From Rules-Based to Roles-Based Governance: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Mission Karmayogi in Building Future-Ready Competencies among Civil Servants

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Mission Karmayogi, the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building, in its original conception, was meant to replace the old colonial, rule-based approach to personnel administration with a role-based, activity-based, competence-based approach. It is based on the indigenous Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies, a national digital learning platform, iGOT Karmayogi, a special purpose vehicle for platform and a specialist Capacity Building Commission, launched on 2 September 2020. The programme has achieved a scale of the kind not seen among comparable civil service learning programmes – about 1.7 crore users, over five and a half thousand competency-based courses, and over seven crore course enrollments, six years after it started. Scale, however, does not equate to capability and the scholarly record is limited, descriptive and philosophically rather than evaluative. While there have been published explorations of its normative underpinnings and its approach to the rules-to-roles transition it is yet to be systematically evaluated whether the transition it promises is evident in the deployment, the appraisal and the learning outcomes of Indian civil servants.

This paper aims to fill in this void. It builds up the programme's unspoken theory of change, assesses, based on available public evidence, whether behavioural, functional or domain competencies are being developed and applied, and identifies institutional barriers to transition. The design is qualitative-dominant through exploratory multilateral evaluation brief and structured synthesis and documentary analysis of parliamentary replies and official press communication and the Department related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice 160th report, in addition to exploratory multilateral evaluation brief, and structured synthesis of 2022 – 2026 scholarship on

competency-based public human resource management. The results indicate that while there is evidence of real progress in participation, the provision of multilingual content and the spread of competency vocabulary, there are also four clear remaining challenges: the definition of activity indicators is not uniform across official sources; achievement of completion and on-the-job performance is poor; there is incomplete linking between role mapping and personnel decisions; and institutional absorption is uneven, with capital expenditure utilisation around 15 per cent and weak coverage in both populous and north-eastern states. The paper concludes that Mission Karmayogi has till now developed a learning system and not an actual competency based HR system and outlines the changes in measurement, institutions and accountability that are required to bridge this gap.

Keywords: Mission Karmayogi; competency-based human resource management; civil service capacity building; roles-based governance; iGOT Karmayogi; administrative reform in India

1. Introduction

The rule has primacy over the role is one of the most enduring features of the Indian public administration. The combination of recruitment by a common competitive examination, generalist career progression, and seniority-weighted promotion and decision making based on a file system yielded a cadre that was based on rank in a rule-governed hierarchy rather than on proven competence in a specific job. Comparative theorising about South Asian bureaucratic regimes views this legacy as an officer regime characterised by high levels of officer privileges and limited policy impacts, enabled by colonial traditions and office-holding arrangements that shield officers from policy outcomes (Mumtaz & Nakray, 2025). There have been longstanding debates about the need for generalist mobility and specialised knowledge in the present day's policy field in the Indian Administrative Service (Veeresha, 2022), and about high-performing officers that has pointed out that where officers have shown high performance, it is largely dependent on self-directed learning and reputation (Pati & Kakani, 2022).

The difference between rules-based and roles-based administration is more than just a slogan - it’s more of an analytical distinction. A rules-based personnel system assigns persons to posts, and then rules govern those persons; a roles-based system first defines what a post requires in terms of roles, and then the development, selection and deployment of persons is related to that. This shift is referred to as the competency turn in public human resource

management internationally, where knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours are used as an organising currency of personnel decision-making in place of qualification and tenure (Belényesi & Dobos, 2022). The turn involves a critique of rule density, but an astute one: modern scholarship has distinguished between those rules that do not promote any purpose and simply consume the organisational resources, and those that could be burdensome but institutionally necessary (Campbell et al., 2022); and it is demonstrated that when officials experience a rule as legitimate, this depends on how it is appraised in relation to their role identities (Davis & Pandey, 2023). Therefore, about the reduction rules, it is not the same as the role building.

