Competency Identification of Salespersons Through Behavioral Event Interviews : Evidence from the Oil Industry

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Abstract

Competency studies for highly placed professionals have proliferated across the planet. However, published research papers with data to corroborate the predictive validity of identification of competencies for salespeople (the first link with the customer) is unexplored. Post deregulation onset of cut-throat competition in the oil industry of India makes a compelling case of such research. This paper aimed to identify the differentiating competency set for salespeople manning petrol pumps (retail outlets) using behavioral event interviews (BEIs). BEIs were conducted with 57 salespersons comprising 22 star and 35 average performers of best-performing retail outlets of fossil fuels of a fortune 500 company in Eastern Part of India during May 2015 - June 2016. Eight competencies were distilled from interviews and then sent to 15 industry experts for ranking these competencies independently. The concordance among 12 experts was found significant at the 1% level of significance. Ranking of competencies, as found in BEIs as per frequency of their appearance in interviews, and those given by experts were compared. There was an insignificant difference between the two, thus validating the findings of BEIs. Statistical analysis suggested that a set of four competencies comprising courteous behavior, honesty & integrity, service orientation, and punctuality were differentiating competencies for salespersons of oil industry in India. The findings can be leveraged for hiring, training, career progression, and compensating salespersons by the industry. The same methodology can be adopted to identify competencies of any role with high reliability.

Keywords : behavioral event interview (BEI), competency, concordance, salespersons, star

The word competency finds its root in the Latin word *competere* which means "suitable" . The concept of competency is not new and has been around for centuries. As mentioned by Özgen, Sánchez - Galofré, Alabart, Medir, and Giralt (2013), the early Romans were known to practice a form of competency profiling by listing attributes of a "good Roman soldier." The term competency was first introduced to psychology literature in 1973 when David McClelland advocated in his groundbreaking article "Testing for Competence Rather than for Intelligence" that traditional tests of academic aptitude, school grades, and knowledge content, in fact predicted neither job performance nor success in life

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outcomes, thus heralding the quest for theory and tools that could predict effectiveness in the workplace more reliably. The competency concept has since then created new paradigms in HR landscape and has morphed from a phrase to a movement across the globe in diverse sectors. The concept now finds wide applications in hiring, career pathing, performance appraisal, training, and compensation management across the planet. Managerial competencies have attracted extensive coverage across the sector and countries and results show substantial evidence of their strength as powerful antecedents to managerial performance (Laxminarayan, Pai, & Ramaprasad, 2016).

Before we discuss the exact definition of the construct called competency, it will be worth delineating it from similar sounding and interchangeably used terms like "ability" and "competence" as pointed out by some other researchers.

Competency not only implies "ability," it goes beyond that. It also encompasses what one is "willing to do" too. As put forward by Ryan, Emerling, and Spencer (2009), effective work performance would seem to require that both of these factors be taken into account. Thus, abilities per se are different from competencies, motive being the critical differentiator. In simple words, abilities tell you what one can do; whereas, competencies provide insights into what a person can and will do. Hence, competency can be considered as ability plus intent.

There is another interchangeably used term "competence." Competence implies a person's ability to comply to a range of externally agreed standards; whereas, competency refers to the personal attributes that persons draw upon as part of their work activities as reported by Dainty, Cheng, and Moore (2004). Thus, competence is a work related concept that defines the areas of work in which a person needs to be competent; whereas, "competency" is a person - related concept that refers to the dimensions of behavior underlying competent performance. Thus, displaying competency is not about merely demonstrating an ability to comply with minimum standards of functional performance, but relates to generic underlying behavioral characteristics that cause or result in superior performance.

Literature Review

(1) Competency Definition : Review of literatures have thrown multitude of definitions of the construct called competency (McClelland, 1973; Raju & Masthan, 2014; Rathnam, Suresh, & Sathish 2008; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). We have discussed a few definitions provided by some eminent researchers in this field.

