

Competency - Driven Civil Service: A Catalyst for Responsive Governance

Dr. Ram Mohan R.
Professor, Institute of Management in Government and

Aswin T. K.
Project Associate, Institute of Management in Government
Email: imgraaswin@gmail.com

Introduction

In the pursuit of effective governance and improved service delivery, the need for competent civil service has become increasingly evident. Traditional Human Resource Management practices rooted in meritocracy have long been the cornerstone of civil service. However, in the dynamic and complex landscape of the 21st century, there is a growing realization that merit alone may not suffice in ensuring optimal performance and efficient administration. It is imperative to explore innovative approaches that utilize competency-based civil service to meet the emerging demands of governance.

Traditional management practices that evolved in the late 19th century emphasized academic achievements. While this system addressed academic achievements, it falls short in assessing the fit of the candidate for the job and ensuring service orientation. Competency-based management aimed at ensuring better service delivery and fostering good governance practices is a human resource management tool that we cannot afford to ignore.

By prioritizing the identification and selection of candidates based on their demonstrated skills, knowledge and abilities relevant to the respective job cadre, a highly competent and performance-driven civil service could be developed.

This study aims to delve into the need for competency-based management practices in civil service for responsive governance. It explores the limitations of traditional HRM practices, highlights the changing landscape of governance and advocates a paradigm shift toward competency-based approaches. By examining successful international models and drawing upon the evolving global best practices, this study aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations. Through this transformative approach in governance, public service delivery could be improved and thereby serve as a role model for citizen-centric governance.

Context

This study addresses the need for implementing competency framework for Human Resource Management to address grievances regarding Public Service Delivery. Despite the introduction of the Right to Service Act, a significant gap exists between citizens' expectations and the actual delivery of services. The expectations from civil society have soared beyond conventional administrative tasks to encompass diverse, challenges and professional roles such as policy formulation, program management and public engagement.

The success of Competency-based management in developed Countries in the West, various European and Scandinavian countries have significantly influenced the public's consciousness as the above. The dynamic and vibrant Indian Diaspora having experienced superior service standards draw comparisons and expect similar service levels in their homeland. Subsequently, there is a demand to enhance government service delivery and efficiency to meet the expectations of the public.

The enduring colonial legacy of the existing administrative apparatus poses a major challenge to the realization of competency-based management. Despite the introduction of e-Governance and other modern practices, the potential of these cannot be leveraged to its fullest potential to satisfy the citizens' expectations. The non-availability of specified duties and responsibilities for job cadres, lack of prescribed competencies, non – availability of service standards and benchmarks limit the ability to provide effective and efficient public service delivery.

Constraints of the Current HRM Practices

Narrow focus towards academic achievements: The current Human Resource Management practice heavily emphasises academic qualifications and examination scores as the criteria for selection. This narrow focus fails to capture the full range of competencies required for effective performance in civil service roles.

Lack of emphasis on practical application: The practical application of knowledge and skills is crucial for civil servants to navigate the complexities of governance and effectively address real-world challenges. The current system does not value candidates who possess practical experience.

Limited diversity and inclusivity: By primarily valuing academic qualifications, it may disadvantage candidates from marginalized communities or those with different educational backgrounds.

Inability to assess soft skills and adaptability: Soft skills, such as communication, leadership, teamwork, adaptability etc. play a crucial role in effective public service. However, the present HRM practices do not adequately assess or prioritize these skills.

Insufficient focus on performance and results: The lack of emphasis on performance and outcomes may undermine the motivation and accountability of civil servants, as their selection is primarily based on past achievements rather than their ability to deliver tangible results.

Significance of the Study

Right Person for the Right Job: The concept of the right person for the right job is significant as it aligns with the core principles of competency-based management. By emphasizing the need to match individual competencies with job requirements, this approach ensures optimal utilization of human resources, leading to improved performance, job satisfaction and organizational success.

Enhanced Service Delivery: Competency-based management ensures that civil servants possess the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities to effectively perform their roles and develop a workforce capable of delivering high-quality services to the citizens.

Performance-driven Approach: By focusing on demonstrated abilities and practical skills, competency management promotes a shift away from solely relying on academic qualifications. This approach fosters a culture of accountability, and continuous improvement within the civil service, leading to more efficient and effective governance outcomes.

Adaptability to Changing Demands: The 21st century governance landscape is marked by rapid transformations, emerging challenges and evolving citizen expectations. Competency-based management enables the identification and selection of civil servants who possess the flexibility, problem-solving abilities and adaptability required to navigate these complex dynamics.

Evidence-based Policy Recommendations: Through a comprehensive analysis of the experiences and outcomes of competency-based management in developed European and Scandinavian countries provide evidence-based insights and recommendations.

