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# The effects of employees' perceptions of competency models on employability outcomes and organizational citizenship behavior and the moderating role of social exchange in this effect

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## Abstract

Competencies of human resource, which are considered as factors creating innovation and value to organizations, are becoming extremely important for organizations. An understanding of competency-based development will improve employees' performance and therefore will help to improve the performance of the organization. Our research was conducted in Istanbul by using convenient sampling method on 175 participants working in banking, telecommunications, health care, aeronautical and food industries. According to the results of the research, employees' perceptions regarding the relevance and fairness of competency models have a positive effect on employability outcomes and organizational citizenship behavior. It has been concluded that social exchange has a moderating role on this positive effect.

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**Keywords:** *Competency models, social exchange, employability orientation and employability activities, organizational citizenship behavior.*

## 1. Introduction

World-wide socio-economic developments such as globalization, changes in workforce demographics, the increasing war on talent, and emphasis on financial performance challenges the human resource function in its role for creating added value to the organization. Therefore the development of human

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resource competency models has become an area that has gained a great deal of interest over the years. Today, the function of human resource management is more strategic as the HR plans and strategies are developed on a long term basis, considering likely changes in the society, industrial relations systems, economic conditions, legislation, global, and technological issues as well as new directions in business operations (Abdullah et.al,2011) An integrated concept of emotional, social, and cognitive intelligence competencies offers more than a convenient framework for describing human dispositions. It offers a theoretical structure for the organization of personality and linking it to a theory of action and job performance (Boyatzis, 2008). Competency Modeling has the potential to fill an important void in traditional HRM functions through the infusion of strategic orientation in day-to-day employee behavior (Sanchez and Levine, 2009). Competency Modeling can take strategic objectives into consideration and identifies competencies critical to the strategic goals. Because the competency modeling process includes a substantial effort in understanding an organization's business context and competitive strategy, it establishes a direct line-of-sight between individual competency requirements and the broader goals of the organization (Schippmann et al., 2000). For organizations that operate in changing business environments, a critical need is to implement new business strategies quickly and effectively. Therefore competencies can be used as a powerful communication tool to translate the vision into behavior terms that people can understand and implement (Sanchez and Levine, 2009). Consequently, organizations can use competency modeling to catalyze organizational change (Vakola et al., 2007). Additionally competency models should generate positive employee outcomes by increasing the transparency of goals and performance measures, and improving the consistency of HR practices (Becker & Huselid, 1999; Campion et al., 2011). The concept of employability has been developed within the context of competency-based organizations by indicating "the continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the optimal use of competences (Redmond, 2013).

Organizational citizenship behavior and exchange relationship have very important roles in the process of accomplishment and continuous development of organizational performance. Organizational citizenship behavior is a concept which organizations require to survive in today's challenging and competitive environment. If employees work in their own organization as good organizational citizens, they can contribute to the organization's overall performance in competition, and change it into an ambience full of trust and motivation (Ghodratollah et al., 2011). The relationship between employees and their organizations has often been described as an exchange relationship. It has been suggested in the literature that employees are more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behavior when they perceive their relationship with the organization as a fair social exchange than when they perceive it as a fair economic exchange (Cardona et.al, 2004).

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses**

### *2.1 Competency Model*

As the primary role of competency models is to align employee behavior to firm strategy, it is suggested that their effectiveness should be evaluated through the lens of organizational culture or climate theories, both of which suggest that a strategy's success depends on how employees throughout an organization understand and act on that strategy, because the purpose of a competency model is to influence strategically aligned behavior by outlining the behavioral themes that are expected and rewarded across all jobs in the organization (Sanchez & Levine, 2009). How the competence models are perceived by the employees in the organization plays an important role on employee outcomes. Employee perceptions of competency models is defined by Redmond, as the degree to which employees perceive the organization's competency model to be both strategically and personally relevant and that they are fairly

rewarded for displaying the behavior outlined in the competency model. Generally employees' perception on competency modeling is based on relevance and fairness. "Relevance" indicates whether employees perceive competency models as important to reaching both organizational and individual goals. "Fairness" refers to employee perceptions of whether competency models are impartial (Redmond, 2013). Fairness is often assessed along the dimension of distributive justice, referring to the perceived fairness of rewards (Bowen et.al 1988).

