Competency Mapping of Front-line Staff: Key for Success inthe Organized Retail Sector

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Abstract
Competency is the ability of an individual to do a job effectively. Competency mapping is a process of mapping an individual's competencies to job related skills. Competency mapping helps in identifying the gaps, if any, between job demands and individual competencies. Organizations can then intervene through effective training solutions for improving organizational performance. The study aims to identify the competencies required of employees in organized retail sector and identify gaps. Survey method was used to collect data through a structured questionnaire. The study is descriptive in nature. Hypotheses were tested. Radar Charts were constructed to identify the degree of competency gap of employee in each of the competencies. The study would be useful for practitioners and researchers for implementation in their contexts for organizational success.
Keywords: Competency, Competency Gap, Competency Framework, Competency Mapping, Competency Models, Employee Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Indiahas beenwitnessing an exponential growth in organized retail sector. In retail store availability,Indiaranks among the world's highest and the fifth largest retail destinations globally. The retail development in India is no more concentrated inmetros and major cities. In fact, it is taking place in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, thus increasing its penetration. The Indian organised retail market is driven by economic growth, higher disposable incomes, changing demographic profile, growing urbanisation, changing consumer tastes and preferences. Indian retail market is expected to grow to USD 1.7 trillion by 2026 from USD883 billion in 2019, making it one of the fastest growing retail markets in the world. However, the year 2020 was marked by a decrease due to COVID 19 pandemic. The retail market is expected to recover in the year 2021.

Online retail too is growing in India. It is expected to touch USD 57 billion by 2021, from a market size of USD 17.8 billion in 2017. This growth is driven by millennialswho aremigrating to online channels from traditional retail. The expected online retail growth is

over 30 per cent CAGR during 2016-2021. Further, during the period 2017 to 2020, organized retail penetration is projected to increase from 7 per cent to 10 per cent.

Both private Indian players and foreign players have played an important role in boosting Indian retail industry. The global retail players such as Walmart, JC Penney, Tesco and GAP are changing their business models and enhancing their sourcing from India. They are now establishing their own wholly-managed or wholly-owned sourcing and buying offices moving away from third-party buying. Large retail players use India as a sourcing base due to its price competitiveness.

Indeed there is hardly any difference in the basic services offered by the players in retail industry. However, its offerings are differentiated by a variety of services and a diverse combination of management structures and ownership patterns. Retailers are working towards differential positioning on service standards and maintaining those standards, which is becoming imperative for them. Service standards are a set of behaviours governing a service, against which service providers are measured.

A two pronged approach is adopted by most retail organizations to address this business need. First, streamlining business processes and implementing innovative ideas, and second, re-working business strategy. Mergers and acquisitions, entering in new businesses or new markets are the strategies adopted by retailers that result in attainment of improved service quality or competitive cost structure or both. However, with the intensifying competition, innovative ideas or process improvements by the leaders are constantly adapted by the "me-too" players quickly. This limits the returns accruing to the leaders, and puts them under pressure to constantly innovate and upgrade service standards in their retail company. The key challenge is how to continuously drive the desired behaviour in the organization where service standards are the key to success. How the innovative ideas, process changes and strategy are communicated and implemented down the line is one important factor that drives the desired behaviours in the organization. The changed processes need different competencies on the part of job incumbents leading to different skill sets and performance standards. To reward the desired behaviour in a job, many approaches have been tried and assessed. Social psychologists looked at the personality traits in an individual as an indicator of job performance and found low correlation with actual job performance. In fact, according to researchers job performance or success could not be predicted through academic aptitude and knowledge content. In the 1990s, another approach looked at competencies that will assess, align, and reward individual behaviours for a job. This approach focused on value creation by an employee and actual accomplishments. A competency describes how excellently a job might be done. Competency is the potential for effectiveness in task performance of an individual through a combination of tacit and explicit knowledge, skills and behaviours.

The reminder of the paper deals with the theoretical background of competency mapping, research context of retail industry, significance of this study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, competency mapping in the context of India, methodology, results and analysis, implications for managers, limitations of the study, future research and conclusions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Competency Mapping

Being able and fit for the purpose for a state or quality is termed as competence. An individual's fitness for his/her job refers to competency (Palan, 2003) and the underlying characteristics causally relate to criterion for superior performance or being effective in a situation or a job (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The concept of competencies has varied definitions. A combination of applied and observable knowledge, behaviours and skills that result in competitive advantage for an organization are termed as competencies. Competenciesfocus on how an employee creates value and what is actually accomplished. Competencies look at a person's attitude, skills and knowledge through both observable and measurable behaviours and outcomes. Individuals with competencies will perform the job tasks much better than others vis-à-vis those who do not possess the relevant competencies (Nath & Raheja, 2001).

Thereare four major components of competency. *Personal competence*thatcontributes to a person's ability to manage job tasks such as behaviours, attitudes and core personality characteristics.*Knowledge competence*that leads to understanding of a subject, both practical and theoretical aspects.*Job related competence*helps in demonstration of various job or position specific skills, aptitudes, and performance levels within a company. *Interpersonal competence* that relates to an individual's ability to effectively cope up with interpersonal relationships.

Use of competency mapping dates back to 1960s.In rigorouscompetency studies grounded critical incidents technique was used as the key methodology as a precursor (Flanagan, 1954). McClelland and his associate Berlew founded a consulting firm, McBer, that has specialized in competency mapping of entrepreneurs and managers across the world.The Behaviour Event Interviewing (BEI) developed by them wasa new and yet simple methodology to map competencies. Competency mapping is a process thathelps an individual employee to assess and determine his/her strengths and at times as part of an organization. Generally emotional intelligence (EI) or emotional quotient (EQ), as well as strengths of an individual in areas such as leadership, team structure, and decision-making are examined. Competency mapping can be effectively used to constitute performing teams by analysingthe strengths among differentemployeesand assembling a combination of desired strengths that can deliver the desired quality work. Competency mapping, thus,isa process of identification and description of competencies of individual employeesthat are the most critical for success in a work role or job or work situation.

Competency mapping helps in identifying key competencies for a particular jobor task or work situation in an organization and then puts them to use forvarious HR related activities such as job evaluation, recruitment and selection, performance management, training and development, succession planning, and so on.The focus of competency mapping is alignment of organizational strategy-structure, structure-role, horizontal- and vertical-roles, avoiding repetitive tasks in two different roles, ensuringtask-based core competencies and linking all of these to bring in competitive advantage.