In 2020, the Government of India approved Mission Karmayogi, which is the institutional solution to this challenge and is now called the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building. It aims to shift the focus of personnel management from rules to roles, by mapping each civil service role to a Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies, and by providing competency-based learning products via a national digital platform. The architecture is unprecedented in the training reform and involves a Prime Minister's Human Resources Council for strategic leadership, a Capacity Building Commission to coordinate standards in training institutions, a special purpose vehicle to run the platform, and Annual Capacity Building Plans to disaggregate capacities into ministry-based plans. The programme has a clear normative dimension and is named after the idea of skilled and disinterested action in the Bhagavad Gita, and defines the civil servant as a professional with ethical motivation, instead of a functionary who merely follows instructions (Tiwary, 2024). It is seen as an important experience in institutionalising capacity development in a very large and fragmented public employment system by a multilateral review (Asian Development Bank, 2025).

It is an evidential stance, however, that is weak in important ways. Nearly all the published literature on the programme is conceptual and descriptive. The early prospective treatment evaluation predicted benefits but did not see them (Panda, 2021); the most thoughtful treatment based on its competency architecture was in the health policy arena, not public administration (Tiwary, 2024); and most rigorous applications of the competency architecture are also in the health policy field (Dixon et al., 2024; Bariya et al., 2026). There is no assessment to be found which thinks about the causal statement of the programme on whether competency development on this scale is leading to the roles-based personnel practice. But the

general literature cautions to never presume so, as there is limited and conditional evidence that training is a pathway to governance reform (Birch, 2024) and elsewhere competency-based management does not work at implementation (de Araújo et al., 2022).

There are three questions that are asked in this paper. What is Mission Karmayogi's theory of change and how is it defensible in the light of the existing literature? What is the published evidence regarding onboarding and competency mapping and building of behavioural, functional and domain competencies? What institutional or measurement conditions hinder the change from a learning system to a roles-based human resource system? The aim of the objectives is as follows: To reconstruct and appraise the logic of the programme, to evaluate the programme critically not celebratorily, and to draw implications for capacity building in large developing-country bureaucracies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Competency-based human resource management in the public sector

If it is possible to explicitly state the observable attributes that differentiate successful performance in a role, then these attributes can be measured, can be developed and can be used as the basis for selection, deployment, appraisal and reward – the simple proposition of competency based human resource management has demanding preconditions. In the public service sectors, the idea has been both alluring and challenging. It has been argued that the low adoption of competency-based approaches in civil services in Europe is not due to any conceptual uncertainty but to the question of credible measurement, on one hand, and to the lack of interpretation divergence between the training institutions and the employing departments, on the other hand, according to Belényesi and Dobos (2022). De Araújo et al. (2022) investigated six federal organisations with competency management programmes as part of a national personnel development strategy, and determined that structural factors related to the organisations and departments were more significant than strategic or political factors, and that the most important enabler was the human resource unit's capacity to lead the structural change rather than the complexity of the program. In Indonesia local government, a similar result can be seen, in which Wardiyanto et al. (2024) have identified this gap between training and practice as due to decontextualised pedagogy, disjointed technology integration, and cultural stagnancy. The diagnosis is that the problem is not of convergence (articulation) but of coupling with personnel decisions.

2.2 Rules-based and roles-based administration

The contrast between rule-bound and role-oriented administration has a long history but, in more recent writing, this is complicated. However, three decades into managerial reform, performance and strategic management have not infiltrate rule of law administrations deeply, as less than one-fifth of German municipalities have adopted the main elements of performance and strategic management, and practice is highly variable (Weiss, 2025). Studies regarding rule density are also challenging the notion that rules are necessarily constraints on capability: Campbell et al. (2022) find that the traditions of ‘red tape' and ‘administrative burden’ evoke different kinds of actors and mechanisms, and Davis and Pandey (2023) suggest that the same rule can be legitimate for one official, while another views it as waste. The settlement does not come from a roll-up of a set of role definitions onto an unchanging rule structure; it requires both rule structure and roles to be settled and the discretionary space in which competencies are exercised must be the focus of settlement.

