

Impact of Strategy-Related Competencies on the Performance of Highly Effective Employees: An Empirical Study of Telecom Companies of North India



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Abstract Competency and performance are correlated, because only a competent person can deliver effective performance. The research has been conducted with the aim to find the relationship between the competency variables and the performance of highly effective employees of telecom companies based in Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh. For the purpose of the research, data has been collected from the private telecom sector employees. There were three competency variables identified which are related to driving strategic objectives of a company along with five indicators of highly effective performance. For the purpose of research, correlation has been applied and the result shows that there is a significant relationship between competency variables and the performance of highly effective employees. The research findings can be integrated into all the human resource practices related to managing employee's life cycles. This can also help to revisit their competency framework and add these tested competencies to achieve strategic organizational objectives and success.

Keywords Highly effective performance · Behavioral competencies · Organizational success · Competency-based management practices · Telecom companies

1 Introduction

The success of organizations has always been evaluated against the financial outcome of profits and loss to measure their performance, value, and health. Over a period of time, the softer aspects like employee attitudes, qualities, and perceptions are now being acknowledged and valued as significant lead indicators of employee conduct and performance leading to organizational success. An employee may have a different

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impact owing to their varied attributes in the workplace, but it is the attitude, behavior, and skill which actually determine his or her work performance. Some of the significant organizational benefits of effective use of competency management are reduced cost of training, reduced employee attrition, and increase in overall employee productivity and organizational success [1]. In the contemporary world, the study of competency and its impact on organizational success has assumed great focus as companies are emphasizing employees' effective performance at work as a basis of distinctive benefit for organizational success. For any organization, organizational development is a key facet of the human resource department that regulates planned organizational efforts, aimed to improve organizational effectiveness through well-planned and executed changes in systems and processes to build a superior workforce.

An organization's position in the market and its performance depend upon the quality of intangible assets which it possesses, i.e., human resources. Deployment of efficient employees plays a significant part in organizational success and is treated as a critical enabler and provides the firm a competitive advantage. Competency-based people management practices play a noteworthy part in augmenting the efficiency of human resources in an organization. It has been well-defined by various researchers and organizations in various ways. Competency-based management is the latest tool used in managing human resources functions. It highlights specific competencies utilized in an assigned job, and helps in individualized administration and development of individual competency within their chosen growth paths [2]. In view of this, competencies are related and specific to company's requirements and jobs that are being performed to get desired results. A people process which is based on competency-based human resource management principles drives job-specific competencies to accomplish chosen goals and objectives. It relies on expected outcomes and the requirements of an organization keeping in view an employee at the center rather than from the position held by the employee [3]. Competence-linked people management process includes the apt application of the competency model, since the competency framework by itself cannot deliver added value without the support of human resources management [4]. Human competence has strong relations with workplace performance. Competency analysis and gap study can be included in usual working tasks. Experts agreed mostly to assigning competencies to tasks [5]. On similar lines, organization-wise competency framework and competency rating are related to selection and job performance, employee attrition, and managerial development needs of talent and succession planning [6].

2 Review of Literature

An essential aspect in the study of organizational behavior is to study, as to how behavioral/personal traits (competencies) of an employee impact the performance and success of an organization. Employees' job performance at work has been given more importance and has been treated as a predictor of business competitive advantage to enhance the overall organizational effectiveness and get success.