Competency mapping is valuable in identifying emotional strengths. In fact many employers screen employees purposefully for specific competencies before making a hiring

decision. For instance, an organization may need to hire someone who has demonstrated great job related skills or one who is good at taking new initiatives or very good at providing direction or someone who is an effective leader. Self-awareness of competencies can give an individual a competitive edge in the job market when seeking new job(s).

Individuals who seek employment in an environment which is intellectually challenging and where one can learn new things will be benefited by competency mapping.This also means collection of factors necessary for achieving important results and being successful in a specific job or work role or situation in an organization. Job specific behaviours described by a combination of knowledge, skills and attributes contribute to the success of an individual.Such attributes are demonstrated by superior performance in those jobs or work roles. Personal characteristics, traits, motives, values or ways of thinking that impact an individual's behaviour are also included in competencies. Applications of competency mapping include competency framework**,** competency map**,** and competency profile**.**

*Competency framework*describes thegeneric competencies that cover all the key jobs in an organization. *Competency map*describes different dimensions of competent behaviour viz., strategic capability, resource management and quality required for a job. *Competency profile*is a set of competencies required for performing a specified role (Armstrong, 1999).

Competency mappinghelps in many ways when implemented effectively. It helps in translatingan organization's vision and goals into behaviours expected of employees; implementing more effectively and legally defensible HR activities such as recruitment, selection and assessment methods; reducing hiring costs,absenteeism and turnover rates; identifying areas for employee development which have direct bearing on desired outcomes and organizational objectives; set effective and valid criteria for developing and evaluating performance; identifyingskills gap between existing skills set and future requirements; and if downsizing is required, in ensuring retention of the required competencies for organizational success. Furthermore, effective communication ofdesired competencies empowers employees and helps them to take charge of their careers, direct their own development, and continually self-evaluate and improvethem in an organization.

RESEAERCH CONTEXT
Competency Mapping in Retail Industry

Effective performance of a specific job requires standardized competencies. A combination of knowledge, skills and behaviours comprise of competencies required to enhance an individual's on the job performance. Competencies areadequate or well qualified qualitiesand the abilities to perform requirements of a specific role. For instance, systems thinking, emotional intelligence, and skills to influence and negotiate are competencies required of a manager.

Organizations that create competency-based systems and culture will spur the demand for HR professionals with specialized skills and promote continuous up-gradation of knowledge. Such professionals can deliver solutions to help the retail industry in addressing the front-line employee challenges around areas such as hiring, training, and retention which address industry priorities of staffing and retention, competency modelling and managing diversity.

Staffing and Retention: Retail employers find it difficult to attract and retain talented employees because of the misperception that jobs lack growth potentialjobs offer low-wages.Retail industry, in reality, is dynamic with diverse career opportunities. It covers a broad range of fields that include communications, marketing,merchandise sourcing, supply chain management, information technology, loss prevention, finance, and retail analytics.

Competency Models: Although the retail industry started skills certifications and initial training models, these are not used consistently across the industry to build required competencies at all levels and for all positions creating career growth paths. Consequently retailers struggle to attract qualified candidates, train them, and provide them career advancement.

Managing Diversity: Retail is a customer service driven business and needs diverse workforce. Retail employees may speak the language of customers, but Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is a handicap. Basic English language and literacy skills are required to perform all job functions in a retail organization. Multilingual employees are desirable for this industry.

The context of the current research is frontline retail employees, whose primary responsibility is to serve customers by assisting them in selection ofmerchandise. The description of retail salespersonjob includes -greeting and welcoming customers and assisting them; providing information on products; escorting customers to racks and counters and advising them on items for purchase; offering suggestions and opinions, building customer confidence and enabling customers make selections; documenting sales; processing of payments including cash, processing checks and credit/debit cards; keepingcustomersinformed by notifying them of preferred customer sales and future merchandise of potential interest and contributing to team effort by accomplishing related results as needed.

The job specifications for retail salesperson are active listening, customer service, people skills, achievingsales targets, meeting customer requirements, knowledge of products,drive to perform, high integrity and dependability, general arithmetical and mathematicalskills, good oralcommunication skills, andjob knowledge.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A lot of interest is generated by human resource management professionals in the notion of competencies over the last one and a half decade. Competencies have become key human performance elements and measuresin organizations as they are collection of success factors necessary for achieving job specific or task or work role outcomes. Measuring job performance and evaluation are important and should be designed to motivate employees to deliver good performance in a fair and transparent environment.

The steps necessary for determining success factors in jobs, situations and work roles in an organization are – assessment of current performance of employees and development needs of persons holding jobs and roles for the future; succession planning; establishing and assigning compensation levels to particular jobs and roles; and recruitment and selection of applicants for open positions, using competency-based interviewing techniques.

The current study highlights the implications of competency mapping in retail industry both for HR managers and business managers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Competency mapping is used in organizations to determine the key elements and measures for success of individual employees. Mapping of competencies is done primarily for - improvement in key performance areas by understanding and analysing the fields where there is a gap between the actual and the desired results; planning the career of an individual based on the competencies possessed and the competencies required; preparing an individual for the next set of responsibilities by mapping his/her competencies; helping an individual to alter the style of work with the help of the competency mapping when the gap exists; increasing the self-confidence and motivation levels by helping the individuals overcome the differences in the desired versus actual level of performance; and making the individual employee understand the actual performance vis-a-vis the gap from the desired level of work performance.

Once the competencies are determined, relevant training can be provided to the employees to work more efficiently on the processes.

The specific business problem is that retail sector lacks focused approach on competencies management and hence suffers from consequences such as attrition, customer dissatisfaction, business outcomes, etc.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this empirical study was to examine the gaps in competencies in the retail stores. Effective management of competencies would result in a better organizational performance, enhanced employee satisfaction and improved customer satisfaction.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this research work are (a) to study competency mapping practices followed in the retail organizations, (b) to understand the current level of competencies possessed by the front-line employees in retail organizations and (c) to determine the competency gap and to suggest ways to fill the gaps.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The overarching research question is to investigate whether there exists any gap in competencies in retail sector and if it does, then to what extent. Further,the following hypotheses were developed for testing:

H_{11}: There is a significant difference in assertiveness levels possessed by the employees in selected companies.

H_{12}: There is a significant difference in integrity levels possessed by the employees in selected companies.