McClelland (1973) defined competency as the underlying characteristics of a person which results in effective and/or superior performance on a job. According to him, a job competency represents the ability to perform; an individual's set of competencies reflect his/her capability or what he/she can do. Furthermore, a job competency may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge that an individual uses, and the existence and possession of these characteristics may or may not be known to the individual.

Spencer and Spencer (1993) viewed competency as an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to the criterion referenced effective and/or superior performance on a job or a situation. They identified five (three covert and two overt) types of competency concepts. The covert characteristics are motive, trait, and self-concept. The overt characteristics are knowledge and skill. Their explanation can be tabulated as given in Table 1.

For the purpose of this paper, the following definition of competencies is adopted by us : Competencies are underlying characteristics of a person that enable him / her to deliver superior performance in a given job, role, or situation with commitment to perform at the best of his/her ability. These include optimal level of knowledge, skills, attitudes, self - image, behaviors, and motives.

Table 1. Overt and Covert Characteristics of Competency

Types of Characteristics	Characteristics	Explanation
Covert	Motive	Wants /desires that stimulate or things that an individual consistently thinks.
	Traits	Physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information.
	Self- Concept	It is individual's attitudes, values, and self-image.
Overt	Knowledge	It is the information that an individual has in specific content areas.
	Skill	Ability to perform a certain physical or mental task.

Source : Adapted from L. M. Spencer & S. M. Spencer (1993). *Competence at work : Models for superior performance* (p. 11). New York : John Wiley and Sons.

(2) Competency Identification - The BEI Method : Human resource literature is rife with myriad methods of assessing competencies like job observation, job/task analysis, expert panels (Yadav & Nalawade, 2012), environmental scanning, survey methods, 360 degree assessment, Delphi technique, behavioral event interviews (BEIs), critical behavior interviews (Cochran, 2009), role set based competency method (Rao & Chawla, 2013), etc. Competency models based on critical incident interviews have previously demonstrated greater predictive power when compared against models constructed using expert panels or respondent measures as reported by McClelland (1998) and Spencer and Spencer (1993). Twenty years of research has shown that at best, focus groups and expert panels are 50% accurate - but competencies they identify are not defined specifically enough to be reliably assessed (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Although many studies have been conducted to design competency models for top managerial and leadership positions, and to assess cross cultural validity of models (Ryan, Spencer, & Bernard, 2012), hardly any study is traceable wherein the lowest in hierarchy have been the subject of research, and that too in Asian nations. The growing economy and cut-throat competition post de-regulation in these parts of the world makes a study on these first links with customers, that is, the salespersons, a compelling case for research .

The method of behavioral event interviews (BEI) deals with the analysis of past events and puts the emphasis on facts and examples from real world situations as pointed out by Raisova (2012). The fact that the method is "operant" rather than "respondent" is the defining feature of the technique and the one that adds to its predictive validity as reporte (Ryan et al., 2009).

The BEI method incorporates the thematic apperception test (TAT). This probes and elicits data about the interviewees' personality and cognitive styles, that is, what they think about, feel, and desire to accomplish in dealing with the critical situations. This enables interviewers to capture competencies such as achievement orientation, customer service orientation, relationship building, logical ways of thinking, and solving the problems encountered.

According to Spencer and Spencer (1993), BEIs contain the following five steps, the most important step being the Step no 3 :

⮌ Step 1: Introduction and explanation.

⮌ Step 2: Getting to know the job responsibilities of the interviewee.

⮌ Step 3: Behavioral Events : Asking the interviewee to describe in detail the five or six most important situations he or she has experienced on the job - two or three "high points" or major successes and two or three "low points" or key failures. Each story should include answers to the following questions in STAR (situation - task - action - result) format :

- What led up to the situation (S) ?
- What was the task (T) at hand ?
- What did the interviewee actually (A) do, feel, and think in the situation?
- What was the result (R) ?

✤ Step 4: Asking to specify characteristics needed to do the job well.