### *2.2 Social Exchange*

Employee perceptions of their relationships within the organization can be understood from the social exchange theory perspective. Employees tend to take a long term approach to social exchange relationship at work with the pattern of reciprocity overtime determining the perceived balance in exchanges (Wayne et.al. 1997). This theory emphasizes that a reciprocal obligation that exists between two parties in a relationship. Thus, if one party is providing a service or something of value to the other party, he or she would expect the other party to reciprocate the exchange in the future. The other party, by virtue of receiving something of value, would feel obligated to return the favor (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory assesses the nature of relationships by providing rules for evaluating the fair dispersal of economic and social value, the social exchange framework is important for understanding relationship development, relationship satisfaction and relationship stability within an organization (White & Yanamandrama, 2012). According to Blau (1964), exchange relationships can be broadly categorized as either economic or social. In economic exchange the terms of exchange are clearly specified, usually through a formal contract. In social exchange, while there is an expectation of some return in the future for any favor rendered, the exact nature and timing of the return is not stipulated in advance. The nature and timing of the return is left to the discretion of the one who makes it. Moreover, in social exchange, in contrast to economic exchange, there is no formal mechanism for ensuring an appropriate return. In the absence of any formal mechanism, parties must trust each other to discharge their mutual obligations. Relationships that develop at work have elements of both economic and social exchange. Employees are more likely to engage in OCB when these relationships become more of a social exchange.

### *2.3 Employability Outcomes*

The concept of employability outcomes indicates "the continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the optimal use of competences" in competency-based organizations (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). It is consisted of employability orientation and employability activities. "*Employability orientation*" is defined as "employees' openness to develop and to adapt to changing work requirements (Nauta, et.al, 2009). Conceptually it is similar to "functional flexibility," which is defined as the willingness and ability of an employee to be employable for various tasks or jobs in the organization (Van den Berg & Van der Velde, 2005). Employability orientation is defined as an antecedent to employability activities. "*Employability activities*" include the proactive development of new competencies. These activities are also identified with pursuit of new career trajectories within the organization (Van Dam, 2004). Employability activities are similar to "self-development" which is a dimension of organizational citizenship behavior (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Self development in employability activities indicates the employees' voluntary efforts to enroll in activities that improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities, so that they are able to perform better in their current position, or in preparation for higher-responsibility positions within the organization (Redmond 2013).

## 2.4 Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

The concept of organizational citizenship behavior is proposed to denote those organizationally beneficial behaviors and gestures that are neither enforced on the basis of formal role obligations nor elicited by contractual compensation (Cardona et.al, 2004). As long as the employees perceive their relationship with the organization as a fair social exchange, they tend to be more engaged in OCB. In this regard fair economic exchange has less importance (Organ, 1990). OCB provides a means of managing the interdependencies among members of an organization, which increases the collective outcomes achieved. OCBs are thought to have an important impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of work teams and organizations, therefore contributing to the overall productivity of the organization (Sharma et.al. 2011).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Goal

Our research goal is to investigate the mediating effect of social exchange on the relationship between competency model and employability outcomes and organizational citizenship behavior. To test the propositions, a field survey using questionnaires was carried out.

### 3.2 Sample

This study was conducted in Istanbul by using convenient sampling method on participants working in banking, telecommunications, health care, aeronautical and food industries implementing competency model. A total of 300 questionnaires were provided for distribution, of which 190 (63.3 %) were returned. After deleting the semi-filled ones 175 (58.3 %) questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS statistical program and tested through hierarchical regression analyses.

### 3.3 Measure

*Competency model* was measured by the scale developed by Bowen and Ostroff (2006). Participants were asked to rate each of the six items using a 5-point Likert scale so that they can select a numerical score ranging from 1 to 5 for each statement to indicate the degree of agreement or otherwise, where 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 denote “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neither Agree nor Disagree (Neutral)”, “Agree”, and “Strongly Agree”, respectively.