2.3 Global and Indian experience in capacity building

Public sector training does not always lead to building governance capacity, and evidence to support this is more ambiguous than the policy documents suggest. The findings in Birch (2024) indicate that training is consistently found to have an effect on knowledge, sometimes on behaviour and only when combined with a change in incentives, supervision and organisational routine on institutional performance. There is related comparative research on personnel systems that also shows a positive link between meritocratic appointment, impartiality and professionalism, and improved government performance and reduced corruption (Oliveira et al., 2023). Thus, capability is not only a skill of the individual, but also of institutional arrangement. The same applies to the cross-national analysis, which puts bureaucratic quality in the connection between policy formulation and implementation, and demonstrates that the burden-capacity gap is systematically related to this connection (Fernández-i-Marín et al., 2023). The facts in India are consistent: senior officers' performance is much more dependent on inter-departmental coordination, financial sufficiency and the reliability of subordinates than on their own resources (Pati & Kakani, 2022), and the research on state capacity focuses on the organisational culture and professional identity of the official, with the argument that reform ideas often fail because they are not taken into the daily life of the frontline official (Aiyar, 2024).

2.4 Mission Karmayogi in the literature, 2022–2026

In this context, the Mission Karmayogi literature is very limited. The main peer-reviewed account is that of Tiwary (2024), who interprets the programme as a shift from rule-governed governance to one that is more flexible and role-based and is driven by an ethic of excellence in action; it does not evaluate outcomes. The prospective evaluation is provided by Panda (2021) before the data of implementation. Indirect is the most severe of the engagements. Dixon et al. (2024) developed a competency framework of health technology assessment in India under its four levels of proficiency and three categories: behavioural, functional and domain-specific, and reported on its portability, along with some of the limitations it faced in terms of sectoral specificity. Bariya et al. (2026) took it one step further, creating and testing a digital health competency framework for frontline health workers in Uttar Pradesh, based on the same role-to-competency mapping. These studies are significant as they are the only published cases where the architecture has been operationalised and tested. The digital learning literature provides the other half: Koddebusch et al. (2024) identify design principles for public sector online platforms, including protected learning space, domain focus and senior sponsorship whereas Matei and Dinca (2022) note that such trainings can only be sustained if they are part of institutional routine. The development of artificial intelligence further increases the urgency, as essential skills have now expanded to data governance and algorithmic accountability (Belényesi, 2025) and automated decision support poses issues of transparency that training based on rules can't resolve (Cetina Presuel & Martínez Sierra, 2024).

3. Conceptual Framework

Here, the framework used consists of four causal links in Mission Karmayogi and conditions are mentioned on which each link depends. Firstly, the policy intent is translated into a role architecture; roles are calibrated against a Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies; which provides a behavioural, functional and domain-specific specification for each role. Secondly, the second transforms that specification into learning supply with competency-based products uploaded onto the national platform and via the Annual Capacity Building Plans that prioritise the department. The third makes learning supply into competency acquisition, which is not dependent on availability, but on engagement, relevance, supervisory endorsement and protected learning time. The fourth and most importantly, what separates a competency-based human resource system from a training programme, is the translation of acquired competency

into a roles-based personnel practice (posting, appraising, promoting and succession planning based on demonstrated competency).

There are three conditions that moderate the chain. Departments and state administrations can host the process at all or not, depending on their institutional absorption capacity, and there are reasons to believe that competency reforms most often fail here (de Araújo et al., 2022). Measurement regime can make it difficult to see whether the system is active or attainment; if only enrolment and completion are measured, the weakest link is measured. The extent to which someone has reason to view competency as important is a matter of incentive alignment and it is clear from the literature when using performance management in public environments, there are competing goals and rule density (Hill & Plimmer, 2024). The framework is completed with a feedback loop to narrow the gap between specification and practice: evidence of competency use should be used to make changes to the role architecture. Table 1 shows an overview of the framework and indicators used to evaluate each link.