Diversity and inclusivity: By broadening the assessment criteria beyond academic qualifications, this approach considers a wider range of candidates, including those from diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, leading to a more representative civil service.

Benefits of Competency-based Management

For the Departments: Competency-based management enhances performance by ensuring employees have the necessary skills for their roles, leading to increased productivity. It also allows departments to align their workforce capabilities with organizational goals, enabling a focus on key priorities and driving overall success. Additionally, competency-based management aids in succession planning for critical positions, ensuring a smooth transition and continuity of operations.

For the Government: Competency-based management improves service delivery by ensuring employees have the necessary skills, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness. It also promotes accountability by clearly defining expected competencies and measuring performance. It also enables governments to have a flexible and adaptable workforce capable of addressing changing circumstances and driving continuous improvement through problem-solving and innovation.

For the Public: Competency-based management improves service quality by ensuring that employees have the necessary competencies to meet public needs. This leads to tailored and personalized service delivery, addressing the diverse needs of the public and increasing satisfaction and trust in the government.

For Employees: Competency-based management promotes professional growth by providing targeted training and development opportunities for employees. It also ensures a fair and transparent evaluation process. Moreover, it increases job satisfaction and motivation by aligning employee competencies with job requirements, allowing them to work in roles that capitalize on their strengths and skills. This engagement contributes to the achievement of departmental and organizational goals.

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study was qualitative in nature. The primary reference document for the study was the Competency Framework developed by Institute of Management in Government for Select Departments of the Government of Kerala – Scheduled Tribes, Local Self Government, Police and the Social Justice Department (bifurcated into Social Justice & Women and Child Development). The study encompassed a comprehensive examination of the department's vision, mission, objectives and functions, along with an in-depth analysis of duties and responsibilities and the enabling competencies required to perform such duties. Additionally, a critical review of the existing administrative machinery and recruitment practices were conducted. The current state of the workforce, competency gaps and the practical applicability of the Competency Framework was explored.

The compilation of data from multiple sources enhanced the reliability and validity of the study's findings, providing with a comprehensive understanding and the need for a competency framework for HRM in civil service.

Competency Framework Development in Selected Departments of the Government of Kerala

The development of a competency framework piloted by the Institute of Management in Government (IMG) for four departments under the Government of Kerala marks a significant milestone in good governance. It stands as the first of its kind initiative aimed at identifying the necessary competencies for personnel at the Cutting-Edge Level within these departments. The framework encompasses six cadres in the Police Department, Eight cadres in the Scheduled Tribes Department, 18 cadres in the Local Self Government Department and 20 cadres in the Social Justice Department. It is to be noted that the Social Justice Department was bifurcated into Social Justice and Women and Child Development Department in the year 2017.

This rigorous process of competency identification sets a strong foundation for competency-based management practices within these departments. By defining the required competencies, the framework established clear expectations for recruitment, development and performance management. It provides a framework for aligning talent with the specific demands of each role, promoting professionalism and enhancing service delivery.

Import of the Study

The import of the study on developing a competency-based framework for selected departments of the Government of Kerala has significant implications for enhancing service delivery, professionalizing services and improving overall governance practices. These departments, which have extensive public interaction, play a crucial role in delivering essential services to citizens. The significant import was that by adopting competency-based management, these departments can achieve several positive outcomes which foster good governance.

Firstly, the identified competencies address the specific needs and challenges faced by personnel in these departments. The competency-based framework ensures that employees should possess the necessary skills, knowledge and behavioral attributes to effectively interact with the public, understand their needs and deliver high-quality services. This targeted approach aligns personnel capabilities with the requirements of their roles, ultimately enhancing service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Secondly, competency-based management contributes to professionalizing services within these departments. By emphasizing core competencies and professional development, the framework supports a culture of continuous learning and growth. Personnel are encouraged to enhance their skills, stay updated with emerging trends and adhere to ethical conduct. This professionalization raises the standard of services provided, strengthens the department's credibility and instils public trust.

Additionally, competency-based management fosters a results-oriented approach. By assessing personnel based on demonstrated competencies, it ensures that personnel are selected on the basis of their ability to achieve desired outcomes. This approach promotes a focus on performance, accountability and continuous improvement. Employees are empowered to make informed decisions, solve problems and drive innovation, leading to enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.

Overall, the findings of the study emphasize the transformative potential of competency-based management. Adoption of this approach has the capacity to enhance service delivery, professionalize services, promote a results-oriented culture and foster continuous improvement. By aligning personnel capabilities with the demands of their roles, the competency-based framework ensures that these departments can better meet the needs of

the public, contribute to good governance practices and ultimately improve the overall well-being of the citizens.