H_{13}: There is a significant difference in flexibility levels possessed by the employees in selected companies.

H_{14}: There is a significant difference in resilience levels possessed by the employees in selected companies.

H_{15}: There is a significant difference in motivational levels of possessed by the employees in selected companies.

H_{16}: There is a significant difference in internet usage by the employees in selected companies.

H_{17}: There is a significant difference in usage of computer equipment possessed by the employees in selected companies.

H_{18}: There is a significant difference in updation of latest technology possessed by the employees in selected companies.

These hypotheses would be tested using Kruskal-Wallis test for their significance.

INDIAN CONTEXT: COMPETENCY MAPPING IN RETAIL COMPANIES

Of the several retail organizations operating in India, retail outlets of six companies viz., BB, LS, RL, SS, S and Aoperating out of Vijayawada, an important town in the State of Andhra Pradesh, India were selected for conducting this study. These companies operated retail outlets at the time of conducting this study. The actual name of the company is kept confidential. A brief description of the company and the competency mapping practices adapted by it are presented below.

Company BB: One of the largest retail companies in India, this companycommenced operations in the year 2002. It has around 900 stores spread across the country and has employee strength of around 33,000 in the year 2016-17. The company has competency

Insert Figure 1

mapping process consisting of fivesimple stepsdetailed below (*Figure 1*):

1. *Clarify role purpose and key accountabilities*: Employees and managers understand the expectations of the employee's role, how it adds value to the business and the key accountabilities of the position.

2. *Establish operating objectives and behaviouralexpectations*: Employees and managers together set the specific, tangible and measurable operating objectives that must be accomplished within the scope of the employee's role accountabilities. Employees also understand how they are expected to achieve their deliverables through behavioural expectations that are based on core values of the company.

3. *Create a development plan and facilitate an individual value proposition discussion*: Employees and their managers together should establish a development plan focused on enhancing employees' skills, experience and overall contribution to company and, at their option, have further discussions regarding what interests and motivates the employee.

4. *Complete regular progress reviews*: Employees receive feedback from their manager(s) throughout the performance period on how their performance is relative to both the operating objectives that were established and the behavioural expectations based on company's core values. Feedback is documented by the manager and retained by both the manager and employee.

5. *Complete a contribution assessment*: Employees' contributions will be assessed based upon the degree of achievement against their operating objectives and whether they have demonstrated the behavioural expectations based on core values. Contribution assessment will also reflect each employee's contribution relative to peers in similar roles based upon role type, scope and complexity, in order to ensure greater accuracy and consistency in application. Managers are provided with guidelines, which establish an expected

distribution curve across the four contribution indicators. The guidelines are intended to reinforce the differentiation the company expects to see at an overall business unit and lower level when the contribution assessment process is completed and results are rolled up for larger groups of employees.

Company LS: Started in the year 1999, this company is one of the premier retail companies operated by an NRI Group, but having significant presence in India. It has around 50 stores spread across the country. The company makes assessment of its employees on a relative performance basis. The process followed by the company is depicted in *Figure 2*.

Insert Figure 2

Company RL: Part of a large Indian conglomerate, this retail company started operations in 2006. Its current workforce is in excess of 45,000 spread over 3,751 stores. Thecompany conducts an assessment test that includes written test, in-basket exercises, billing system exercises and personal interview. The focus of the company is store performance as opposed to individual performance. A prospective candidate who does not measure up to the requirements, can appear for the process after a gap of one year. On joining the company, he/she is on probation for one year during which period his/her job behaviour would be under observation by his/her immediate supervisor.

Company SS: This Companystarted its retail operations in 1991. It currently has 156 stores across India with employee strength of around 7500. The company does not endorse elaborate paper work. The criteria for evaluation includes (a) work experience, (b) interest of the employee, (c) references, (d) opportunities for internal promotions, (e) job knowledge, and (f) on the job behaviour.

Company S: Founded in 1996, the company has currently 7,500 employees in 250 stores across India.

Company A: A multinational retailer, entered Indian market in 2012, but closed its operations subsequently. Currently the company does not have any operations, but is looking forward for re-entering it business conditions turn favourable.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive and quantitative research. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. Initially a focus group discussion was conducted to identify the behaviour of customers whether they are satisfied with the behaviour of retail salespersons. The study was conducted in Vijayawada town of Andhra Pradesh during 2015 over a period of two months. The constructs taken for study include various competencies viz., personal, knowledge, job related, communication and interpersonal, functional and technical.

The census for the study are frontline employees in organized retail organizations. Stratified Random sampling was used. Six retail companies having significant presence in Vijayawada were selected for the study. The questionnaire (*Annexure I*) was distributed to total of 200 front-line employees in these companies, out of which 176 valid responses were received. The Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient is .81 indicating high internal consistency of the research instrument. Kruskal Wallis H-test was used find out the significance on some of

the dimensions of competencies in the six companies. To identify the competency gap of salespersons on each dimension of competency mapping radar chart was used.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The analysis and results of the study are presented below:

Results of demographic data

Age: Majority of respondentswere in the age group 25 to 35 years (44%), while 71 (40%) were in less than 25 years age group, 24 (14%)in 35 to 45 years and only 4 (2%) were above 45 years of age.

Gender: Males constituted 70% and females 30% among the respondents.

Education: Majority of the respondents passed class X (39%), while 63 (36%) passed class XII, 31 (18%) were graduates/diploma holders and 13 (7%) were post-graduates.

Experience: Majority of the respondents (40%) were new to their organization having 6 months to one year experience, 57 (32%) had 2 to 3 years' experience, 41 (23%) had 3 to 5 years' experience and 8 (5%) had above 5 years' experience.

Annual income:Annual income of the respondents ranged from one to two lakhs rupees (39%), two to four lakhs (36%), four to five lakhs (17%) and 8% had income in excess of five lakh rupees.

Results of Competency Mapping

A thirty item research instrument was used to obtain data on competencies. Respondents were asked to rate themselves on a five point Likert scale for items related to competencies (5 for being very good at a competency and 1 for failing to meet the standards of a competency). The summary of the responses is presented below:

A majority of 48% the respondents disagreed that they can state opinions to superiors persuasively,35% agreed that they can state their opinions to superiors' persuasively and the remaining 17% are moderate in expressing their opinion to their superiors.

When it comes to ability to handle objections from superiors, 45% of the employees disagreedthey have the ability to do so, 39% agreed that they have the ability and 16% stated that they are moderate at it.