Table 1. Analytical framework for evaluating the rules-to-roles transition

Link	Mechanism	Observable indicator	Enabling condition
1. Role architecture	Calibration of posts to roles, activities and competencies	Coverage of role mapping; Annual Capacity Building Plans prepared	Departmental HR capability; Commission reach
2. Learning supply	Competency-based products and curated pathways	Course volume; language coverage; role-linked curation	Content governance; institutional partnerships
3. Competency acquisition	Engagement with and completion of relevant learning	Enrolment, completion and proficiency assessment	Protected time; supervisory endorsement; digital access
4. Roles-based practice	Use of competency evidence in personnel decisions	Posting, appraisal and promotion linked to competency	Incentive alignment; procedural change

Source: Author, synthesised from Belényesi and Dobos (2022), de Araújo et al. (2022) and Birch (2024).

4. Methodology

This study is a documentary study with a theory-dominant approach. This is not a choice of method of interpretation, but the state of the evidence. At present, independent researchers cannot access individual learning records and there is no public micro-dataset that correlates these with posting or appraisal outcomes; a quantitative assessment of the core claim of the programme is not yet possible. The only thing that can be done rigorously is to gather the entire body of publicly reported programme data and read it against a stated analytical context, and assess the inferences it will and will not sustain.

There are three bodies of material. The first sets are official and parliamentary documents, such as the press information on the pillars of the programme, the structure of the institutions and the statistical data on the platform (Press Information Bureau, 2024, 2026a, 2026b), along with the figures presented before the Lok Sabha in August 2026 regarding enrolment and completion of the programme, and registration (Asian News International, 2026). The second is a multilateral institution's evaluative account from an implementation perspective (Asian Development Bank, 2025). The third type of literature is peer-reviewed articles from 2022 to 2026 on public sector digital learning, public human resource management, and administrative capacity which were obtained from systematic searches from Scopus-indexed and Crossref-registered sources and showed relevance to the four links of the framework.

The analysis was carried out in three phases. Programme data were first presented as a time series from the National Learning Week in October 2024 to the parliamentary disclosures in 2026 to differentiate growth from restatement and highlight the variations in categories reported. The documentary content was then deductively coded to the four links and three moderating conditions, and each empirical claim coded to the strongest link that it could support. Lastly, a disconfirmation check was performed: each positive inference was rechecked against the corpus for any contradictory evidence, and each mentioned metric was followed up in the operationalization traces. It needs to be said outright that there are two drawbacks. There is no individual level outcome data for this link, and official statistics are self-reported and cannot be independently audited. The constraints are, however, reduced by triangulation between official, legislative, multilateral and scholarly sources.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Participation and onboarding

Mission Karmayogi has done an amazing work on the measures taken by it. There were approximately 1.6 crore completions of formal courses on the iGOT Karmayogi, which provided more than 1,400 courses and some 45 lakh employees were registered during the National Learning Week in October 2024 (Press Information Bureau, 2024). By early 2026 it had registered 1.48 crore users, more than 4,200 courses, of which 829 courses were in Hindi and 546 in other Indian languages in 23 languages and 28 states/UTs with Karmayogi Bharat and the Capacity Building Commission (Press Information Bureau, 2026a). The statistics

released before Parliament in August 2026 show there are approximately 1.7 crore users, over 5,600 courses of which 218 are related to artificial intelligence and new technologies, 7.3 crore enrolments, 3.35 crore courses completed and 30 states and union territories are covered (Asian News International, 2026). The path is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Reported iGOT Karmayogi indicators at three observation points

Indicator	October 2024	Early 2026	August 2026
Registered users	About 45 lakh	About 1.48 crore	About 1.70 crore
Courses available	Over 1,400	Over 4,200	Over 5,600
Course completions	About 1.6 crore	Reported as over 7 crore	About 3.35 crore
Course enrolments	Not reported	Not reported	About 7.3 crore
States/UTs with memoranda	Not reported	28	30

Sources: Press Information Bureau (2024, 2026a); Asian News International (2026). Categories reproduced as reported.

Three features merit stress prior to this record is qualified. This level of onboarding across all union ministries and almost every state administration, has no clear parallel in a similar jurisdiction. The investment is not tokenistic, but seeks to make language accessible. Additionally, the fast growth of content about new technologies suggests that the pipeline is aligned with the changing demand for competencies, which is exactly what the literature about future-readiness says is needed (Belényesi, 2025).

