

# COMPETENCE MANAGEMENT MODELS IN LEADING BRAZILIAN ORGANIZATIONS

## *MODELOS DE GESTÃO POR COMPETÊNCIAS EM ORGANIZAÇÕES LÍDERES NO BRASIL*

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To investigate into the strategic alignment of competency-based management (CBM) models implemented in 95 Brazilian organizations, leaders in their respective segments.

**Design / methodology / approach:** The study is a longitudinal, exploratory-descriptive study under a qualitative and quantitative approach.

**Findings:** A great similarity was found in the competencies in the CBM models, both in terms of incidence of competencies and similarity of their descriptions.

**Research limitations / implications:** The study reveals a trend towards a disconnection between individual competencies and organizational strategies and values, and suggests four possible propositions to be investigated in future studies: P1: Absence of conceptual rigor for competences; P2: Insufficient dedication of time to implement a model; P3: Dissemination of “off-the-shelf models”, and P4: Institutionalization of CBMs as a dominant practice for people management.

**Practical implications:** The results point to the need for organizations, when building or updating their CBM models, to pay attention to the concept of competencies used, ensuring the incorporation of the organizational strategy into the model, and dedicating adequate time to its elaboration and implementation in order to customize the CBM model to their needs.

**Originality / value:** It constitutes one of the few longitudinal surveys with a representative sample of existing CBM models in Brazil and worldwide; hence, it captured a phenomenon (homogenization of CBM) that has been difficult to be observed outside this research.

**Keywords:** competencies; competency-based management (CBM) models; people management; Brazilian companies.



## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** investigar o alinhamento estratégico de Modelos de Gestão por Competências (MGC) implementados em 95 organizações brasileiras, referências em seus respectivos segmentos

**Design/metodologia/abordagem:** A pesquisa se constitui em um estudo longitudinal, de natureza exploratório-descritiva com abordagem qualitativa e quantitativa

**Resultados:** Observou-se grande similaridade nas competências constantes nos modelos de gestão por competências, tanto em termos da incidência das competências como também na similaridade na própria descrição das competências.

**Limitações/implicações da pesquisa:** O estudo revela uma tendência de descolamento das competências individuais das estratégias e valores organizacionais e sugere quatro possíveis proposições para serem investigadas em estudos futuros: P1: Ausência de rigor conceitual para competências; P2: Dedicção insuficiente de tempo para implementar um modelo; P3: Disseminação de “modelos de prateleiras” e P4: Institucionalização dos MGC como prática dominante para gestão de pessoas.

**Implicações práticas:** Os resultados apontam para a necessidade de organizações, ao construírem ou atualizarem seus MGC, atentem ao conceito de competências utilizado, assegurem a incorporação da estratégia organizacional ao modelo, dediquem tempo adequado à elaboração e implementação, a fim de customizar o MGC às suas necessidades.

**Originalidade/valor:** Constitui-se um dos poucos levantamentos longitudinais com uma amostra representativa existentes sobre MGC no país e no mundo; como consequência, capturou um fenômeno (homogeneização dos MGC) difícil de ser observado fora deste recorte de pesquisa.

**Palavras-chave:** Competências; gestão de pessoas; empresas brasileiras

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The theme of competency is not recent and much has been explored about the concepts and approaches involved, theoretical and empirical implications, as well as strategic and managerial dimensions. However, in a recent bibliometric study, Silva, Ribeiro, Alvarez and Caregnato (2019) highlighted that competence-based management remains a topic of interest in research, having experienced an increase in publications in annals and journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus databases from 2005 on, with peaks in some years (2010) and remaining constant since then (around 40 publications-year). However, some theoretical and empirical gaps have not yet been comprehensively addressed. An important gap refers to the understanding of the strategic alignment of CBM models. Though emphasized by several authors (Campion et al., 2020; Sani et al., 2016; Audenaert et al., 2014), little is known about how to, in fact, this alignment occurs in practice, particularly in the Brazilian context. The theme is even more interesting given the extent of its use. As stated by Mau (2017, p.19), “it is now difficult to find a leading company that has not implemented a leadership competency model as a means of recruiting, hiring, training and rewarding their human talents”.