✤ Step 5: Concluding and summarizing the key findings from the interview.

The above - mentioned steps of conducting BEIs clearly suggest that the interviewee should open up, articulate the stories of his/her peak successes or failures so that relevant competencies could be distilled from the transcripts by well-trained interviewers.

Competency models based on critical incident interviews have previously demonstrated greater predictive power when compared against models constructed using expert panels or respondent measures (McClelland, 1998 ; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). BEIs are also found to be very effective in differentiating people with equal communication and academic brilliance in the selection process (Kurian, Ribeiro, & Gomes, 2016).

Methodology

(1) Sample : From the latest performance reports available, the best performing retail outlets in the respective trading areas were identified. Respective sales executives of these best-performing outlets (based on last 3 years' performance reports) were identified with help from their proprietors and managers ; 22 star performers among 57 salespersons were short listed through 360 degree feedback. In essence, the sampling had to be purposive but reasonably large from a statistical angle (57 salespersons).

(2) Data Collection : BEIs were conducted by us and narratives were recorded with the help of mobile phones, transcribed, and competencies were coded. Salespersons were asked to describe their real acts and deeds in STAR format (situation - task - action - result) in answer to the following open - ended provocations during May 15 to June 16 :

(i) Describe a situation when you created customer delight.

(ii) Narrate one significant act of yours which won appreciation of the manager.

(iii) Tell us a story when you successfully handled a difficult/angry customer.

(iv) Describe a situation when you were scolded by your manager/proprietor.

(v) According to you, what are attributes of a star performer in this business ?

(3) Thematic Analysis of Competencies : Narratives were recorded ad-verbatim and then distilled into competencies using thematic analysis by us. BEIs of 57 salespersons yielded eight competencies in order of frequency of their incidences in the interviews as shown in Table 2.

(4) Validation : A questionnaire listing all these competencies was then mailed to 15 subject matter experts (General Managers / Deputy General Managers /Divisional Managers placed at far away places without letting them know as to who the others were), who had experience of handling retailing of petroleum

Table 2. Definition of Competencies Distilled from Behavioral Event Interviews (BEIs)

S.No	List of Competencies Observed in BEIs
1	Courteous behavior (Showing gracious consideration towards others ; being polite and respectful to others, towards customers, colleagues, and superiors.) - **T3**
2	Integrity (Honesty in handling cash, products, and maintaining records.) - **T2**
3	Service orientation (Propensity to help and attend to customer requirements /complaints on their own.) - **T4**
4	Punctuality (Availability at workstations on time and not absenting without prior permission.) - **T1**
5	Technical know how (Product knowledge, knowledge about dispensing machines, standard operating procedures, appropriateness of fuel and safety aspects to be followed in retail outlets.) - **T6**
6	Persuasive capabilities (Ability to convince customers & colleagues about products and business related issues.)- **T5**
7	Appearance of the customer attendant (Uniform, physical built, tidiness, and communicative ability.) - **T7**
8	Emotional maturity (Ability to know and control own emotions and those of other stakeholders of business and leverage the same for advantage of the business as well as ability to deal with difficult customers/situations.) - **T8**

products for at least 15 years. They were asked to rank these competencies and to add any competency which they thought was capable of predicting success in trade, keeping in mind the forthcoming competitive scenario as well as current roles and responsibilities and also to suggest if any of the listed competencies was irrelevant. We received responses from 12 experts. Before going ahead with the analysis of data, it would be worthwhile discussing a term called 'concordance'. The term 'concordance' has very precisely been explained by Coleman (2009) as the degree of agreement between ranks to some person or to a statement or to a concept/product by a set of competent rankers when a new concept or statement is required to be ranked on its relative merit or its multidimensional attributes. One of the standard methods as propounded by Kendall is the coefficient of concordance, conventionally denoted by *"W"*.

(5) Tools Used for Analysis

(i) Chi - square test for finding the relative importance of eight competency components.