The socio-economic transition of societies and the increase of economic knowledge have contributed to that power of knowledge is an important means for prosperity and wealth [7–9]. In view of a market perspective, knowledge and information seem to be a critical element in sustainable long-term organizational success. Competency is simply explained as a grouping of knowledge, skills, behaviors, motives, perception of self, social role, and specific function of the subject which an individual uses to accomplish a job [10]. Competencies are “a cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that affect a major part of one’s job (a role or responsibility), that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured against well-accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development” [11]. Managing competencies required to deliver desired results has been rated as one of the important instruments to get organizational success. Investments in developing people both in terms of money and time have been found as major activity taken by companies as it helps in improving the competencies of an employee who in turn gives higher performance and collectively achieves organizational success. While an employee’s motivation at work drives performance, the skills, knowledge, and attitude he demonstrates at work play a noteworthy role in delivering desired results [12]. It is an individual’s abilities which actually explain the type of behavior needed by businesses to accomplish an extraordinary performance [13]. Proper utilization of individual competencies impacts successful individual performance as well as company’s performance and success [14]. Literature around performance management have concentrated on processes that help increase proficiency and organizational performance [15]. During performance appraisal practice along with having an impartial assessment of main objectives, the behavioral attributes necessary to deliver are also appraised and they are provided clear advice about the desired standards of proficiencies and their current status at which they are. As per the Human Resource Management Digest 2019, there are certain competencies which help to differentiate between superior and average performance. Some of the competencies which drive superior performance are the ability to lead high achievement orientation, ability to give directions, ability to persuade, and ability to innovate. Other competencies related to both mediocre and high performers are verbal communication, ability to organize, ability to seek information, analytical thinking, and ability to plan. A few latest competencies added to drive higher performance are thematic analysis, ability to comprehend rules and regulations, collaboration with multi-stakeholder and having technical knowledge, and ability to manage people and to manage finance. In another research work, [16] tried to find the relationship between the competencies of managers with the organizational performance. The results suggest that four competencies which caused variation in productivity of business were motivation toward success, ability to develop fellow team members, team leadership, and creating influence. There are numerous competencies of managers and their influence on the overall organizational success [17]. There is not a common competency which is suitable in all circumstances. Effective management of competencies needs a balance between managing social and emotional characteristics; a perfect equilibrium of both is necessary to provide the best outcomes. Theoretically, it can be said that competencies at large have a direct impact on employee performance, and can be used to predict different levels

of organizational performance [18]. It was also found that competencies related to human resources and employee's job satisfaction also lead to employee's performance on the job [19]. It can be said that building competencies and knowledge in both product and services sectors help to increase performance at work and help achieve performance targets [20].

Employees are the most important pillars for reaping success for any organization. Dedicated employees are crucial to elevating small organizations into huge corporates. But the conundrum lies in how to make an employee effective enough, or how to identify an effective employee? A highly effective employee is characterized by overachievement of key performance indicators and setting benchmarks for superior performance. Their performance is expected to be scalable, replicable, sustainable, and aligned with ideal behavioral competence at work. Effective employees are valuable assets for any organization. They are go-getters, self-starters, and initiators, who are curious and do not rely much on others. It is very tough to find a high-performing employee. There is a huge difference between mediocre and highly effective employees. Mediocre employees fulfill their responsibilities and their daily tasks while on the other hand, highly effective employees also plan efficiently for their future and find a scope of improvement in every role that they perform.

It is mentioned by Steven Covey (1989) in his book "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" [21] that there are seven habits that elevate an individual to become highly effective in the workplace. The journey of delivering superior performance has to pass through three stages first being independence, second being interdependence, and the third is working on continuous improvements. All the seven habits are very elaborately explained with behavioral attributes attached to each of them. All seven habits talk about behavioral competencies leading to superior performance. All of these seven habits indicate personal competencies that if developed well will help individuals deliver superior performance and a worthwhile career.

Having considered all these, the Focused group discussions with industry experts, peers, Heads of Departments following five behavioral indicators were identified which actually explained highly effective performance:

- Over-Achieving Pre-Determined Goals/Objectives;
- Always Doing Right Things;
- Delivering Quality of Products and Services;
- Optimization of Available Resources;
- Deliver Sustainable Results.

Another important construct of the study are the competency variables and competency indicators attached to each competency variable. An extensive literature review of the competency frameworks of telecom companies have been conducted along with associated literature available to identify these three competencies related to strategic orientation which are Analytical Thinking, Innovation and Improvement, and Ability to Learn and Develop. All the competencies are related to an individual's ability to plan for the future.

Analytical thinking was identified as a competency for Reliance Jio and was mentioned in Spencer and Spencer [22] also, while applied thinking of Vodafone

and business acumen of Idea were found closely related to analytical thinking during the focused group discussion. Innovation and Improvement was a prominent competency variable of Idea, managing for innovation for Tata Teleservices, facilitating change and innovation for Airtel helped the focused group discussion to select this competency for discussion. Ability to learn and develop as a competency variable got featured in almost every framework like develop self and others' ideas), Organizational and personal learning (Tata Teleservices), Change (Vodafone), Empowering and developing (Bharti Airtel), People development (Airtel), and Develop self and others (Spencer and Spencer).

The above construct was also supported by a review of literature. Managing data with rigorous analysis assists in taking informed business decisions and gives a perspective as to what happened and predicting what may happen in future [23] which help in ensuring business completeive advantage. As opposed to the mechanical and traditional view [24] which helps in driving better performance. The use of data to be better informed and as a competency has become a convincing action agenda for human resource managers [25] to deliver higher performance. Similarly, [26] as well as Gray [27] found analytical skills to be an important future workplace competence. Rooted in this is the increasing expectancy of the human resource (HR) function to realize how workforce analytics and analytical skill apprises the business and drives success (DiClaudi [28]).

