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Competency Mapping as a Tool for Talent Management: An Empirical Study

[1]Dr. Arpita Sastri,[2]Ms. Manisha G

[1]Associate Professor, Primus School of Management Studies

[2] Assistant Professor, Primus School of Management Studies

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of competency mapping as a strategic tool in talent management and its impact on organizational effectiveness. Despite growing recognition of competency-based approaches in human resource management, empirical evidence linking competency mapping to specific talent management outcomes remains limited, particularly in the Indian organizational context.

Keywords: Competency Mapping, Talent Management, Organizational Effectiveness, Structural Equation Modeling, Human Resource Management, India

1. Introduction

In an era defined by intensifying competitive pressures, rapid technological advancement, and evolving workforce expectations, organizations face the dual challenge of identifying employees with the right capabilities and deploying those capabilities strategically. Talent management has emerged as a cornerstone of contemporary human resource strategy, encompassing the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention, and deployment of individuals who are considered especially valuable to an organization (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). However, the effectiveness of talent management initiatives is critically contingent on the existence of accurate, context-specific competency frameworks that define what constitutes high performance in a given organizational setting.

Competency mapping refers to the systematic process of identifying and documenting the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors—collectively referred to as competencies—that are necessary for effective job performance (Sanghi, 2016). When rigorously conducted, competency mapping provides organizations with a standardized language for discussing and evaluating performance, a blueprint for learning and development, and an objective criterion for talent identification and succession planning. Despite its intuitive appeal and widespread adoption among large corporations, empirical research examining the pathways through which competency mapping influences talent management outcomes remains underdeveloped.

The Indian corporate landscape presents a particularly instructive context for this inquiry. India's economy, characterized by a large and diverse talent pool, a rapidly expanding services sector, and intensifying global competition, has witnessed significant investment in competency-based HR systems over the past two decades (Thite, 2016). Yet many organizations continue to implement competency frameworks without a clear understanding of their downstream effects on talent processes and organizational outcomes. This gap between practice and evidence represents both a practical limitation and a scholarly opportunity.

The present study addresses this gap by empirically examining the relationship between competency mapping and key talent management dimensions—talent identification, performance management, employee development, and succession planning—and their collective influence on organizational effectiveness. Using data from 358 HR professionals and line managers across multiple sectors in India, the study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test a theoretically grounded framework and assess mediation effects. The findings are intended to offer both theoretical contributions to the talent management literature and actionable guidance for HR practitioners.

2. Literature Review

The concept of competency in an organizational context traces its origins to McClelland's (1973) seminal work, which argued that traditional intelligence tests were poor predictors of job performance and that competencies—defined as

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underlying characteristics causally related to criterion-referenced performance—offered a more valid basis for personnel selection. Boyatzis (1982) subsequently elaborated this framework by distinguishing threshold competencies, necessary for minimally acceptable performance, from differentiating competencies that distinguish superior from average performers.

Modern competency frameworks have evolved significantly from these early formulations. Contemporary definitions encompass both behavioral and functional elements, recognizing that effective performance requires not only the possession of relevant knowledge and skills but also the ability to apply them appropriately in diverse organizational contexts (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Competency mapping, as a practice, involves the systematic identification of these competencies through methods such as job analysis, behavioral event interviews, focus groups, and expert panels (Lyle & Signe, 2008).

The strategic value of competency mapping lies in its capacity to create alignment between individual capabilities and organizational requirements. By articulating the competencies associated with high performance at each level and function within an organization, HR practitioners can establish a common framework that guides recruitment, performance appraisal, learning and development, and career progression (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004). This integrating function has led many scholars to characterize competency frameworks as the architectural backbone of strategic HRM (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

Talent management as a formal field of inquiry gained prominence in the late 1990s following McKinsey's influential report on the 'War for Talent' (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001), which highlighted the strategic importance of attracting and retaining high-performing individuals. Subsequent scholarly work has sought to provide greater theoretical rigor to the field by grounding talent management in established HR theories including the resource-based view of the firm, human capital theory, and configurational HR systems (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

Talent identification, or the process of identifying individuals with the potential and performance to occupy critical organizational positions, is widely recognized as the entry point of the talent management pipeline (Silzer & Church, 2009). Performance management systems, which establish performance expectations, provide feedback, and evaluate goal attainment, serve as critical data sources for talent identification and development decisions (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Employee development encompasses the intentional investments organizations make in building employee capabilities through training, coaching, mentoring, and stretch assignments (Noe et al., 2017). Succession planning, perhaps the most strategic element of talent management, ensures organizational continuity by systematically preparing high-potential employees for future leadership roles (Rothwell, 2010).