(ii) Concordance analysis among ranking given by experts and its test.

(iii) One-way ANOVA by ranks was carried out for rankings given by experts to components of competencies.

(iv) Chi - square test of independence for 2×2 contingency table was conducted to detect the association between groups of salespersons (Star vs Average) and two classes of competencies delineated by least significant difference obtained from one-way ANOVA.

(v) Two-tailed tests for differences between proportions of Star and Average groups in respect of competencies was performed .

(vi) ANOVA for weighted mean rank of competencies obtained from experts was done where weighing factor was frequencies of competencies as observed in BEIs for both the groups.

Statistical Analysis and Results

(1) Chi - Square Test : Eight competency components as distilled from BEIs of 57 salespersons was tabulated as

frequency table for each component as depicted in the Table 3. Though the number of salespersons interviewed was 57, the total frequency obtained was 93, as few components appeared more than once in each interview. The test was done with the null hypothesis (H01) that components of competency as per salespersons do not have unequal importance.

Though the Table 3 itself is quite expressive of the relative importance of each competency component, nevertheless, it was considered essential to test such by chi‑square test of goodness‑fit on the basis of the null hypothesis (H01).Thus, the expected frequencies of each of the eight components was worked out and compared with observed ones, and the chi‑square test was performed as reflected in the Table 3. It is found that the values of chi-square are higher than the table values at 7 degrees of freedom both at 5% and 1% levels of significance, rejecting the null hypothesis H01 that the eight components do not have unequal importance and accepting Ha1 that competency components are significantly of unequal importance.

(2) Kendall's Concordance Analysis and its Test : It was considered to adopt this method for examining the degree of agreement on rankings awarded by the 12 experts to the eight competencies that emerged from BEIs reported above. The frequency Table 3 establishes the relative importance of each of the eight components of competencies as observed in the BEIs of the salespersons.

The Table 4 presents the data on rank given to each of the eight competencies. Experts ranked the most important competency as 1, the next one as 2, and so on till 8. The 8th rank being the least important as per the expert's views. This data was tabulated in matrix format with rankers in row (from R1 to R12) and competency components in columns (T1 to T8) as shown in the Table 3. Such data was subjected to Kendall's concordance analysis and related to chi-square test, for which the null hypothesis (H02) is that there is no concordance amongst experts on differential ranks given to the eight competency components.

Since there were multiple cases of tied ranks on almost every component of competencies, it was obligatory to correct the coefficient of concordance for such tied ranks. The coefficient of concordance (W) was obtained as 36.624, which obviously increased further on account of correction for tied ranks and was observed to be highly significant at the 1% level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis (H02) as formulated above is rejected. The rejection of the null hypothesis leads to the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis that experts were in concordance for differential ranking given to eight competencies among themselves.

(3) Kruskal - Wallis One Way ANOVA : The standard errors of each competency component may be seen in

Table 3. Chi Square Test for Relative Importance of Eight Competencies

Sno	Competency Components	Frequency Observed (Oi) = a	Frequency Expected (Ei) = b	(a-b)^2/b
1	Courteous Behavior	21	11.6	7.56
2	Honesty & Integrity	18	11.6	3.49
3	Service Orientation	18	11.6	3.49
4	Punctuality	10	11.6	0.22
5	Technical Know-how	9	11.6	0.59
6	Persuasive Capability	6	11.6	2.72
7	Appearance	6	11.6	2.72
8	Emotional Maturity	5	11.6	3.77