A majority of 64% of the employees agreed that they are able to provide exact information to customers during sales process, while 25% disagreed and 11% stated that their ability is moderate in providing exact information.

On flexibility at the work environment and policies framed, 40% of respondents agreedand 37% disagreed, while 23% of the respondents have moderately agreed.

A majority of 46% of the respondents disagreed that they maintain professional behaviour in stressful situations and 17% moderately agreed. Only 37% agreed that they maintain professional behaviour during stressful situation.This is indicative of lack of competency of emotional balance among employees.

A majority of 65% of the respondents agree that they can comfortably explain characteristics of the products to customers, while 14% moderately agree. Only 21% disagree that they can comfortably explain characteristics of the products.

On possessing good knowledge on the quality of product, 51% agree that they are good at it, while 18% moderately agree and 31% of the respondents disagreeindicating a competency gap.

Interestingly 24% of the respondents disagreed that they have extensive knowledge about their organization. However, a majority of 57% have agreed that they have extensive knowledge and 19% have moderate knowledge about their organization.

Frontline staff in retail stores are expected to be knowledgeable about presenting the product functions to their customers. Contrary to this, 49% of the respondents disagreed that they are knowledgeable, 37% agree that they are knowledgeable and 14% moderately agreed.

Motivation is one of the important constructs at the workplace. However, 38% of the respondents disagree that they are motivated, 11% moderately agree and 51% agree on their motivation levels.

Only 45% of the respondents are aware of their competitors, while 23% are moderately aware. 32% of the respondents are not aware of their competitors.

A majority of 54% of the respondents are knowledgeable about the product to explain to their customers, 25% are moderately knowledgeable, while 21% disagree that they are knowledgeable.

On effectively resolving the conflicting situation on the job, 45% of the respondents agreed that they are effective, 30% stated that they are moderately effective and 25% said they disagree on their effectiveness.

A majority of 47% of respondents agree that they listen to the customers' queries and resolve them, while 24% moderately agree and 29% of the respondents disagreed that they listen to the customers' queries and resolve them.

A majority of 53% of the respondents agree that they are determined to attain goals set by their organization, while 27% per cent moderately agree and 20% of the respondents disagree that they are determined to attain the goals set by the organization.

A majority of 51% of the employees demonstrate customers' needs to the team members, while 29% of moderately demonstrate and 20% disagreed on their ability to demonstrate customers' needs to the team members.

On their ability to negotiate with the customers,49% of the respondents stated that they are effective, while 31% contend that they are moderately effective and 20% disagree that they are effective.

A majority of 50% of the respondents agree that they can persuade others to consider alternative view points, 31% moderately agree and 19% disagree on their ability persuade others to consider alternative viewpoints.

A majority of 56% of the respondents agree that they have adequate knowledge on all aspects of business operations,30% stated that they have moderate knowledge. Only 14% disagreed on having complete knowledge on business operations.

A majority of 52% of respondents agreed that they have the ability to manage and accept changes that take place in organization, 34% stated they are moderate at managing and accepting organizational changes and 14% disagree on their ability to manage and accept changes that take place in their organization.

A good number of employees (55%) stated that they work on improving knowledge and skills on a regular basis, while 31% moderately improve. Relatively a small number of employees (14%) disagree on improving knowledge and skills on a regular basis.

On achieving monthly targets, 48% of the respondentsagree achieve,31% stated they moderately meet monthly targetsand 21% disagree on meeting monthly targets.

A majority of 57% of the respondents have agree that they are ready to gain and share job knowledge and17% stated that they are moderate in doing so. 26% stated they disagree on gaining and sharing job knowledge.

On working along with their team members, 45% of the respondents disagree that they work along with their team. On theother hand 42% agree that they work along with their team members and 13% moderately agree.

A majority of 66% of the respondents stated that they are committed to the responsibilities allotted to them, 17% are moderately responsible. Relatively a small percentage of 17% of the respondents disagreed on commitment to the responsibilities allotted to them.

A majority of 73% of the respondents stated that they can identify the product strengths and weaknesses, while 14% can moderately do so. Only a small percentage of 13% disagree on their ability to identify the product strengths and weaknesses.

A majority of 56% of the respondents stated that they know guarantee/warranty policies of the products, while 19% are aware moderately. 25% of respondents have strongly disagreed on their knowledge on guarantee/warranty policies of the products.

A majority of 56% of the respondents have strongly disagree on having good technical knowledge on internet usage, feedback system, while 34% of the respondents stated that they have good technical knowledge on internet usage and feedback system. Only 10% of respondents stated that they have moderate knowledge.

Only 42% of the respondents agreed that they know using computers and related equipment, while 21% are moderately good at using computer equipment. 37% disagree that they know how to use computers and related equipment.

Half of the respondents (50%) stated that they keep updated themselves on latest technological advances and seek ways to use these technologies in work place, while 21% moderately do so. Relatively a lower percentage of 29% of respondents disagree that they updated themselves on latest technological advances.

Radar Charts: Visual Presentation of Competencies

Radar charts or competency reports are effective visual presentation of competencies. Each axis of the graph represents one of the competencies. The "web" of lines that links the axes shows how the competency measures against a standard or desired level. The difference between the observed and the desired value represents the gap. The Radar charts are provided for Personal Competencies (*Figure 3*), Knowledge Competencies (*Figure 4*), Job Related Competencies (*Figure 5*), Communication and Interpersonal Competencies (*Figure 6*), Functional Competencies (*Figure 7*), and Technical Competencies (*Figure 8*) in *Annexure II*.The gap analysis for difference competencies is summarized in *Table 1.*

From the Radar Charts and the table above, it can be observed that the gap is spread more or less equally in all the dimensions of competency factors. However, in personal and technical competencies the gap is higher.

Insert Table 1

298

Kruskal-Wallis Test

The Kruskal-Wallis test is a non-parametric i.e. distribution free test. It is used to assess significant differences on a continuous dependent variable by a categorical independent variable (with two or more groups). This test can be used for both continuous

Insert Table 2

and ordinal-level dependent variables. **Table 2** shows the Kruskal-Wallis Test results for Personal Competencies. **Table 3** shows the test statistics.

A Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in

Insert Table 3

assertiveness level possessed by employees in selected companies, χ^2 =8.721, p=0.121, with a mean rank assertiveness score of 97.21 for company BB, 91.96 for company LS, 93.81 for company RL, 71.02 for company SS, 86.75 for company S, and 68.80 for company A.

A Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in integrity level possessed by employees in selected companies, χ^2 = 7.991, p=0.157, with a mean rank assertiveness score of 95.45 for company BB, 89.50 for company LS, 81.51 for company RL, 101.12 for company SS, 67.38 for company S, and 76.93 for company A.

A Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in flexibility level possessed by employees in selected companies, χ^2 = 4.249, p=0.514, with a mean rank assertiveness score of 86.73 for company BB, 80.62 for company LS, 101.07 for company RL, 86.45 for company SS, 81.96 for company S, and 81.15 for company A.

A Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in resilience level possessed by employees in selected companies, χ^2 = 23.757, p=0.000, with a mean rank assertiveness score of 108.33 for company BB, 63.60 for company LS, 75.77 for company RL, 100.02 for company SS, 61.96 for company S, and 101.80 for company A.

A Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in motivation level possessed by employees in selected companies, χ^2 = 9.807, p=0.081, with a mean rank assertiveness score of 99.81 for company BB, 81.06 for company LS, 78.48 for company RL, 100.93 for company SS, 101.25 for company S, and 70.63 for company A.

Insert Table4

Table 4 shows the Kruskal-Wallis Test results for Technical Competencies. **Table 5**

Insert Table 5

shows the test statistics.

A Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in internet usage by employees in selected companies, χ^2 = 8.200, p=0.146, with a mean rank

assertiveness score of 102.01 for company BB, 93.33 for company LS, 76.83 for company RL, 89.50 for company SS, 83.46 for company S, and 75.33 for company A.

A Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in use of computer equipment by employees in selected companies, $\chi^2 = 37.936$, p=0.003, with a mean rank assertiveness score of 57.63 for company BB, 79.10 for company LS, 115.36 for company RL, 95.43 for company SS, 95.71 for company S, and 108.98 for company A.

A Kruskal-Wallis H-test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in updation of latest technology by employees in selected companies, $\chi^2 = 17.845$, p=0.000, with a mean rank assertiveness score of 101.61 for company BB, 83.69 for company LS, 77.88 for company RL, 89.12 for company SS, 83.29 for company S, and 63.65 for company A.

The results of descriptive statistics of NPar tests for Personal Competencies and Technical Competencies are presented in *Table 6* and *Table 7* respectively.

Among the employees of selected companies, there is a significant difference in the assertiveness levels, integrity levels, motivational levels and flexibility levels, but there is no

Insert Table 6

Insert Table 7

significant difference in the resilience levels.

Further, among the employees of selected companies there is significant difference in the internet usage, there is no significant difference in the usage of computer equipment and there is no significant difference in the updation of latest technology.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study included assessment of competencies viz., personal competencies, knowledge competencies, job related competencies, communication and interpersonal competencies, functional competencies and technical competencies for the frontline employees of the organized retail stores to identify the competency gap. From the results, it is observed that gaps exist in all the competencies, although it is relatively less infunctional competencies, communication and interpersonal competencies,knowledge competencies and job related competencies.

Association for Talent Development (2008) model for salespersons also maps technical competencies as an important factor for sales employee performance in their world-class Sales Competency Model. In this study the gap in technical competencies is around 40% vis-à-vis the required competency level. With technology playing an important role in determining personal effectiveness leading to organizational performance, retail employees need appropriate technical skills.In fact higher the technical competencies, higher is the employee performance. The solution to deal with this gap is to organize training programs for the identified employees.

Personal competencies are another cause of concern from the employer's perspective. Employees lack competencies such as assertiveness, flexibility, resilience and motivation. This requires HR managers to look into the employee hiring practices, induction and on-

going training.Through a meta-analysis Churchill *et al.* (1985) identified the major determinants of performance for salespersons were role variables, skills, motivation, personal factors, aptitude and organisational factors. Personal factor was noted to be the most significant indicator for effective sales performance. Hence focus on personal competencies of prospective candidates during recruitment would help in narrowing the gap. For those who are already in employment appropriate training solutions are suggested.

Continuing gapin competencies can also cause higher levels of attrition due to performance problems and consequential organizational actions.

Hypotheses H_{11}, H_{12}, H_{13} and H_{15} have tested statistically significant differences exist on assertiveness, integrity, flexibility and motivation levels among the employees of companies under the construct of personal competencies. There is no significant difference among the employee of different companies on the resilience levels.

Hypotheses H_{16} tested statistically significant difference exists in usage of internet among the employees of different companies. However, such statistically significant difference does not exist in usage of computer equipment (H_{17})and updation of latest technology (H_{18}).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

This study was of value to the managers of retail storesas it may contribute to reduction of competency gaps leading to improved organizational and employee performance, and customer satisfaction.Business practitioners and HR managers will gain from the study results bylearning that competency mapping is an effective way to improve business outcomes as well as reduce frontline employee turnover rates leading tosavings in operational costs thus contribute value to the organization.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Some limitations exist in this study. First, the data were collected from one town viz., Vijayawada in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Hence generalizability of the findings has limitations. Second, the study is conducted only among the front-line employees in the retail outlets. Similar study needs to be conducted among other levels of employees.Third, this study used cross sectional research design. Data collection at one point in time might hinder the assumption of causality.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper highlights the scanty research in the area of competency mapping in the retail sector in India. Retail sector is characterized by concentration of large multiple retailers at one end and a large majority of small businesses (unorganized street corner *kirana* shops) at the other. Retail is an important sector contributing to local economies (Finn &Louviere, 1996; Warnaby et al., 2004). Further, the sector is also characterised by relatively higher employee turnover, highest proportion ofpart-time workers and non-preferred career destination due to employee perceptions especially among the well-qualified. Hence employers in this sector face formidable challenges.Competencies of individuals are related to their performance at work (New, 1996).Previous studies have identified the critical value of employee competencies for providing good service to retail customers (Dabholkar *et al.*, 1996).This accentuates the need to explore the competency gaps not only among the frontline employees, but also at other levels. Further there are retail formats in other verticals of retail

industry. Study in these verticals and formats may be useful to validate the findings of this study. Competency mapping is not only relevant for retail sector, but also to other services and manufacturing sectors. Similar studies can also be conducted in these sectors.