Organizational effectiveness, defined broadly as the degree to which an organization achieves its goals efficiently and adaptively, has been consistently linked to the quality of talent management practices in both empirical research and practitioner literature (Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994). However, the specific mechanisms through which talent management activities translate into organizational outcomes remain incompletely specified in the existing literature.

Research Hypotheses

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence reviewed above, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H1: Competency mapping will have a significant positive influence on talent identification.

H2: Competency mapping will have a significant positive influence on performance management.

H3: Competency mapping will have a significant positive influence on employee development.

H4: Competency mapping will have a significant positive influence on succession planning.

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H5: Competency mapping will have a significant positive direct influence on organizational effectiveness.

H6: Talent identification will have a significant positive influence on organizational effectiveness.

H7: Performance management will have a significant positive influence on organizational effectiveness.

H8: Employee development will have a significant positive influence on organizational effectiveness.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional, quantitative survey design consistent with the positivist research paradigm. Positivism was deemed appropriate given the study's objective of testing theoretically derived hypotheses regarding objectively specified causal relationships. The cross-sectional design, while limiting inferences about temporal causality, permitted efficient data collection across multiple organizational contexts.

The target population comprised HR professionals and line managers employed in medium to large organizations across three sectors—IT/ITES, manufacturing, and BFSI—operating in India. These sectors were selected on the basis of their extensive documented use of competency-based HR systems and their significant contribution to the Indian economy. A stratified random sampling procedure was employed, with organizations initially selected from the NASSCOM, CII, and FICCI member directories and respondents then randomly selected within each organization. A minimum organizational size of 500 employees was specified to ensure the existence of formal HR systems.

A target sample of 380 respondents was established based on power analysis for SEM (N > 200 for models with 6 constructs and up to 10 paths; Hair et al., 2014). After the removal of 22 questionnaires containing incomplete data (> 10% missing items), the final analytic sample comprised 358 respondents. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Sample (N = 358)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	198 (55.3%)
	Female	160 (44.7%)
Age Group	Below 30 years	86 (24.0%)
	30–40 years	142 (39.7%)
	Above 40 years	130 (36.3%)
Qualification	Undergraduate	104 (29.1%)
	Postgraduate	178 (49.7%)
	Professional/Others	76 (21.2%)
Experience	Less than 5 years	98 (27.4%)
	5–10 years	156 (43.6%)
	More than 10 years	104 (29.0%)
Sector	IT/ITES	128 (35.8%)
	Manufacturing	106 (29.6%)
	BFSI	80 (22.3%)

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	Others	44 (12.3%)

A structured self-administered questionnaire was developed in two phases. In the first phase, items were generated through a comprehensive review of established scales and consultation with three academic HR experts and two senior HR practitioners. In the second phase, a pilot study with 40 respondents not included in the main sample was conducted to assess item clarity and preliminary psychometric properties, resulting in minor item modifications.

The final questionnaire comprised six scales measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree): Competency Mapping (CM, 7 items), Talent Identification (TI, 6 items), Performance Management (PM, 6 items), Employee Development (ED, 7 items), Succession Planning (SP, 5 items), and Organizational Effectiveness (OE, 6 items). Items were adapted from validated scales including Sanghi (2016) for competency mapping, Silzer and Church (2009) for talent identification, DeNisi and Murphy (2017) for performance management, and Noe et al. (2017) for employee development and succession planning. Organizational effectiveness items were adapted from the Organizational Effectiveness Questionnaire (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) with modifications for the contemporary corporate context.

Data analysis proceeded in two stages following the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). In the first stage, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 26.0 to assess the measurement model, examining construct reliability (Cronbach's α and composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE), and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio). In the second stage, the structural model was estimated to test the hypothesized paths. Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices: χ^2/df, CFI, RMSEA, SRMR, GFI, AGFI, and NFI. Mediation hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (Hayes, 2018).

4. Results and Analysis

Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), ranging from α = 0.819 (SP) to α = 0.877 (OE). Composite reliability values ranged from 0.841 to 0.892, all above the 0.80 benchmark (Hair et al., 2014). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established as the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 presents the reliability statistics.