Table 4. Concordance Among Experts on Ranking of Eight Competencies

Competency Components/Expert Respondents	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
R1	8	7	3	1	5	4	2	6
R2	4	1	2	7	6	5	3	8
R3	7	1	3	5	6	2	4	8
R4	7	6	1	3	4	5	2	8
R5	6	1	4	3	8	5	7	2
R6	8	3	1	2	4	5	6	7
R7	2	5	7	4	6	3	1	8
R8	7	6	1	2	3	4	5	8
R9	8	3	2	1	4	5	6	7
R10	6	1	2	8	4	7	3	5
R11	4	3	2	5	7	6	1	8
R12	4	5	2	3	7	6	1	8
SUM	71	42	30	44	64	57	41	83
Mean Rank	5.92	3.50	2.5	3.67	5.33	4.75	3.42	6.92
Error(+/-)	0.57	0.65	0.48	0.64	0.45	0.39	0.62	0.53

Note : R1 to R12 : Respondent experts , T1 to T8 : Eight Competencies as tabulated in Table 2.

Table 5. One Way ANOVA for Ranks Given to Each Competency Components by Experts

Sources of Variation	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Sqs.	Mean Sqs.	Var- ratio *(F)*
Competency component	7	185.67	26.52	7.34***
Error	88	318.28	3.61	
Total	95	504.00		

the Table 4. They appear to be homogeneous. Such phenomenon provoked us to undertake the Kruskal - Wallis one-way ANOVA for the ranks obtained in the Table 4. The ANOVA table is presented in the Table 5. The null hypothesis formulated here is that :

 H03: There is no variation amongst the competency components with respect to the mean ranks obtained for them.

A glance at the ANOVA table (Table 5) reveals very highly significant (0.1%) value of variation in ranks accountable to the competency components. Thus, the null hypothesis H03 is rejected, implying that the components did show significant variation amongst them, as ranked by the panel of experts. Arranging the mean ranks in increasing order and comparing with LSD as depicted in Table 6, it is clear that T3, T7, T2, and T4 form a distinct class, which can be named as Class 1, and the remaining four (T6, T5, T1, & T8) are grouped in Class 2. It is worthwhile tabulating the two distinct classes of competencies derived in the Table 7.

(4) The Chi - Square Test of Independence : Since it was possible to crystallize two distinct classes of competencies, it was apt to investigate their association with two groups of salespersons, namely Star and

Table 6. Classification of Competencies Based on Least Significant Difference

T3	T7	T2	T4	T6	T5	T1	T8	LSD@5%
2.50	3.42	3.50	3.67	4.75	5.32	5.92	6.92	1.54

Table 7. Two Distinct Classes of Competencies as Found by ANOVA

Sno	Competency	Class of Competency
1	T3: Courteous Behavior	Class 1
2	T7: Appearance of Salesperson	
3	T2: Integrity and Honesty	
4	T4:Service Orientation	
5	T6:Technical Know- how	Class 2
6	T5: Persuasive Capabilities	
7	T1:Punctuality	
8	T8: Emotional Maturity	

Average performers. For the same, it was proposed to perform the chi - square test of independence for testing the null hypothesis :

✤ **H04 :** The two attributes - one that is the categories of salespersons (Star and Average) and the other, which is the classes (Class 1 and Class 2) of competencies are not associated.

In order to perform such a test, it was considered first to take up the two groups (Star vs Average) performers. One is the Star-group, who were superior performers and the other is the category of Average performers. The other attribute, as stated earlier, is of competency classes as depicted in the Table 7. Thus, a 2×2 contingency table was formed of frequencies of competencies as observed in the BEIs. The same is divided into four cells of the Table 8.

The chi-square being highly significant, the null hypothesis (H04) that the two attributes are independent gets rejected and Ha4 is accepted, leading to the interpretation that there exists a significant association between the groups of salespersons and classes of competencies. The Table 8 makes evident that the Star group has largest frequencies (40) for competency Class 1 and lowest for competency Class 2. This indicates that competency Class 1, which was also ranked high by experts, was frequented or possessed by Star performers.

Table 8. Contingency Table (2 × 2) for Star vs Average Performers and Class 1 & Class 2 Competencies

Competency Class	Frequency of Occurrence in BEIs of Salespersons		Sum
	Star	Average	
Class 1	40	27	67
Class 2	6	20	26
	46	47	93

Note: χ^2 at 1 degree of freedom = 10.05 ** is highly significant.