5.2 What the metrics can and cannot establish

What's challenging is that almost all of them are activity measures and are not consistently defined in official sources. The figure of more than seven crore course completions reported in early 2026 is again mentioned in the parliamentary reply in August with more than 14 crore completion certificates, which is 4 times the figure of course completions mentioned in the reply (Press Information Bureau, 2026a; Asian News International, 2026). Whatever the cause, the headline figures are not based on consistent operational definitions and the implied completion rate ranges between about 46 per cent and almost one depending on the combination used. This is not a material, but a presentational weakness of a programme that has, as its sixth pillar, monitoring and evaluation. The broader literature calls for caution: completion is a poor indicator of ability in large-scale online learning, and protected learning space, domain focus and senior sponsorship are designed in in the public sector, supporting engagement.

5.3 Behavioural, functional and domain competencies

The two studies that have tested the programme provide the best evidence on its effectiveness; the most exportable contribution is the tripartite competency taxonomy. Dixon et al. (2024) developed a HTA framework within its categories and four levels of proficiency and determined that the framework is workable but can be limiting for sectoral specificity. Similarly, Bariya et al. (2026) mapped the same mapping exercise with the frontline health workers in Uttar Pradesh, where there was a statistically significant improvement in knowledge scores for auxiliary nurse midwives after conducting the sessions by the instructors, but the baseline scores for community health activists were found to be very low (below 40 per cent). Two conclusions follow. When completed, the architecture is clearly effective, with mapped roles, aligned content, delivered instruction and measured assessment, which add up to gains. However, such completion is uncommon, as the factors which led to those outcomes, namely face to face instruction, a validated assessment instrument and institutional embedding are not consequences of platform access. This is consistent with the findings that training is very effective at enhancing knowledge and less effective at enhancing institutional performance unless there are complementary factors in place (Birch, 2024) and suggests that the less measurable element of the current system is behavioural competencies which will not be assessed by an online module.

5.4 How far has the roles-based shift travelled?

The fourth link is the least supported and the thinnest. The programme sees a form of role-based curation in the design of learning pathways – some are widely recommended courses; other learning pathways are centrally curated role-based learning; and other learning pathways are from the Ministry, based on annual capacity building plans; and other learning pathways are self-selected study (Press Information Bureau, 2024); and the current phase holds the promise of deeper integration of role-based frameworks with AI tools to generate a learning pathway from the official documents (Press Information Bureau, 2026b). Although it is a true step forward in the organisation of learning, it is not yet proof that competency is now consequential for personnel decisions. There is no evidence published that posting, empanelment, promotion or appraisal now depends on competency evidence from the programme and the electronic human resource management pillar that would enable this linkage is not fully realised. As predicted in the literature, the implementation of competency systems ends up at the coupling stage because this is where they clash with existing rules and

interests (de Araújo et al., 2022) and the implementation of public sector performance management is already affected by conflicting objectives and rule overload (Hill & Plimmer, 2024). What has been created is a very big learning system on top of a personnel system that's still pretty rule-based.

5.5 Institutional and fiscal constraints

This is focused by independent legislative scrutiny. According to the 160th report of the Department related Parliamentary Standing Committee, the scheme has been allocated approximately 42 per cent of the ministry's scheme allocation, but it has used only 69.96 per cent of the scheme's revenue provision and 15.09 per cent of the scheme's capital provision, and the capital allocation for 2026–27 has been cut down to a nominal level from ₹125.35 crore (PSC, 2026). The committee also noted that it is not yet expanded to several states, including Uttar Pradesh and other parts of the north-east; that the faculty of the main national training institute has not been filled and its staff is not in-depth in digital governance, artificial intelligence and climate policy; and that vacancies in one all-India cadre are near a quarter of the sanctioned strength. It recommended that there be more monitoring to make sure that the expenditure results in governance outcomes. The observations correspond to the moderating conditions of the framework: institutional absorption is not even; the institutions supposed to underpin the competency system are also under-resourced; and low capex indicates that the competency system's systems infrastructure is not being constructed at the pace of its digital front end.