Table 2: Construct Reliability Statistics

Construct	No. of Items	α	Composite Reliability
Competency Mapping (CM)	7	0.871	0.889
Talent Identification (TI)	6	0.848	0.863
Performance Management (PM)	6	0.836	0.854
Employee Development (ED)	7	0.862	0.878
Succession Planning (SP)	5	0.819	0.841
Organizational Effectiveness (OE)	6	0.877	0.892

Means for all constructs ranged from 3.62 (OE) to 3.84 (CM), indicating moderate-to-high levels of the measured phenomena across the sample. Competency mapping demonstrated the highest mean score (M = 3.84, SD = 0.62), followed by employee development (M = 3.76, SD = 0.64). All inter-construct correlations were positive and

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significant at $p < 0.01$, with the highest correlation observed between CM and OE ($r = 0.71$). No correlation exceeded 0.80, mitigating concerns about multicollinearity. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were all below 3.0, confirming the absence of problematic collinearity. Table 3 presents the correlation matrix.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Construct Correlations

Construct	Mean	SD	CM	TI	PM	ED	OE
CM	3.84	0.62	1.00				
TI	3.71	0.58	0.63**	1.00			
PM	3.68	0.61	0.59**	0.61**	1.00		
ED	3.76	0.64	0.66**	0.64**	0.58**	1.00	
OE	3.62	0.59	0.71**	0.68**	0.65**	0.72**	1.00

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed). CM = Competency Mapping; TI = Talent Identification; PM = Performance Management; ED = Employee Development; OE = Organizational Effectiveness.

The structural model demonstrated acceptable fit as indicated by multiple fit indices (Table 5). The χ^2/df ratio of 2.34 fell within the recommended range of below 3.0. CFI (0.963), GFI (0.941), AGFI (0.918), and NFI (0.952) all exceeded the 0.90 threshold. RMSEA (0.051) and SRMR (0.046) were well within the recommended limits of 0.08, collectively confirming good model fit.

Table 4 presents the standardized path coefficients for all hypothesized paths. Competency mapping demonstrated significant positive effects on all talent management dimensions: talent identification ($\beta = 0.521$, $p < 0.001$), performance management ($\beta = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$), employee development ($\beta = 0.563$, $p < 0.001$), and succession planning ($\beta = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H1 through H4. The direct path from CM to OE was also significant and positive ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5. All three mediator constructs—TI ($\beta = 0.341$), PM ($\beta = 0.308$), and ED ($\beta = 0.374$)—demonstrated significant positive effects on OE, supporting H6, H7, and H8.

Table 4: Structural Model Path Coefficients

Hypothesis / Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value	Result
H1: CM → Talent Identification	0.521	0.048	10.85	0.001	Supported
H2: CM → Performance Management	0.487	0.051	9.55	0.001	Supported
H3: CM → Employee Development	0.563	0.046	12.24	0.001	Supported
H4: CM → Succession Planning	0.498	0.053	9.40	0.001	Supported
H5: CM → Organizational Effectiveness	0.612	0.044	13.91	0.001	Supported
H6: TI → Organizational Effectiveness	0.341	0.057	5.98	0.001	Supported
H7: PM → Organizational Effectiveness	0.308	0.059	5.22	0.001	Supported
H8: ED → Organizational Effectiveness	0.374	0.054	6.93	0.001	Supported

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Table 5: Structural Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Obtained Value	Interpretation
χ^2/df	< 3.0	2.34	Acceptable
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.963	Good Fit
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.051	Good Fit
SRMR	< 0.08	0.046	Good Fit
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.941	Good Fit
AGFI	≥ 0.85	0.918	Good Fit
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.952	Good Fit

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping-based mediation analysis (5,000 resamples) was conducted to assess the indirect effects of competency mapping on organizational effectiveness through the three mediating variables. All three indirect paths were significant, as evidenced by 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals that did not include zero (Table 6). The indirect effect via employee development was the strongest (β = 0.210, CI: [0.140, 0.282]), followed by talent identification (β = 0.178, CI: [0.104, 0.252]) and performance management (β = 0.150, CI: [0.070, 0.231]). Since the direct path from CM to OE remained significant after the inclusion of mediators, partial mediation was established for all three indirect paths.

Table 6: Mediation Analysis Results (Bootstrapped Indirect Effects)

Mediation Path	Indirect Effect	SE	95% CI	Type of Mediation
CM → TI → OE	0.178	0.038	[0.104, 0.252]	Partial Mediation
CM → PM → OE	0.150	0.041	[0.070, 0.231]	Partial Mediation
CM → ED → OE	0.210	0.036	[0.140, 0.282]	Partial Mediation

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the proposition that competency mapping is a strategically significant driver of talent management effectiveness and organizational outcomes. The confirmation of all eight hypotheses, along with the strong model fit statistics, underscores the validity of the theoretically derived framework and reinforces the importance of systematic competency identification as a foundational HR practice.