(5) Comparison Between Star and Average Groups - Test of Proportions : The proportion for star group for competency Class 1 is 0.6 and that of the Average group is 0.4, which results in normal test of proportion, that is, $Z = 3.34$ (highly significant). This is much larger than the table value of 1.98, indicating that on the proportion count also, the star group has highly significant proportion for Class 1 competencies. It is interesting to note that on the other hand, the Average group has a large proportion (0.77) for competency Class 2 and only 0.23 for competency Class 1. Here also, the Z ratio $= 6.54$ is highly significant.

(6) ANOVA of Star and Average Groups : For the purpose of performing ANOVA, Table 9 has been prepared with 5 columns and 11 rows as indicated in the Table 9 itself. Both mean ranks by experts and frequencies of corresponding competency components for both the groups, that is, Star performers and remaining group of salespersons and respective frequencies of their occurrence in BEIs are shown in the Table 9 in their columns. Competency components, on the other hand, have been grouped into two classes.

For finding sums and sums of squares for different sources of variation, such mean competencies have been weighted with corresponding frequencies obtained in BEIs separately for both the groups of salespersons and also for both the classes of competency components. Thus, the ANOVA Table 10 has been obtained.

Variance ratios obtained for both the sources of variations being highly significant are suggestive of the fact that large part of variations in weighted mean ranks are accountable for :

(i) Difference between two groups of salespersons, those being Star and Average.

(ii) Difference between two classes of competencies - competencies of Class 1 and Class 2. Thus, high ranking

Table 9. ANOVA Between Star vs Average Performers

Competency Component	Mean Rank	Frequency of Competencies as Observed in BEIs		
		Star	Average	Total
T3-Courteous Behavior	2.5	14	7	21
T7-Appearance	3.42	12	6	18
T2- Integrity and Honesty	3.5	6	4	10
T4- Service Orientation	3.67	8	10	18
		40	**27**	**67**
T6- Technical Know- how	4.75	2	7	9
T5- Persuasive Capabilities	5.33	1	5	6
T1- Punctuality	5.92	2	4	6
T8- Emotional Maturity	6.92	1	4	5
		6	**20**	**26**
		46	**47**	**93**

Table 10. ANOVA Between Star vs Average Performers and Class of Competencies

Sources of Variation	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	Variance Ratio (F)
Between Groups	1	24.0297	24.0297	275.02**
Between Classes	1	104.3612	104.2612	1173.917**
Residual	90	8.0027	0.0889	

weighted mean competencies having lower magnitude were significantly so over the same of their comparative counterparts. Thus, the Star - group established its superiority over the Average group, and also, the four components of competency of Class 1 (those being T3 for courteous behavior, T2 for honesty and integrity, T4 for service orientation, and T1 for punctuality) did emerge as real differentiators to gauge the competencies of such salespersons.

The results of statistical analyses for each of the Tables obtained are presented hereunder :

(i) Four competencies namely courteous behavior, honesty & integrity, service orientation, and punctuality are found to be the differentiating competencies for the salespersons of retail outlets for petro- products as obtained by the number of appearances of these competency components in the BEIs as reflected in the Table 3.

(ii) The concordance analysis enabled us to draw an inference that rankers, though far-apart and quite independent for such ranking, were in agreement in respect of score for rank accorded by them. The concordance coefficient *(W)*, which is found to be significant at the 1% level of significance, validates that experts had high agreement among themselves that these eight competencies can be reliably be taken as critical differentiators in delivery of superlative performance.