Social exchange was measured eight item scale, as adopted from English scale used by Shore et al. (2006). Participants are asked to rate each of the items using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). The validity of the in Turkish translated scale has been substantiated by Göktepe (2012).

*Employability outcomes* were adopted from Van Dam (2004), which uses 10 items to measure two dimensions (employability orientation and activities). Employability orientation and activities were measured with five-items scale. Participants are asked to rate each of the items using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).

*Organizational citizenship behavior* was used for the eight-item short version of the Survey of Organizational Citizenship Behavior, which was adopted by Reymond (2013). While seven items of this

short form were adopted by Van Dyne and Lepine (1998), one item was taken from Smith, Organ, and Near (1983). Participants are asked to rate each of the items using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly

### 3.3 Research Model

In the current study, we investigated the role of competency model to advance our understanding of how competency model influence employability outcomes and the moderating effect of social exchange support on competency model – employability outcomes and organizational citizenship behavior relationship. The hypothesized model is shown in Figure 1.

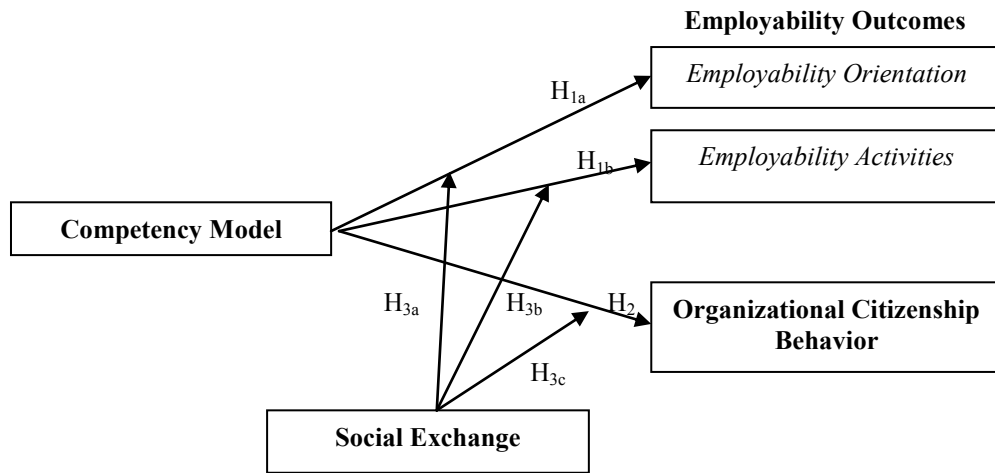


Figure 1: Research Model

H<sub>1</sub>: Perceptions of competency model relevance and fairness will be positively related to employability outcomes.

H<sub>1a</sub>: Perceptions of competency model relevance and fairness will be positively related to employability orientation.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Perceptions of competency model relevance and fairness will be positively related to employability activities.

H<sub>2</sub>: Perceptions of competency model relevance and fairness will be positively related to organizational citizenship behavior.

H<sub>3</sub>: Perceptions of social exchange relationships will mediate the relationships between perceptions of competency model relevance and fairness and (a) employability orientation (b) employability activities (c) organizational citizenship behavior.

### 3.4. Findings

The demographic characteristics of participants were subjected to frequency analysis. Of the 175 participants, 95 (54 %) were female. The mean age of participants was 30.7 (SD= 7.27). Education varied at six levels, ranging from elementary level education (1) to doctoral level education (6) (M= 3.91, SD= 1.05). Sector information of participants: 41 (23.4%) banking, 39 (22.3%) telecommunications, 47 (26.9%) were health care, 33 (18.9%) aeronautical and 15 (8.6%) food sector. The average of job tenure was 4.95 (SD = 5.72).