Recommendations

I. Establishing a Comprehensive Competency Framework for the Civil Service:

- a. Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage key stakeholders including political leadership, bureaucrats, subject matter experts and civil service professionals, in the adoption of the competency-based management.
- b. Job Analysis and Mapping:** Conduct a thorough job analysis to identify the core competencies required for each role. Map these competencies to specific job positions, ensuring relevance and accuracy.
- c. Continuous Review and Iteration:** Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of identified competencies in light of changing demands, technological advancements, and evolving governance priorities.

II. Integrating Competency-Based Practices into Recruitment Processes:

- a. Revamping the existing recruitment system:** By incorporating competency assessments and criteria into the recruitment process, departments can identify and select candidates with the right skills and abilities, ensuring a more effective and responsive workforce.
- b. Job Notifications and Descriptions:** Modify job notifications and descriptions to clearly communicate the required competencies for each position.
- c. Competency-Based Interviews:** Incorporate competency-based interviews as a key component of the selection process. Structured interviews around behavioral-based questions that assess candidates' past experiences and demonstrate their competency in specific areas may be incorporated.

III. Training and Development Programs to Support Competency-Based Approaches

- a. Assessor Training:** Provide comprehensive training on competency-based recruitment methodologies and techniques.
- b. Competency-Based Training and Mentoring:** Provide training and mentoring programs to support employees in developing and enhancing their competencies. This helps bridge such gaps and ensures a continuous focus on competency development throughout employees' careers.

c. Continuous Learning Opportunities: Establish a culture of continuous learning by providing access to training programs, workshops and online resources that focus on developing specific competencies identified as critical for the civil service.

Challenges

Resistance to Change: Introducing a competency-based management system may face resistance from various stakeholders, including civil servants, administrators and policymakers. Some individuals may be accustomed to traditional systems and may be hesitant to embrace a new approach.

Revamping Existing Staff Patterns: Implementing competency-based management poses challenges in reworking the existing staff patterns within departments and developing an appropriate bureaucratic architecture to meet the demands of the present era. As part of this transformation, irrelevant posts may need to be eliminated to optimize efficiency and ensure that the civil service remains responsive and agile in the ever-changing landscape.

Developing Competency Frameworks for each Department: Developing comprehensive competency frameworks that align with the unique requirements of civil service roles is essential. This involves identifying the specific competencies necessary for different positions and considering their diverse functions and responsibilities.

Aligning Competencies with Departmental Needs: Conducting a thorough analysis of the duties, responsibilities and strategic objectives of each department can help identify the core competencies required for successful performance. Flexibility should be built into the competency-based system to allow customization based on departmental variations.

Ensuring Fairness and Transparency: Competency-based management must be fair, transparent and free from bias and ensure that all officers have equal opportunities.

Training and Development Programs: Implementing competency-based management requires adequate training and development programs to ensure that assessors and recruiters are well-equipped to evaluate candidates based on competencies. Building capacity within the civil service for effectively assessing competencies, conducting competency-based interviews and interpreting assessment results is essential. This may involve providing training to assessors, creating guidelines and resources and establishing a robust feedback mechanism to continuously improve the assessment process.

Integration with Existing Recruitment Processes: Integrating competency-based management with existing recruitment processes can be a complex task. This includes reviving the present system and process for recruitment to ensure that they align with the competencies identified for each role.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement: Competency-based management should be subject to regular evaluation and continuous improvement. Monitoring the effectiveness of the system, collecting feedback from stakeholders, and conducting periodic reviews are essential to identify areas for improvement and make necessary improvements. This evaluation process should be supported by data collection and analysis to ensure evidence-based decision-making for further enhancements.

Conclusion

In short, Competency-based framework for HRM supports a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability. This framework acknowledges the importance of staying abreast of evolving technologies, changing societal dynamics and emerging needs. By identifying competencies such as technological proficiency, cultural sensitivity, adaptability, etc. the framework enables personnel to respond proactively to challenges and effectively serve a diverse and dynamic population.

The necessity for a competency framework in HRM was endorsed by the Fourth Administrative Reforms Commission of Kerala. The Commission's findings emphasized the interconnection between performance appraisal and training needs analysis based on the competency framework, leading to their recommendation of establishing competency frameworks for each department in the state. This strategic initiative would provide valuable insights for professional development and succession planning while facilitating the identification of competency gaps.

By adopting competency framework for HRM, civil service can be revitalized and building an accountable workforce that is skilled, adaptable and dedicated to serving the citizens, with integrity and excellence. The potential for unleashing responsible governance starts with competency-based management and this is one innovation that the society can ill afford to miss.

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