(iii) The interpretation of the results obtained from ANOVA table (Table 7) clearly shows that the Class 1 competency set is significantly different from the Class 2 competency set. As regards its comparison with those ranking as per BEIs, it is to be noted that the service orientation component of competencies is ranked highest by both the techniques. Furthermore, competency component : integrity (T2) also coincides with ranking by both the techniques. However, the experts ranked T7 (appearance) of the salespersons higher than what emerged from BEIs. This is very natural because none of the salespersons felt that their personal appearance could be a critical incident to be reported, at least while responding to interviewees. The other component on which both the techniques showed agreement is T8 (emotional maturity). Regarding other components, T6 (technical - know how) & T5 (persuasive capabilities), the experts' ranking did not differ significantly, while the ranking of BEIs is just the reverse by only one rank. Regarding T1 (punctuality), it is only natural to be ranked much higher than T7 (appearance) for the reasons explained above.

(iv) Frequency of Competency Class 1 observed in case of Star performers is significantly high as tabulated in the Table 8.

(v) The Star - group established its superiority over the Average group, and also, the four components of competency of Class 1 (those being T3 for courteous behavior, T2 for honesty and integrity, T4 for service orientation, and T1 for punctuality) did emerge as real differentiating competencies for salespersons.

Discussion

Narration of one's peak achievement stories and deeds transcend him or her to a highly emotional state. Since the language of emotion is universal , it works equally well across countries, cultures, and hierarchical levels. Interacting with one who is at a highly emotional - self level can provide a magnified glimpse and insights into the real abilities of a person. This fact is the capstone of the concept of BEI.

However, there are certain traits which are better perceived by others like appearance, amiability, or persona of the individual. A BEI may fail to elicit such competencies. However, the technique of behavioral event interviews could elicit a reliable competency set for the semi-literate class of salespersons. This can be taken as a pointer to the impact a competency movement can create even for the bottom of the corporate pyramid. It is worth mentioning that other traditional methods like aptitude tests or psychometric tests may not be effective in determining competency model as their cognitive ability or literacy level is bound to come in the way. Since they have grown up listening to stories, story telling can be the most effective way to elicit responses from them.

Managerial Implications

The growing popularity of competency based HR processes is corroborated by the findings of Boyatzis (2008) who asserted that almost every organization with more than 300 people uses some form of competency based human resource management. It is also well indicated from this research that the BEI technique can be reliably used for identifying competency sets even for those at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy in developing nations of the world. This competency set can be utilized by HR professionals for hiring, training, and performance management (Rao & Chawla, 2013) of salespersons (numbering approx. half a million in India) particularly when the oil industry is at the cusp of facing newer challenges thrown open by recent de-regulation of fossil-fuels and resultant competition in the Indian market. The methodology adopted in the paper could be of advantageous use for competency identification of any role across the planet.

Conclusion

The competencies like courteous behavior, service orientation, honesty & integrity, and punctuality are found to be the unique differentiating competencies for people at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy (salespersons) of fossil-fuel retailing. This revealed that courteous behavior and service orientation are distinctly superior competencies, while emotional maturity is distinctly inferior to other competencies for the specific role. The competency set too is quite different from those for top ranked sales professionals in developed regions of the planet as a competency like emotional maturity is crucial for top executives as concluded from the research conducted by proponents of emotional intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & Mckee, 2001).

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

While carrying out this study, we could identify a limitation specific to employees at the bottom of the corporate hierarchy. There could be a class of people at the bottom of the corporate hierarchy who may not be able to articulate their inner feelings due to their introvert nature, language issues, and literacy levels, or due to a feeling that "will it be believed?" The dogma that one should always "answer to the point" and a mindset "Are my real life incidental stories worth sharing?" are real roadblocks in eliciting the "underlying" characteristics that result in superior performance, particularly when interviews are conducted with employees having low level of education and exposure.

Interviewees were also observed to be apprehensive of how their revelations will be taken by their employers. Few of them did not open up at all. Cultural variations were not taken into account as area of

study was limited to Eastern part of the country .

A country wide sample would have made the research more realistically relevant. A longitudinal study can reveal changes in desired competency over a period of time. BEI being one of the most effective method for competency modeling can be used for any role across the industry.

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