

**Research Paper Summary**

***Mapping Competence for the Future***



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## Overview

In sharp contrast to the past, job/ roles in organisations are changing very rapidly today. They are also increasingly being evaluated for their relevance to organisational strategy. Thus, competencies (and hence competency maps) too, need to reflect the dynamism, uncertainty, ambiguity and so on, representative of the organisation today and in the foreseeable future.

Current methods of competency mapping (process of identifying relevant competencies) stop well short of this goal. Most methods focus on past performance which makes them unreliable as tools to work with for a radically different future. They also ignore organisational fingerprints of its strategy and culture. Even where some methods do attempt to unshackle the 'pull of the past' or attempt to broad base the search for relevant competencies, it is done intuitively and without the support and discipline of a pre-defined and researched process. The truth of these assertions is confirmed by the fact that companies that differ widely in their business areas, strategy and culture, still end up having similar competency maps!

Limitations in the mapping process result in inaccurate identification of competencies. Inaccurate competencies significantly blunt the edge of competency based HR systems. The competency framework, which has the potential to be a powerful agent for organisational change, alignment, and performance enhancement, can thus, potentially, end up misdirecting organisational energy and undermine performance.

It is in this context, and with a view to correct the aforementioned deficiencies that we propose the JOE (t) method for competency mapping. The method (including tools and techniques for implementation) has been only partially validated and continues to be refined and improved with every successive experience.

### **This paper attempts to**

- A. Evaluate and critique current methods of competency mapping
- B. Outline the JOE (t) approach to competency mapping, which results in competency maps that are better aligned with organisational requirements of today and the foreseeable future.
- C. Detail specific techniques that can be used while implementing JOE (t) to evolve competency maps.

## A. Limitations of Current Methods

### 1. Stretching the Present

Today, most competency mapping methods focus on the present role through BEIs. However, we are unaware of any documented method to systematically identify competencies that address needs of the foreseeable future. Some methods we encountered do attempt to consider future implications (through visionary interviews) but these are neither systematic nor does it address the crucial question of balancing the current and future needs. Thus, despite the overwhelming need to be future-oriented, most competency maps remain deeply rooted in historical versions of the role.

### 3. Poor linkage with the Organisational Strategy, Culture, and Performance Management System

Another key aspect that does not get adequate attention is the cultural and strategic fingerprint of the organisation. Few competency maps reflect the strategic thrusts that the top management wants to provide to the organisation.

Reasons for this include:

- The role is studied in isolation to the strategic context.
- Mapping organisational level competencies onto individual level competencies is not easy.

This can result in a weak alignment between the strategy and performance.

### 3. Cloning Success, Eliminating Mavericks

Competencies are usually identified by de-constructing the success of high-performers. This results in a shortlist of behaviours that have been effective in the past. These are then codified into a competency map which forms the basis for assessment, development, and other operational decisions. All such competency frameworks are based on the implicit assumption that there is one best (or preferred) route for effectiveness. Such attempts at cloning, if applied indiscriminately, can have both long and short term negatives

- **Long term:** It can eliminate 'alternative' competencies, which are a company's bet for future success
- **Short term:** Even in the short term utility of such an approach needs scrutiny since alternative routes (Mavericks) that are equally effective are eliminated. This can be disastrous, as Mavericks are not just good for the present, but rather potential aces for a very different future.

Thus, a blind and ironclad application of the map can breed an unhealthy level of uniformity and hence invite disaster.

## B. The J-O-E (t) Approach

Given the need to take a '**Systems view**' of a role, we propose the **Job-Organisation-Environment (evolving over time) [JOE(t)]** approach to identifying competencies. The approach is not only comprehensive, but also future-oriented, since elements likely to influence the future shape of the role are factored in when mapping competencies.

Thus, by ensuring that the map represents all relevant aspects, the approach guarantees the maximum return to an organisation.

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