicators: has physical and mental endurance.

3E. Competency: Self Monitoring

Narrative Description: I know when I'm linguistically effective and when I'm not.

Behavioral Indicator: self awareness, situational awareness, able to ask for support.

3F. Competency: Team Interpreting

Narrative Description: I know how to feed and how to ask for feed in a workstation environment.

Behavioral Indicators: asks for support, indicates to team how to feed.

3G. Competency: Linguistic Multitasking

Narrative Description: I can take in visual information, process it and produce verbal output while taking in auditory information, process it and put out manual information.

Behavioral Indicators: Simultaneous interpreting without interruption of communication flow.

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4. Technology Skills Cluster

4A. Competency: Use of Workstation Equipment

Narrative Description: I'm not afraid of the equipment.

Behavioral Indicators: Can use all pieces of workstation equipment efficiently for a variety of call types (standard, VCO, conference, transfer, etc.)

4B. Competency: Conceptual Understanding of Call Center Infrastructure

Narrative Description: I know how the general technicalities of a call center work.

Behavioral Indicators: Can name parts and processes of call center systems, understands how the technical aspects potentially impact calls.

4C. Competency: Sequential/Analytical Thinking

Narrative Description: If this happens, I know what to do.

Behavioral Indicators: Procedural problem solving, controls technical processes well, knows which buttons to push and when.

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5. Telecommunications Skills Cluster

5A. Competency: Call Management

Narrative Description: I know how to manage calls.

Behavioral Indicators: Uses verbal and non-verbal cues to place-hold, indicate turn-taking with efficiency and limited intrusion.

5B. Competency: Manage Group Processes

Narrative Description: I can make the call work effectively. I can mediate between the callers.

Behavioral Indicators: Able to correctly assess callers' objectives, employing skill sets to match those objectives.

5C. Competency: Manage a Virtual Environment

Narrative Description: I am aware of the potential needs of a 2-D environment.

Behavioral Indicators: Can explain gaps in caller's expectations or close those gaps with minimal intrusion.