Competency-based management (CBM) models are presented as frameworks that integrate people management tools, thereby providing a unique contribution to strategy implementation. This second understanding stems from the Resource-Based Theory-RBT (Barney, Ketchen & Wright, 2011), which emphasizes that value creation and strategy implementation derive from the use of the organization’s singular resources. By this logic, the professional competencies highlighted by organizations in their CBM model can be understood as one of the “resources” that translate the specifics of their strategies and that, to this extent, are unique and singular for each organization.

Such reasoning, a corollary of the RBT, is addressed in the reflection on competencies in an ambiguous way. Whereas some authors argued for the need to develop specific individual competencies to enable strategies (Campion et al., 2011; Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006; Munck & Galleli, 2015; Ghedine, 2015), others emphasized generic professional competencies (Lombardo & Eichinger,



2005; Ulrich et al., 2015). Moreover, works such as those of Fleury and Fleury (2005) and Dutra (2017) proposed models that link strategic standards to the choice of typical competencies (for instance, a strategy of operational excellence requires competency in cost orientation). Ultimately, companies aligned with the same strategic profile would opt for a “basket” of similar competencies, being in that option supported (if not induced) by conceptual models disseminated in the literature.

A second important gap, highlighted by Garcia (2013), refers to the prevalence of simple case studies in the research on competencies. Between 2000 and 2011, there was only one survey on the topic (Garcia, 2013), the work of Barbosa and Rodrigues (2005). This prevalence also occurs in international competency investigations (Campion et al., 2011). The scarcity of quantitative studies hinders a more precise view of the area because it does not provide a comprehensive view that may contribute to advances in the state of the art, or point empirical weaknesses. It would be welcome quantitative research to complement prevalent qualitative research, which seeks to understand the context, reasons, and implications of some findings in the area.

This article discusses the strategic alignment of competency-based management (CBM) models in 95 Brazilian companies, leaders in their respective segments, based on a quantitative and qualitative longitudinal study analyzing how these models are being implemented. The present work is, therefore, one of the few longitudinal quantitative-qualitative surveys on the theme. In addition, it significantly expands the sample of companies investigated in the previous survey (Barbosa and Rodrigues, 2005), from 37 to 95, and updates the state of art in CBM, considering that the previous survey dates from over fifteen years ago.

This enhanced and updated view enables seeing the phenomenon of homogenization of the competencies listed in CBM, as suggested by Armstrong and Taylor (2014) and Barbosa and Rodrigues (2005). Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p. 87) present a survey in English organizations, in which the following seven competencies are listed by more than 50% of the organizations studied: team orientation (used in 86% of respondents), communication (73%), people management (67%), customer focus (65%), results orientation (59%), problem solving (57%), and planning and organization (51%). Similarly, Barbosa and Rodrigues (2005) found similarities in the competencies chosen by organizations in the only survey we identified on the use of competencies in Brazil, carried out with 37 companies from different sectors in four states (Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo).

Such similarity of competencies in different organizations contradicts the singularity of resources proposed by the RBT and implies a dilemma in the field: to what extent does it make sense for organizations with different strategies to assume similar competencies? This article investigated the CBM strategic alignment in leading Brazilian organizations in their segments, in order to understand whether the models contribute to a strategic alignment or are a mere operationalization of the competency concept and, therefore, not favoring an organization differentiation.

Hence, after exploring how the literature addresses the issue of specificity and alignment of competency to strategy in CBM models, an empirical study was carried out to ascertain this alignment in Brazilian organizations, by examining the similarity (or not) among competencies adopted in their CBM; finally, after finding some similarities, possible reasons were investigated, and 4 propositions presented.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Competency-based management is an important enabling element of the so-called strategic people management (Audenaert et al., 2014; Redmond, 2013; Burns et al, 2012). In a context dependent on intensive knowledge (Oehmichen et al., 2017), companies are concerned with developing competencies in line with their strategic guidelines. The alignment between strategy and people’s development enhances organizational performance (Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006).



According to the RBT (Penrose, 1959; Barney et al., 2011), organizations have imperfectly imitable resources, and value creation is the result of the appropriate use of resources under their control. Successful strategies thus consist of combining and exploiting valuable, unique resources, difficult to imitate and replace, and capable of internal transfer inside the business. As organizations combine these resources, they create competitive advantage and generate superior value (Barney, 1991). Resources are something that organizations have, even if only temporarily (Edgar & Lockwood, 2012).