The practice of competency mapping among the retail employees would lead to improved performance, retention of employees and enhanced customer and employee satisfaction. Future researchers may explore possibilities to develop a better understanding of competency mapping not only in retail industry but also in other similar industries for attaining better organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

Organizationsare channelling their efforts to mapping competencies and implementing to assessment and development centres, both in India and abroad. Competency mapping enables in meeting various customer expectations.Competency mapping also enablesan organization articulate a clear strategy for developing competencies of their workforce. Competency mapping supports successful performance of the employees within an organization.

Response of the front-line employees about competency mapping are summarized as - (a) they were involved in identifying and expressing the their views on competencies, (b) the process of competency mapping gave them the opportunity to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, (c) the process helped them discuss their personal goas, department and company objectives, (d) mapping the competencies helped them identify and clarify theirindividual role, (e) the entire process helped in improved working relationships, (f) mapping competencies and the related processes have increased job satisfaction and self-efficacy, and (g) training provided by the organization made better meaning and employees could appreciate the development plans of the company.

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Annexure I

Questionnaire

<u>Part-A</u>

Name: Designation:

Age: Experience in the previous Organization:

Gender: Experience in the current Organization:

Educational Qualification: Total Experience:

Income per annum (in rupees):

What is your Job Description?

_____

Are you given written Job Description by your employer?

_____

Whether job performed by you is in line with job description given to you?

_____

If there is a deviation, could you mention the most frequent deviations?

_____

What could explain the reasons for those deviations?

_____

Part-B

Competency Mapping

The following questions are related to various competencies. The scale for answering these questions is given below.Tick appropriately. Please provide your objective answers which reflect the actual performance.

|	
Very Good at this competency	5
Good at this competency	4
Moderate at this competency	3
Performance on this competency **is not quite up to acceptable standards**. Need development	2
Performance on this competency **fails to meet acceptable standards.** Need development	1

S. No	Item	5	4	3	2	1
1.	I am able to state opinions to superiors persuasively.					
2.	I am able to handle objections from superiors.					
3.	I always provide exact information to customers during sales process.					
4.	I am flexible with the work environment and policies framed by the company.					
5.	I maintain professional behavior in stressful situations.					

| 6.	I can comfortably explain the characteristics of the products we sell.					
7.	I have good knowledge on the quality of products we sell.					
8.	I have extensive knowledge about the organization and its functions.					
9.	I am comfortable in presenting product functions clearly to customers.					
10.	I am motivated at work place.					
11.	I am aware of competitors.					
12.	I am able to effectively provide product knowledge to customers.					
13.	I can take effective steps to resolve conflicting situations					
14.	I am able to listen to the queries of customers' and resolve them.					
15.	I am determined towards attaining goals set.					
16.	I can demonstrate understanding of the customers' needs to the team members.					
17.	I negotiate effectively with the customers.					
18.	I can persuade others to consider alternative view points.					
19.	I have adequate knowledge on all aspects of business operations.					
20.	I have an ability to manage and accept changes that take place in my organization.					
21.	I work on improving knowledge, skills on a regular basis.					
22.	I can reach targets set every month.					
23.	I am ready to gain and share knowledge.					
24.	I can work along with my team members always.					
25.	I am committed to the responsibilities allotted.					
26.	I can identify product strengths and weaknesses.					
27.	I know guarantee/warranty policies of the products we sell.					
28.	I have good technical knowledge on internet usage, feedback system.					
29.	I know how to use computers, faxes, and other hardware.					
30.	I keep myself updated to latest technological advances and seek ways to use these technologies in my work place.					

Annexure II

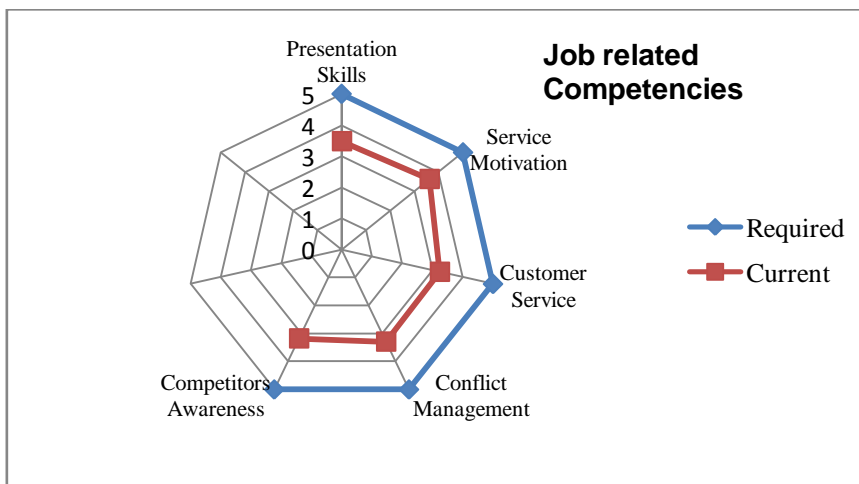**Radar Charts Showing the Competency Gap**

