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Human Resources and Organizations

# What is the social gain from competency management? The employees' perception at a Brazilian public university

*Qual é o ganho social na gestão por competências? a percepção dos funcionários de uma universidade pública brasileira*

*¿Qué beneficio social aporta la gestión por competencias? El punto de vista de funcionarios de una universidad pública brasileña*

Qi Guilherme Busch Rocha\*, Claudia Souza Passador, Gilberto Tadeu Shinyashiki

Universidade de São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil

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## Abstract

In the present global scenario of strong competitive edge, the Human factor had its relevance enhanced, presenting itself as a key element to enhance organizations' flexibility and performance. Since the 1990s, one of the most widespread and studied Human Resources practices has consisted of the Management Model by Competency, that innovated by changing the "position" reference to the "people" element. Therefore, this paper tries to investigate what are the elements that influence the employees' perception of social gain within an establishment that had taken on the competency management model. This is a quantitative work with survey methodology. The sample consists of 422 employees of a Brazilian public university that had implanted the competency model in 2011. The questionnaire, available in an online environment, used the dimensions developed by Sarsur (2007). The relationships between the actions on corporate education, wage move, career move, managerial positions held, workplace and seniority (independent variables) with the perception employees have of social gain (dependent variables) were analyzed through non parametric statistical techniques. The results indicate that the employees' perception of social competency gains in the model displays an essentially utilitarian nature. Namely, just the benefited employees demonstrated higher rankings of perception regarding the new proposal.

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**Keywords:** People management; Competency management; Corporate education; Performance evaluation; Social gain

## Resumo

No atual cenário mundial de forte competitividade, o fator humano aumentou sua importância e apresenta-se hoje como fator chave para aumentar a flexibilidade e a *performance* das organizações. Uma das práticas de Recursos Humanos mais difundidas e estudadas, a partir dos anos 1990, foi o modelo de gestão por competências, que inovou ao alterar o referencial "cargo" para o elemento "pessoas". Assim, neste artigo, pretendeu-se investigar quais são os fatores que influenciam a percepção de ganho social dos funcionários de uma organização que adotou o modelo de gestão de pessoas por competências. É um trabalho quantitativo com metodologia de levantamento (*survey*). A amostra é composta de 422 funcionários de uma universidade pública brasileira que implantou o

\* Corresponding author at: Avenida Bandeirantes, 3900 – CEP, 14040-900 Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil.

E-mail: [guilhermerocha@fearp.usp.br](mailto:guilhermerocha@fearp.usp.br) (G.B. Rocha).

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modelo em 2011. O questionário disponibilizado em ambiente virtual utilizou as dimensões desenvolvidas por Sarsur (2007). Foram analisadas por meio de técnicas estatísticas não paramétricas as relações entre ações de educação corporativa, movimentação salarial, movimentação na carreira, ocupação de cargos de gestão, local de trabalho e tempo de serviço (variáveis independentes) com a percepção de ganho social dos funcionários (variáveis dependentes). Os resultados indicam que a percepção de ganhos sociais com o modelo por competências por parte dos funcionários possui caráter prioritariamente utilitarista, ou seja, apenas os servidores beneficiados apontaram *rankings* superiores de percepção em relação à nova proposta.

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*Palavras-chave:* Gestão de pessoas; Gestão por competências; Educação Corporativa; Avaliação de desempenho; Ganho social

## Resumen

En el actual escenario mundial de fuerte competitividad, se atribuye mayor importancia al factor humano, que se presenta como elemento clave para aumentar la flexibilidad y el desempeño de las organizaciones. Una de las prácticas de Recursos Humanos más difundidas y estudiadas a partir de los años noventa ha sido el modelo de gestión por competencias, que ha innovado al cambiar del referente “puesto” al elemento “personas”. En este artículo se pretende investigar qué factores influyen en la percepción de beneficio social por parte de los empleados de una organización que adopta el modelo de gestión de personas por competencias. Es un estudio cuantitativo con método *survey*. La muestra está compuesta por 422 funcionarios de una universidad pública brasileña que utiliza el modelo desde 2011. En la encuesta, disponible en forma virtual, se han utilizado las dimensiones desarrolladas por Sarsur (2007). Mediante técnicas estadísticas no paramétricas, se han analizado las relaciones entre acciones de educación corporativa, aumento salarial, movimiento en la carrera, ocupación de puestos de gestión, lugar de trabajo y antigüedad (variables independientes) con la percepción de beneficio social de los empleados (variables dependientes). Los resultados indican que la percepción de beneficios sociales del modelo por competencia por parte de los encuestados posee carácter sobre todo utilitarista, es decir, sólo los funcionarios beneficiados han indicado *rankings* superiores de percepción con relación a la nueva propuesta.

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*Palabras clave:* Gestión de personas; Gestión por competencias; Educación corporativa; Evaluación de desempeño; Beneficio social

## Introduction

The extreme strength and frequency of socio-economic, scientific and technological alterations in the global and national scenario in recent decades have thoroughly reshaped solid concepts. Consequently, such changes have become usual in organizational environments, since the outcome and survival of businesses today are directly related to their ability to identify and adapt to new trends (Wood, 2000).

In this context, the Human Resources field (HR) has gained representativeness for “[...] the transition from the industrial socioeconomic context to the post-industrial context causes People Management to be closely associated with Change Management issues [our translation]” (Vasconcelos, Mascarenhas & Vasconcelos, 2006, p. 18).

Since the 1990s, Competency Model for people management has become one of the most widespread and studied Human Resources practices. The design arises as an alternative to traditional people management models, based on the “position” element. Competency management models seek to encourage individual development to enhance knowledge, skills and attitudes applied to the professional context of each organization. The advantages of using the Competency concept as a pivotal axis of Human Resources practices are numerous. For instance, they include the increase in organizational flexibility, the alignment of the organization’s strategy with people management strategy, and the empowerment of managers toward HR decisions (Albuquerque & Oliveira, 2001; Appel & Bitencourt, 2008; Lawler III & Jenkins, 1992; Milkovich, Newman & Gerhart, 2013).

The fundamental reason for devising a new personnel management methodology relies upon the previous position-focused model – naturally inflexible – which hinders staff development and movement initiatives. Consequently, while the position-based system is often associated with bureaucratic structures and low mobility organizational settings, the Competency Management model seeks to enhance flexibility, providing managers with better chances to achieve their results (Albuquerque & Oliveira, 2001; Lima, Zambroni de Souza & Araújo, 2015).

The vast majority of the research on the competency concept is undertaken in the light of organizational outcomes. In this sense, several authors (Boyatzis, 1982; Dutra, 2001, 2004; Fleury & Fleury, 2001; Ruas, 2005; Zarifian, 2001) claim that the competency-based models for people management have higher chances of success in modern organizations inserted in competitive environments. The major drawback of such model is due to its natural difficulties of conceptualizing, assimilation and consequently consolidation (Albuquerque & Oliveira, 2001; Dutra, 2004).

One of the assumptions of such people management model asserts that “[...] “competencies should add economic value to the organization and social value to the individual [our translation]” (Fleury & Fleury, 2001, p. 187). However, Sarsur (2007) challenges that fact, given that social values might be perceived to a limited extent by the individuals in the organization, often being merely relegated to the level of speech.

Given the above and the importance the innovation promoted by switching the “position” referential to the “people” element, as proposed by the competency management model, this paper seeks to describe the factors that influence the perception the

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