Similarly, Innovation and Improvement in an organization is becoming an important factor in the survival of a company [29]. It is important to note that around 50% and 80% of economic prosperity is the result of innovation and knowledge. An organization should invest more on workplace innovation as it helps in driving organizational success [30]. On similar lines, it was found that employee innovative behaviors play a dominant role to improve the quality of both service and customer satisfaction which gives a competitive advantage over others [31].

Ability to learn and develop is related to efforts made by an individual employee for himself to grow and thereby helping the organization also to grow as a whole in long run [32]. Thus, there exists a direct association between an employee's ability to learn and develop and it is work performance. A competent employee would be more content with the job, will be more dedicated with the job, and his performance naturally would be better. Competent, satisfied, and dedicated employees will work hard and deliver high levels of organizational success [33]. Many companies do not value the importance of people development. They only put emphasis on accomplishing organizational goals. On the contrary, if organizations put focus on employee developing activities, this would help in building required competencies for better performance. With enhanced skills, they would be able to develop their own growth plans and thus help to grow organizational effectiveness.

Learning and Development initiatives also ensure that employees can acclimatize flawlessly to the latest technology which helps in augmenting the effectiveness and output of both the individuals and organizations [34]. A skilled workforce constitutes an important means of competitive advantage in the competitive international marketplace [35]. Employee training also has a positive incidental impact and also

impacts individual's self-confidence, which enhances their job satisfaction and helps them to perform better [36].

The competency models of all the telecom companies were studied along with available literature around behavioral competencies. The idea was to make a cluster of competencies which are strategic in nature and can help an organization to plan for the future. About 50 competency variables were studied and through focused group discussions with HR Heads, Functional heads, Industry experts, and a few highly effective employees collaborated and decided to list Analytical Thinking, Innovation and Improvement, and Ability to learn and develop as three competency variables which will enable a company to plan for future; working on these competencies will make the organization future-oriented. Analytical thinking will stimulate the analysis of the current trends of business and can also predict future business scenarios and can help an organization to optimize the resources to meet future needs and be contemporary and relevant in the future. Ability to innovate and improve is directly linked with the future of any organization. Any organization which is adaptable to fast-changing customer requirements should work on its ability to innovate and be relevant. Similarly, ability to learn and develop equips an organization to provide various learning platforms for employees to be skilled and trained on the new abilities which are required for the future and make the organization dynamic in view of the fast-changing customer requirement.

As a business strategy, the organization will invest in new technology and equipment to be future-ready, and for that, improving all these competencies will provide a huge competitive advantage to a company in the future. Though there were enough evidences found to suggest that there is an association between competence and performance, there are very limited studies around the central theme of the topic which is to measure the effect of competency variables on the performance of highly effective employees.

3 Research Methodology

The research methodology includes the data and the statistical evidence to support the purpose of the research and the hypotheses formulated for such research. The research is empirical research; the data has been collected in the form of structured questionnaires from the highly effective employees of Indian telecom industries. The data was collected from four telecom operators of India. The sample size is 530 employees of telecom companies that includes Idea, Vodafone, Bharti Airtel, and Reliance Jio.

Based on the available literature related to the competency framework of telecom companies and through focused group discussion, a questionnaire was prepared which consists of different kinds of questions designed to achieve the objectives of the research. A pilot test of the questionnaire was also done. The pilot study helped to know and address a few issues related to the questionnaire. The exercise helped in building a better understanding of competencies, fine-tuning the definitions and

attaching the right behavioral indicators to each competency variables. Considering the feedback of the pilot study, all the changes were incorporated in the questionnaire to design and administer the final questionnaire to be used in the survey.

3.1 Objective of the Study

To study the Impact of Strategy-related competencies on the performance of Highly Effective Employees of Telecom Companies in North India.

3.2 Hypotheses

In this study, hypotheses pertaining to study the effect of various competency variables related to strategy such as analytical thinking, innovation and improvement, and ability to learn and develop on highly effective performance whose indicators are over-achieving goals, doing right things, delivering quality product and services, optimization of resources and deliver sustainable results were formulated. These hypotheses are listed below.

H₀₁: Analytical thinking is not significantly correlated with highly effective performance.

H_{01a}: Analytical thinking is significantly correlated with highly effective performance.

H₀₂: Innovation and improvement is not significantly correlated with highly effective performance.

H_{02a}: Innovation and improvement is significantly correlated with highly effective performance.