To control for common method bias in line with the original -factor test was conducted, although the explanatory power of it is controversial and no single factor emerged in exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

(Padsakoff et al, 2003). In line with Knight (1997), in international studies it is important “to evaluate the dimensionality of the scale” and to control for factor structure and loadings. Two separate EFAs using VARIMAX rotation were conducted for the dependent variables (employability outcomes and organizational citizenship behavior), the independent variables (competency model and social exchange) following generally accepted procedures. Two items of employability orientation (first and second question), two items of employability activities (first and second question) and two items of organizational citizenship behavior were removed due to low communalities (<0.50). For exploratory research, a Chronbach  $\alpha$  greater than 0.70 is generally considerate reliable (Nunnally, 1978). The results of Cronbach’s alpha, % of variance explained and factors analysis of our study are depicted in Table 2 below:

**Table 1: Factor Analysis**

	<b>Factor Score</b>	<b>% of Variance</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b><math>\alpha</math></b>
<b><i>Social Exchange</i></b>		<b>30,888</b>	<b>8,031</b>	<b>0.905</b>
SE3	0.861			
SE1	0.852			
SE4	0.799			
SE6	0.752			
SE5	0.741			
SE7	0.688			
SE8	0.656			
SE2	0.614			
<b><i>Competency Model</i></b>		<b>12,203</b>	<b>3,173</b>	<b>0.901</b>
CM2	0.824			
CM4	0.797			
CM1	0.794			
CM3	0.775			
CM5	0.737			
CM6	0.711			
<b><i>Employability Orientation</i></b>		<b>5,358</b>	<b>1,393</b>	<b>0.715</b>
EO4	0.898			
EO5	0.849			
EO3	0.815			
<b><i>Employability Activities</i></b>		<b>7,294</b>	<b>1,897</b>	<b>0.874</b>
EA4	0.785			
EA3	0.772			
EA5	0.566			
<b><i>Organizational Citizenship Beh.</i></b>		<b>10,043</b>	<b>2,611</b>	<b>0.846</b>
OCB3	0.787			
OCB4	0.779			
OCB5	0.747			
OCB8	0.738			
OCB6	0.702			
OCB7	0.633			

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.852

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 2741,770, df = 325, Sig.= 0.000

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations and correlations. According to Table 2 most of the respondents expressed the presence of a relatively higher level of organizational citizenship behavior ( $M = 4.27$ ). This was followed by employability orientation ( $M = 4.09$ ), employability activities ( $M = 3.41$ ) and competency model ( $M = 3.88$ ). The lowest item is social exchange ( $M = 3.63$ ). After analyzing the table 3, we may see that the relations between competency model, social exchange, employability orientation employability activities, and organizational citizenship behavior have positive correlations in the level of  $p < 0.01$ . Only, the relationship between employability orientation and employability activities have a positive correlation but it is the level of  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 2: Correlation matrix, means and standard deviations (n= 175; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ )**

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.Dev.</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 Competency Model (CM)</b>	3.88	0.715	1				
<b>2 Social Exchange (ST)</b>	3.63	0.689	0.354**	1			
<b>3 Employability Orientation (EO)</b>	4.09	0.585	0.338**	0.284**	1		
<b>4 Employability Activities (EA)</b>	4.04	0.878	0.395**	0.243**	0.162*	1	
<b>4 Organizational Citizenship Beh. (OCB)</b>	4.27	0.556	0.334**	0.280**	0.216**	0.217**	1

We have applied two separate hierarchical regression analysis via SPSS in Table 3. In order to test  $H_{1a}$  and  $H_{3a}$  hypothesis the hierarchical regression analysis is conducted in first stage. Firstly, competency model was added in Model 1 and competency model has positive effect employability orientation ( $\beta = 0.326$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Secondly, competency model ( $\beta = 0.249$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and social exchange ( $\beta = 0.219$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were added Model 2 and have positive effect on employability orientation. Therefore,  $H_{1a}$  hypothesis was supported in the regression analysis result.  $H_{3a}$  stated that social exchange would moderate relationship between competency model and employability orientation. The interaction term of competency model and social exchange had a significant beta-weight e ( $\beta = 0.170$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and explained 2 per cent additional criterion variance in the model 3. So, the results provided support for  $H_{3a}$  hypothesis. Employability activities was dependent variable in the second stage of hierarchical regression analysis in

**Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis on Employability Orientation and Employability Activities**

Variables	Dependent Variables					
	Employability Orientation			Employability Activities		
	Model 1 B	Model 2 $\beta$	Model 3 $\beta$	Model 1 $\beta$	Model 2 $\beta$	Model 3 $\beta$
<b>Main effect variables</b>						
Competency Model(CM)	0.326***	0.249**	0.255**	0.537***	0.527***	0.480**
Social Exchange (SE)		0.219**	0.169*		0.177**	0.140*
<b>Interaction variables</b>						
CM*SE			0.170*			0.132*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.106	0.148	0.175	0.289	0.308	0.332
$\Delta R^2$	0.106***	0.042**	0.027*	0.289	0.019*	0.024*

a Standardized regression weights. \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

Table 3. At first stage, competency model was attached in model 1. It has positive effect on employability activities ( $\beta=0.537$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In the second stage, competency model ( $\beta=0.527$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and social exchange ( $\beta=0.177$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) were attached in model 2. They have positive effect on dependent variables. So, H<sub>1a</sub> hypothesis was supported in the regression analysis result. H<sub>3b</sub> hypothesis predicts that social exchange moderates the relationship between competency model and employability activities. As shown in Table 3, the interaction between competency model and social exchange was positively related to employability activities ( $\beta=0.132$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The interaction term accounted for 2 percent of the explained variance in both exploration innovation ( $\Delta R^2=0.02$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Thus, the results provided support for H<sub>3b</sub> hypothesis.

**Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Analysis on Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

Variables	Dependent Variables		
	Organizational Citizenship Behavior		
	Model 1 $\beta$	Model 2 $\beta$	Model 3 $\beta$
<b>Main effect variables</b>			
Competency Model(CM)	0.326***	0.249**	0.255**
Social Exchange(SE)		0.219**	0.169*
<b>Interaction variables</b>			
CM*SE			0.170*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.106	0.148	0.175
$\Delta R^2$	0.106***	0.042**	0.024*

a Standardized regression weights. \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001.

Table 4 provides the results of our hierarchical moderated analyses. As can be seen in Model 1, competency model has effect on organizational citizenship behavior ( $\beta=0.326$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In particular, the main effect of competency model ( $\beta=0.249$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and social exchange ( $\beta=0.326$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) have positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior. So, H<sub>2</sub> hypothesis was supported in the regression

analysis result. After entering main effects and the CM\*SE interaction accounted for a significant increment in the amount of organizational citizenship behavior criterion variance explained ( $\Delta R^2=0.02$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Thus, the results provided support for H<sub>3c</sub> hypothesis.

#### 4. Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationships between employees' perceptions of competency models and employability outcomes as well as the relationship with the organizational citizenship behavior. According to the findings of the research it is concluded that perceptions of competency model is positively related to employability outcomes. As the employees perceive the competency models applied in organization as fair and relevant, better employability outcomes can be achieved in competency based organizations. Perceptions of competency model relevance and fairness are also positively related to organizational citizenship behavior. Our findings support existing findings in the literature that OCBs and task performance increase with more favorable perception of competency models. In our research it has been also concluded that social exchange plays a mediator role between the relationships competency models, employability outcomes and OCB.

Competency models encourage positive employee outcomes by outlining the behaviors required for effective performance, encouraging contextual work behaviors facilitating organizational growth and change, and providing employees with the knowledge of what to focus on in order to succeed in the organization (Redmond, 2013). These positive outcomes will increase organizational performance. Therefore, organizations implement competency model in HR practices because it can increase employees' performance and this situation will have the consequence of creating positive value for the organization.

This study was limited and only focused on the effects of employees' perceptions of competency models on employability outcomes and organizational citizenship behavior and the moderating role of social exchange in this effect of the banking, telecommunications, health care, aeronautical and food industries in Istanbul. This study was not conducted on a single industry. However each industry has its specific conditions which may affect. Therefore, future research may replicate this study in a single industry and should focus on supervisor support and job satisfaction

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