The organizational competence concept is an unfolding of Penrose's (1959) seminal ideas. Prahalad and Hamel (1990) contributed in this field by formulating the core competence concept, a complex integration of key technologies and production skills, difficult to imitate, which provides access to the world market. Following RBT's assumptions, they highlighted three conditions for core competences: delivery of value, difficulty to imitate by competitors, and the possibility of transferring to other products and services in the organization. Galpin (2019) highlighted the importance of combining unique resources in the characterization of organizational competences, also emphasizing their role in strategic diversification movements.

Seeking to synthesize such reflections, this work assumes organizational competence as a set of articulated resources that generate value for the organization, are difficult to imitate, can be transferred to other areas, products or services of the organization, and impact organizational performance in key success factors, essential attributes for competitive success in an industry (Fernandes, 2013). Organizational competences are specific to the company and reflect the peculiarity of its resources and strategies. Strong organizational competences are based on the coordination of unique and valuable resources and enable strategies of greater value (Barney, 1991).

One of the constitutive resources of organizational competences consists of individual competencies (Salman et al., 2020). Although they are subject to several definitions, not necessarily converging (Durand, 2015; Spencer & Spencer, 1993), this article assumes individual competencies as a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that an individual mobilizes in a context, in order to generate economic value for the business and social value for oneself (Fleury & Fleury, 2005).

According to Dutra (2017), competency has two aspects: capacities (or inputs), which consist of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values (SKAV), as an individual's stock, and their effective delivery to the organization to add value. Skills mean proficiency to perform operations, knowledge is information stored in the intellect and retrieved to interpret facts, attitudes consist of evaluative findings or predisposition towards something, and values are rationalized conceptions that influence choices of means and ends (Fernandes, 2013). Each capacity considered in isolation (or even combined) does not guarantee competence, given that its distinctive feature is application. It is important to highlight this point, since several authors do not distinguish competencies from capacities (Salman, Ganie & Saleem, 2020), assuming as "competencies" attributes which this article would call knowledge, skills, attitudes or values.

Fleury and Fleury (2005) proposed a classification into individual competencies focused on business, technical-professional and social. Business-focused competencies are related to the company's interaction with the environment, market and competitors. For example, customer orientation can be a business competency. Technical competencies are distinguished by their emphasis on "technical knowledge". Thus, supply chain management is a technical competence because, among the SKAV, it focuses on the "technical knowledge" input (logistics, operational research, etc.). Social competencies emphasize interpersonal interactions, such as teamwork, leadership, etc.

Organizations incorporate competencies as a management tool in the CBM model which, according to Redmond (2013, p. 771), "is a written and often graphically enhanced description of the desired competencies that are derived from the firm's strategy and are intended to facilitate organizational growth and change". CBM models are used to align people management practices



(recruitment and selection, assessment, training and development, career, compensation, talent management) and relate them to strategy (Knapik, Fernandes, Sales, 2020; Sani et al., 2016; Aude-naert, Vanderstraeten, Buyens, & Desmidt, 2014; Redmond, 2013). Considering that organizational competencies require unique resources to make strategies feasible, it is plausible to assume that the individual competencies elected for the composition of a CBM model reflect the uniqueness of the organization's strategies and competences (Salman, Ganie, & Saleem, 2020). CBM models "serve as employees' complete and accurate understanding of what is expected from them in line with the objectives of the company." (Sani et al, 2016, p. 38).

Various authors argue for the need to incorporate the strategy in the construction of CBM (Saha, Chatterjee, Gregar and Sáha, 2016; Cardy and Selvarajan, 2006). For example, Dutra (2017) suggested investigating organizational competences before inventorying individual ones in a company, and recalled the Fleury and Fleury (2005) strategy-organizational competence typology, based on Treacy and Wiersema (1995). Their typology classifies strategies into operational excellence (companies that compete based on costs, offering medium quality products with the best price and good service), product leadership (driven to the development of innovative products, the result of intensive Research and Development (R&D) investment) and customer intimacy (aimed at serving specific customers, that is, they are strategies that seek to develop "built-to-suit" offerings). Thus, Dutra (2017) builds a bridge relating types of strategy to the organizational and individual competencies to insert into CBM models (Table 1). Dutra (2017) does not address the customer intimacy strategy, possibly believing that this requires competencies that cannot be generalized.