5.6 Critical evaluation

There is evidence to support a differentiated judgement. Mission Karmayogi has developed a national learning infrastructure, codified and popularised a language of competency in an incredibly decentralised employment landscape, and developed a transferable role-mapping methodology that has been adopted and endorsed by experts. Based on experience with other designs, these are the most difficult aspects of the design problem to execute. It has yet to prove that it creates competencies that are verifiably developed, that the competencies change administrative behaviours, or that they guide decisions such that the roles-based claim would be true. The learning layer is built first and fastest, with the institutional, measurement and incentive layers still to come – hence the gap. The neo-Weberian notion that managerial instruments percolate into rule-of-law administration slowly (Weiss, 2025) and the Indian

experience that reform ideas take root when incorporated in organisational culture (Aiyar, 2024) both suggest that one should not read the statistics and figures found on platforms as capability.

6. Implications

Theoretically the case contributes to the competency-implementation literature in three ways. In the case of a large developing-country bureaucracy, it's not framework articulation at the national level or learning supply through digital public infrastructure, but it is the coupling of competency evidence to persons' authority. This reinforces the conclusion that organisational and departmental aspects are more relevant than strategic and political aspects in the implementation of competency (de Araújo et al., 2022), and also includes a scale dimension: in the case of a centrally determined role architecture and localised authority over personnel in ministries, states and cadre controlling authorities, coupling is a challenge of federal coordination rather than human resource design. Additionally, the case illustrates how competency frameworks can have lateral value, even where the vertical use chain is not complete: the Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies has proven to have value in its sectoral workforce as a design standard without first being used for personnel (Dixon et al., 2024; Bariya et al., 2026). Finally, measurement regimes are not only descriptive, but also constitutive, that is, a system of measurement of enrolments will produce enrolments.

Four priorities for policy follow. Measurement should focus on proficiency, rather than participation; standardised measurement definitions should be published across formal sources; criterion-referenced measurement should be used for functional and domain competencies, and simulation or supervisor rating should be used for behavioural competencies which are not measurable when completed online. Coupling should be explicit and incremental, starting with a limited number of consequential choices, such as specialised postings and empanelment for technical roles, where competency evidence is given a clear and defined weight and gradually as assessment credibility is built. Instead of complementing, the institutional capacity must be built before it is relied upon – extending the Commission to the remaining large and north-eastern states, and filling faculty vacancies at national and state training institutions are prerequisites – and the current practice of capital under-utilisation is counterproductive (PSC, 2026). Evaluation results should also be released, via anonymised micro-data which can be made available to independent researchers, under appropriate safeguards, to allow effects on

behaviour and performance to be estimated rather than asserted. Blended delivery should be the norm for behavioural and leadership competency trainings as there is only evidence of measured gain in instructor-led delivery with assessment in India (Bariya et al., 2026).

7. Conclusion and Way Forward

Mission Karmayogi is not necessarily a training scheme that has gone out of hand but more of a currency shift from a position in a rule structure to capability in a role in the Indian administration. Considering that aim, the programme's first six years have provided the tools and the language for the transition, but not the transition itself. The reality is that there is a platform implemented by approximately 1.7 lakh officials, and content in 23 languages, and a competency taxonomy strong enough for specialists to build on, and an institutional structure throughout the union and in nearly all the states. The shortfall is also true: activity is still measured, and definitions are not consistent; no published evidence of learning changing administrative behaviour; and decision making about personnel is still based on seniority and procedure.

It's not about expansion; it's about completion. Role calibration, learning, assessment, and personnel decision-making must be a closed loop in the programme's theory of change; at the moment, the assessment and decision-making stages are not necessarily closed, evidenced by incentives for officials. Closing it demands reform of the measurement system; it demands a defensible connection between competency evidence and a set of personnel decisions; it demands investment in the institutions that must be the system; and it demands an evaluation system that allows independent evaluation of effects. This does not detract from the programme's overall philosophy that the right ambition of public service is the skilled and the ethical act (Tiwary, 2024). Only that this be made auditable it insists. It remains to be seen whether Mission Karmayogi is a transition from rules to roles, or an unusually elaborate iteration of a rules-based regime, as governments determine which things to measure, and which things to let the measurement determine.

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