H₀₃: Ability to learn and develop is not significantly correlated with highly effective performance.

H_{03a}: Ability to learn and develop is significantly correlated with highly effective performance.

Cronbach's alpha method was employed to test the reliability of the scale (Table 1).

3.3 Sample Size

For collecting the primary data, researcher approached a much higher no of respondents (750), just to ensure that he is able to get the required samples; out of 750 respondents, 530 valid responses were received. The responses received were Bharti Airtel 154 (29.1%), Vodafone 130(24.5%), Reliance Jio 82 (15.5%), and Idea 164

Table 1 Reliability of the questionnaire

S. No	Sections of Questionnaire	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Section C. Perception of highly effective performance	0.834
2	Section D. Perception on importance of behavioral competencies on work performance	0.899
3	Analytical thinking	0.854
4	Innovation and improvement	0.901
5	Ability to learn and develop	0.88

Table 2 Sample size details

Sample size				
Telecom company	No. of target respondents	Valid responses	Percentage (%)	Percentage of valid responses (%)
Bharti Airtel	200	154	77	29
Vodafone	200	130	65	25
Reliance Jio	150	82	55	15
Idea	200	164	82	31
Total	750	530		100

(30.9%). The distribution of 750 questionnaires to all four telecom companies was Bharti Airtel 200, Vodafone 200, Reliance Jio 150, and Idea 200 (Tables 2 and 3).

4 Research Methods

To analyze the data and to validate the hypotheses, a number of statistical tools were used to draw useful implications for managers to derive a high-performing culture across levels in the different verticals of telecom operators. Statistical tools like descriptive statistics, Karl Pearson Correlation Matrix, FGD technique, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and MS-Excel were used to analyze the data to reach logical and meaningful conclusions.

5 Results and Discussions

To find the relationship between the performance of highly effective employees and behavioral competencies, Pearson correlation is calculated. All the hypotheses were tested and the results are presented according to the hypotheses. The statistical

Table 3 Demographic profile of the respondents

Demographic profile of the respondents			
Main category	Sub-Categories	Responses	Total responses
Gender	Male	384	530
	Female	146	
Educational qualification	Graduate	272	527
	Diploma holder	83	
	Postgraduate	160	
	Doctorate	5	
	Any other	7	
Age	up to 27 years	194	530
	28–37 years	216	
	38–47 years	87	
	48–57 years	32	
	Above 58 years	1	
Association with organization	0–3 years	230	530
	4–7 years	145	
	5–11 years	99	
	12–15 years	48	
	Above 16 years	8	
Position in organization	Team member	335	530
	Supervisor/In Charge	92	
	Vertical head	70	
	Head of department	33	

result shows that all three competency variables are correlated with highly effective performance.

Analytical thinking is moderately correlated with highly effective performance (Pearson correlation $r = 0.350$) and this association is significant ($p = 0.000$).

Similarly, the competency variable of Innovation and Improvement is also found moderately correlated with highly effective performance (Pearson correlation $r = 0.366$) and the association is found to be significant ($p = 0.000$).

On similar lines, there was a moderate correlation with Ability to Learn and Develop was also found with highly effective performance (Pearson correlation $r = 0.384$) and the association was significant ($p = 0.000$).

Thus, all the null hypotheses are rejected and alternate hypotheses are accepted. Hence, statistically it was found that all the three strategy-related competencies are significantly correlated with highly effective performance (Table 4).

The findings are summarized as under.

Table 4 Summary of the hypotheses

No	Hypotheses	Accepted/Rejected	Significance (p value)	Pearson correlation (r)
H ₀₁	Analytical thinking is not significantly correlated with highly effective performance	Rejected	0	0.350
H _{01a}	Analytical thinking is significantly correlated with highly effective performance	Accepted		
H ₀₂	Innovation and improvement are not significantly correlated with highly effective performance	Rejected	0	0.366
H _{02a}	Innovation and improvement are significantly correlated with highly effective performance	Accepted		
H ₀₃	Ability to learn and develop is not significantly correlated with highly effective performance	Rejected	0	0.384
H _{03a}	Ability to learn and develop is significantly correlated with highly effective performance	Accepted		

It was found that all the three competencies were significantly correlated with highly effective performance. It was also found that the behavioral indicators of all the competencies have differential impacts on driving highly effective performance for each of the categories of employees. There is a noteworthy association of competency variables with employee's work contentment which helps an employee to perform a job [37] and competency variables create a significant influence on a worker's performance [38].