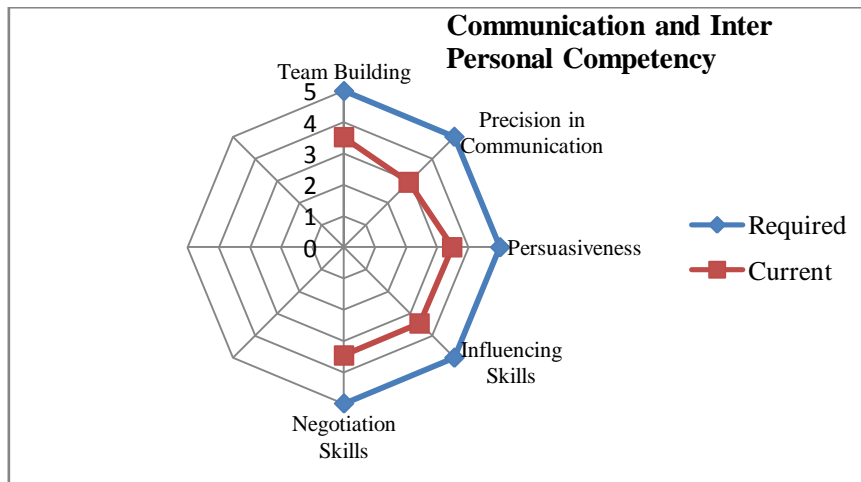**Figure 3:** *Competency Assessment of Personal Competencies*
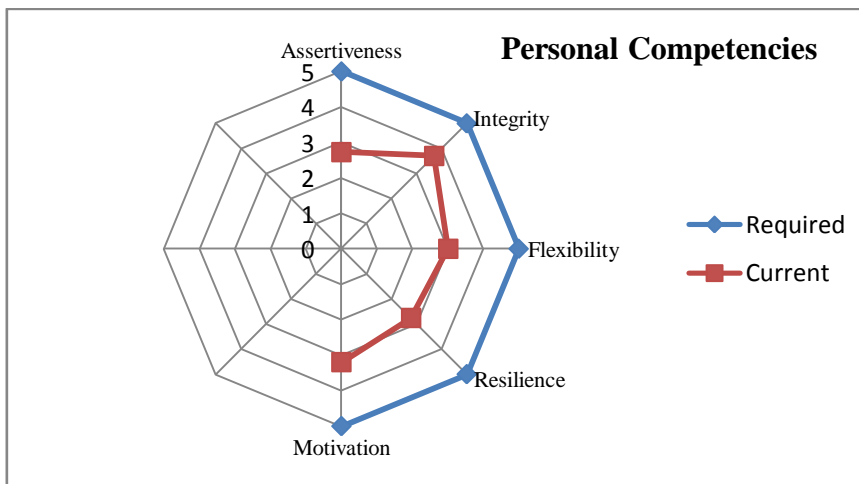
Figure 4: *Competency Assessment of Knowledge Competencies*
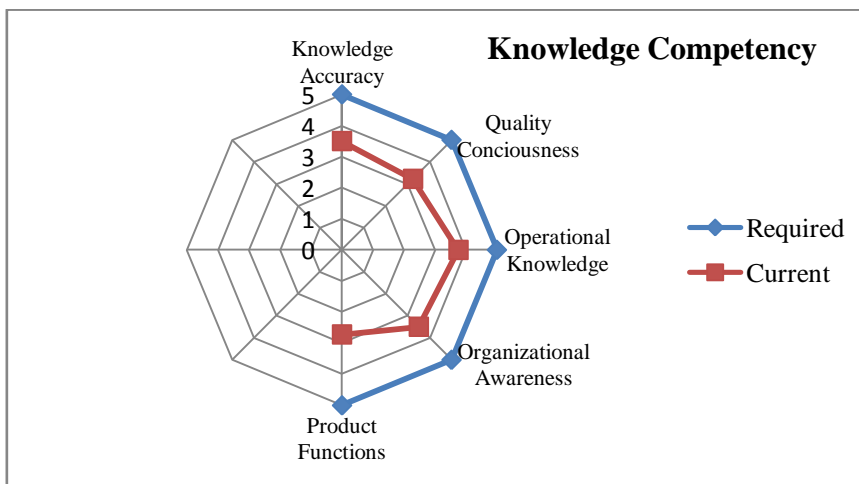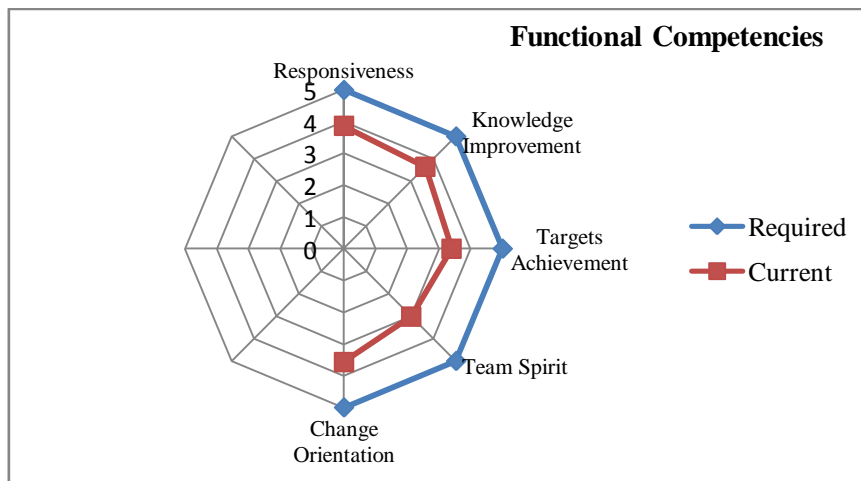

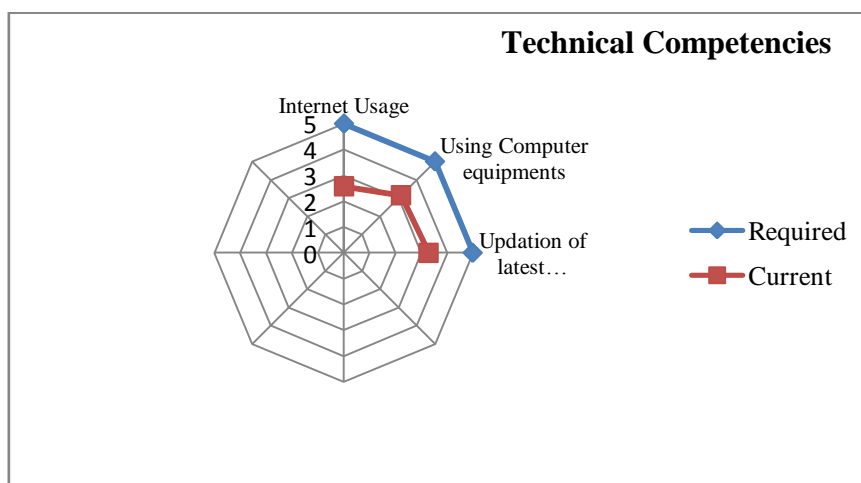**Figure 5:** *Competency Assessment of Job Related Competencies*