The finding that competency mapping exerts its strongest direct effect on organizational effectiveness (β = 0.612) and employee development (β = 0.563) is theoretically and practically significant. From a theoretical standpoint, it supports the configurational perspective in HRM, which posits that HR practices create value not only through their individual effects but through their capacity to align and integrate multiple HR subsystems (Delery & Shaw, 2001). When competency frameworks are embedded in performance management systems, learning interventions, and succession pipelines, they create an integrated talent architecture capable of generating sustained competitive advantage (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

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The partial mediation results deserve particular attention. The persistence of a significant direct path from CM to OE even after controlling for the mediating variables indicates that competency mapping creates organizational value through multiple mechanisms, some of which may not have been captured in the present framework. This is consistent with Levenson et al.'s (2006) observation that competency frameworks influence organizational performance both directly—by enabling more precise strategic workforce planning—and indirectly, through their effects on specific HR processes.

The relatively stronger mediating effect of employee development (β = 0.210) compared to talent identification (β = 0.178) and performance management (β = 0.150) is noteworthy. This suggests that, in the Indian organizational context, competency mapping's contribution to organizational effectiveness is particularly potent when it drives structured capability building initiatives. This finding resonates with Thite's (2016) observation that Indian organizations tend to prioritize development-oriented competency applications over selection-oriented ones, possibly reflecting the constraints of the domestic talent market and the premium placed on internal capability development.

The study also contributes methodologically by demonstrating the utility of SEM in simultaneously estimating the complex, multi-path relationships inherent in competency-based talent management frameworks. The bootstrapping-based mediation analysis provides effect estimates that are more statistically robust than traditional Baron-Kenny approaches, particularly given the non-normal distribution of some variables in the sample.

Comparing these results with international literature, the path coefficients observed in the present study are broadly consistent with those reported by Campion et al. (2011) in a North American context and somewhat higher than those found by Levenson et al. (2006) in European organizations. This differential may reflect the greater formalization of talent management practices in the organizations sampled here, or it may indicate that competency mapping yields relatively stronger returns in high-growth emerging market contexts where talent scarcity is acute.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study makes three primary contributions to the talent management and strategic HRM literature. First, it provides the first large-scale SEM-based empirical test of a comprehensive model linking competency mapping to multiple talent management dimensions and organizational effectiveness simultaneously, offering a more holistic view than previous studies. Second, it establishes the mediating roles of talent identification, performance management, and employee development in the competency mapping–organizational effectiveness relationship, illuminating the mechanisms through which competency frameworks generate value. Third, it extends existing theory by demonstrating that these relationships hold in the Indian corporate context, contributing to the growing literature on HRM in emerging economies.

The findings carry several important implications for HR practitioners and organizational leaders. First, the significant and consistent effects of competency mapping across all talent management dimensions suggest that investment in systematic competency identification and documentation yields broad-based HR returns. Organizations that have not yet developed formal competency frameworks should consider prioritizing this investment as a foundational element of their talent strategy.

Second, the particularly strong effect of competency mapping on employee development (β = 0.563) and its strongest indirect path to OE through this variable suggests that organizations should move beyond using competency frameworks primarily for selection and appraisal and leverage them more deliberately in learning and development design. Competency gap analyses should be routinely integrated into individual development planning and organizational learning needs assessments.

Third, the finding that competency mapping significantly influences succession planning (β = 0.498) underscores the importance of competency-based succession processes. Organizations should map leadership competencies not only for current roles but for anticipated future roles, enabling more targeted identification and development of high-

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potential talent.

This study is subject to several limitations. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish temporal causality, and longitudinal research designs would strengthen causal inferences. The sample, while diverse in terms of sector and organizational size, was confined to formal-sector organizations in India, limiting direct generalizability to other national contexts or to micro and small enterprises. Common method variance, a potential concern in self-report survey research, was addressed through procedural remedies (temporal separation of predictor and criterion variables was not possible in a single survey) but not through full statistical separation; future studies employing multi-source data collection would address this limitation. Finally, the study did not examine potential boundary conditions—such as organizational culture, HR department maturity, or leadership quality—that may moderate the competency mapping–talent management relationship. Future research should explore these moderating effects.

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