6 Recommendations

A human resource management system based on a competency framework is recommended for improving the competency of human resources by integrating the same with various HR processes and various people processes.

The integration of competencies in people practices depends on the organization's strategic requirements, available resources, and ability of the human resources team. Competency-based management thus assumes huge importance as organizations use them to drive employees to drive superior performance leading to organizational success.

The findings of the study reinforce the fact that competency variables impact the performance of highly effective employees. The assumption is thus established that if you have to drive highly effective performance in an organization, one has to use the competency framework in every aspect of human resource management. To drive highly effective performance at work, these three competencies related to strategy can be integrated with the complete life cycle of an employee by integrating the same with the processes related to Talent Management which includes Talent Acquisition, Managing Poor Performance, Career, and Succession Planning through Assessment and Development Centers, Coaching and Mentoring, Learning and Development, Rewards Management, etc.

Important managerial implications can also be derived from the study. These three competencies have been tested by highly effective employees of major telecom companies which are required to deliver highly effective performance. All managerial actions can be realigned in view of the recommendations and accordingly people-related strategies can be developed.

This model will help the leadership to create awareness among all the stakeholders that the demonstration of right competency behaviors at work help in delivering highly effective performance and leaders to overall organizational success. It is an attempt to empirically and analytically study the relationship between competency variables and highly effective performance. It was found that how competencies and right behaviors impact the performance of highly effective employees in an organization, hence strongly recommended that they should be integrated into HR processes to increase organizational productivity, and efficiency. It is strongly recommended that organizations should revisit their competency framework in view of these findings which will give a new direction to the organizational development and effectiveness initiatives.

In the talent acquisition process, the competency-based interviewing using Behavioral Event Interviewing (BEI) assists in identifying the right fit of candidates meeting the required job competencies of that position. During the interview, assessment of the desired level of behavioral descriptors of each competency is done by using the critical incident technique.

The candidate will be hired only when he is able to show the behavioral indicators leading to deliver highly effective performance. The benefit of this is that the organization gets a candidate who has been evaluated on the required level of identified competency which is required to deliver highly effective performance. Thus, the entire process of talent acquisition becomes quite robust as the process checks functional expertise, competencies, and behavior that a candidate is required to deliver highly effective performance.

Another important managerial recommendation is to integrate the complete talent management framework into these findings. It should cover the process related to

talent segmentation, talent assessment, talent development, succession, and career planning in any organization. While specific training programs can be created in view of the requirements of talent management, a set of general training programs can be created against each competency variable in alignment with the behavioral indicators that can be developed by the organization so that mass level and broad base training programs are imparted to increase the overall level of employee performance. Competency-based training ensures employees receive the right training which reinforces knowledge, skill, and attitude in the job to deliver highly effective performance. Similarly, the performance appraisal and management process can also be integrated into the competency framework. Mostly, all performance management frameworks are woven around measuring performance against set targets which are largely measured in certain numbers or targets. The behavior that actually helps to deliver low or high is seldom measured by the manager. The findings can add another element to the appraisal process where the manager can assess the behaviors demonstrated to deliver performance. The findings can also be integrated into the performance reward and recognition framework of an organization. Employees who are demonstrating identified and tested behavior at work will be rewarded. This will create a ripple effect among others, and they will also get motivated to demonstrate the right kind of behavior at work.

7 Theoretical Contributions

There is a general understanding that competencies enable superior performance and various models have been created keeping this assumption in consideration. It is also largely assumed that in any organization people who deliver more do things differently, but the question was “has this been tested”?

The research’s theoretical contribution is that the assumption has been successfully tested on three competencies and validated by employees who are highly effective, assessed, and rated by their respective organizations.

8 Conclusion

Some people demonstrate exemplary performance in comparison to people delivering average results having the same job responsibilities, titles, and compensations. The objective of the study was to find this distinction. If we are able to find out these competencies, organizations will start hiring candidates who can deliver superior performance or help others to develop similar capacities. This will lead organizations to dramatically improve their productivity and success multifold. While it is not possible to turn every employee into a highly effective employee, having identified such competencies one can select candidates who possess enhanced abilities in certain areas and can become highly effective by delivering superior performance. In

addition, the knowledge gained through the study can also help employees at large to work in accordance to enabling behaviors related to these competencies to enhance their performance. The study's findings provide a frame of reference that a number of human resources processes like talent hiring, performance management, talent management, learning, and development can be aligned with these competencies to deliver superior performance. Accordingly, the existing competency model can be revisited on the recommendation to produce great competitive advantage when they are linked to delivering strategic business results.

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