Figure 6: *Competency Assessment of Communication and Interpersonal Competencies*
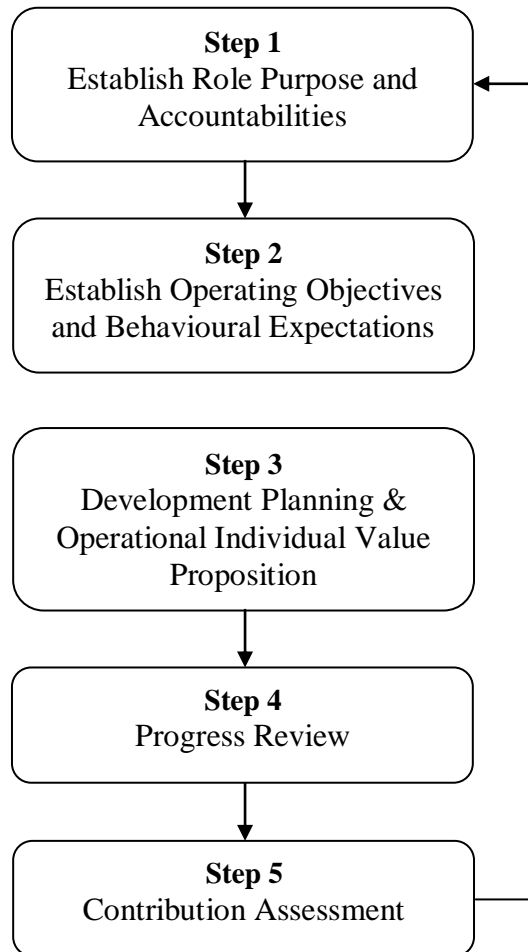

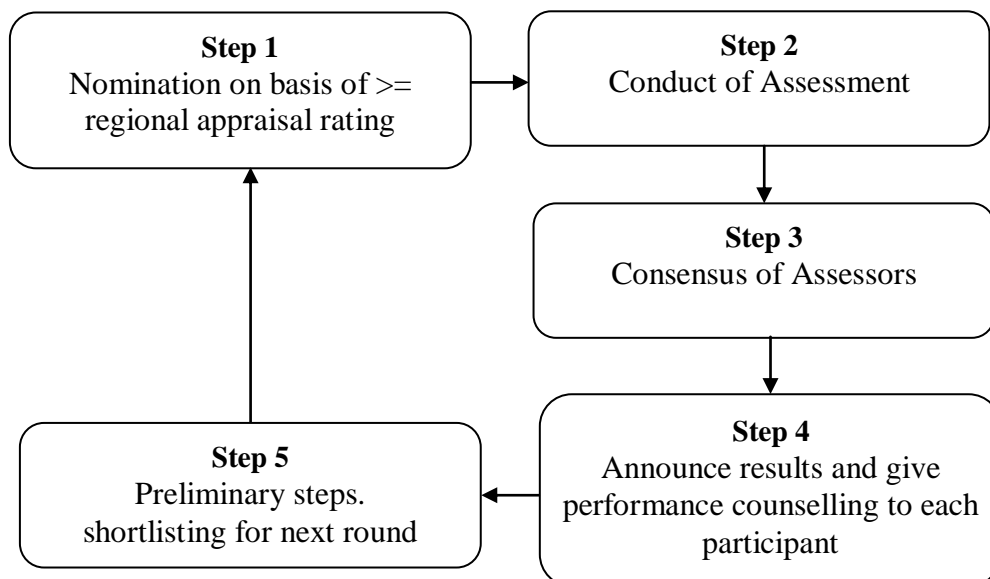**Figure 7:** *Competency Assessment of Functional Competencies*

Figure 8: *Competency Assessment of Technical Competencies*

Figure 1 *Competency Model of Company BB*

Figure 2 *Competency Process Map of Company LS*

Table 1: *Summary of Gap Analysis*

S. No.	Competencies	Required Level RCL (1-5)	Observed Level ECL(1-5)	Gap
1	Personal Competencies	5	3.1	1.9
2	Knowledge Competencies	5	3.4	1.6
3	Job Related Competencies	5	3.4	1.6
4	Communication and Interpersonal Competencies	5	3.5	1.5
5	Functional Competencies	5	3.5	1.5
6	Technical Competencies	5	3	2

Table 2T*he Kruskal-Wallis Test for Personal Competencies*

Ranks			
	Company Name	N	Mean Rank
Assertiveness	BB	52	97.21
	LS	26	91.96
	RL	45	93.81
	SS	21	71.02
	S	12	86.75
	A	20	68.80
	Total	176	
Integrity	BB	52	95.45
	LS	26	89.50
	RL	45	81.51
	SS	21	108.12
	S	12	67.38
	A	20	76.93
	Total	176	
Flexibility	BB	52	86.73
	LS	26	80.62
	RL	45	101.07
	SS	21	86.45
	S	12	81.96
	A	20	81.15

Ranks			
	Company Name	**N**	**Mean Rank**
	Total	176	
Resilience	BB	52	108.33
	LS	26	63.60
	RL	45	75.77
	SS	21	100.02
	S	12	61.96
	A	20	101.80
	Total	176	
Motivation	BB	52	99.81
	LS	26	81.06
	RL	45	78.48
	SS	21	100.93
	S	12	101.25
	A	20	70.63
	Total	176	

Table 3: *Test Statistics*[a,b]

	Assertiveness	**Integrity**	**Flexibility**	**Resilience**	**Motivation**
Chi-Square	7.991	8.721	4.249	23.756	9.807
Df	5	5	5	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	.157	.121	.514	.000	.081

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Company Name

Table 4 T*he Kruskal-Wallis Test for Technical Competencies*

Ranks			
	Company Name	**N**	**Mean Rank**
Internet Usage	BB	52	102.01
	LS	26	93.33
	RL	45	76.83
	SS	21	89.50
	S	12	83.46
	A	20	75.33
	Total	176	
Usage of computer equipment	BB	52	57.63
	LS	26	79.10
	RL	45	115.36
	SS	21	95.43
	S	12	95.71
	A	20	108.98
	Total	176	
Updation of latest technology	BB	52	110.61
	LS	26	83.69
	RL	45	77.88
	SS	21	89.12
	S	12	83.29
	A	20	63.65
	Total	176	

Table 5: *Test Statistics[a,b]*

	Internet Usage system	**Usage of computer equipment**	**Updation of latest technology**
Chi-Square	8.200	37.936	17.845
df	5	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	.146	.000	.003

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Company Name

Table 6 *NPar Test Results for Personal Competencies*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Assertiveness	176	2.73	1.353	1	5
Integrity	176	3.70	1.312	1	5
Flexibility	176	3.01	1.400	1	5
Resilience	176	2.77	1.397	1	5
Motivation	176	3.20	1.527	1	5
Company Name	176	3.35	2.006	1	6

Table 7 *NPar Test Results for Technical Competencies*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Internet Usage	176	2.57	1.428	1	5
Usage of computer equipment	176	3.14	1.395	1	5
Updation of latest technology	176	3.29	1.238	1	5
Company Name	176	3.35	2.006	1	6