**Table 1**  
**Relationship among strategy and organizational and individual competencies**

| Strategy   | Organizational Competencies   | Individual Competencies  |
|--|---|--|
| Sales volume   | - Cost  | Cost and quality orientation   |
| Operational excellence (consumer goods, commodities)                                       | - Quality<br>- Production process<br>- Distribution<br>- Market monitoring<br>- Commercialization<br>- Strategic partnerships | Resource and time management<br>Team work<br>Planning<br>Interaction with systems<br>Multifunctionality<br>Interpersonal relationship  |
| Focus on customization<br>Product innovation (products for specific customers or segments) | - Product and process innovation<br>- Quality<br>- Technological monitoring<br>- Image<br>- Technological partnerships        | Innovation capacity<br>Internal and external articulation<br>Articulação interna e externa<br>Absorption and transfer of knowledge<br>Leadership and teamwork<br>Problem solving<br>Use of data and technical information<br>Improvement of processes / products and participation in projects |

Source: Dutra, J. S. (2017, p.18).

This conception by Dutra (2017) is emphasized because the author is a reference on competency management in Brazil, both academically and in the implementation of CBM by companies (Montezano et al, 2019; Fernandes, 2013). In this sense, his model has a prescriptive character to help organizations in implementing MGC, pointing which strategic types "fit" with organizational and individual competencies.

Other empirical studies that analyze the relationship among strategies, organizational competence and individual competencies are not conclusive. For example, when examining the jewelry, semi-jewelry and costume jewelry sector, Oliveira et al (2019) did not confirm an association be-



tween the strategic types (considered in terms of the Miles & Snow model, 2003) and organizational and individual competencies. The authors did find relationships between individual and organizational competencies, and those with performance, but found no influence of strategic types on competencies and performance — perhaps due to the sector’s characteristics. Also not conclusive is the work of Gava Neto et al. (2015) when investigating a similar problem in the software sector. The authors identified a relationship between strategy typology and requisite individual competencies (prospective and analytical companies had better performance and greater intensity of business management competencies, technical competencies, and marketing and sales competencies compared to defensive and reactive ones), but this study has not examined organizational competences.

In designing a CBM model, complementary concepts can be used to customize competencies for an organization. Dutra (2017) highlights career axes and work levels. Career axes correspond to organizational macroprocesses that bring together positions of a similar nature and constitute trajectories for professional growth, such as a commercial or engineering career. Each career axis requires specific competencies. Work levels reflect increasing levels of abstract thinking and complex decision making as an individual develops professionally (Fernandes et al, 2014). The work levels concept facilitates the use of competencies in career and remuneration processes, since it signals requirements for each career level, hence enabling reward parameters (Dutra, 2017). Once these bases are established, CBM models are linked to evaluation (to assess team competence), training and development (to train people in required competencies), recruitment and selection (seeking people according to the competencies necessary for the function), in addition to career and remuneration.

Career axes and work levels concepts are characteristic of modern CBM models (Knapik et al., 2020; Campion et al., 2011), insofar as that implies describing competencies in a differentiated manner, according to a professional’s position, in contrast to traditional models that propose the same competencies for everyone, regardless of work process and career level. For example, Knapik et al (2020), when carrying out a longitudinal study in an automotive company that adopted several CBM models over time, with different conceptual bases, found that the model that prevailed and was adopted at the end of the period— due to its functionality —, incorporated concepts of career axes, work levels and competencies as deliveries.

Finally, as an additional precaution to ensure adherence of the CBM model to the organizational context, building and implantating is usually a “taylor-made” process: namely, it presupposes conducting interviews and workshops to build a model that incorporates strategies, organizational competences and company specificities (Dutra, 2017). The next section explains the methodological procedures used to analyze the strategic alignment of CBM in the Brazilian companies studied.

### 3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The research was conducted as a longitudinal study, with an exploratory-descriptive nature under a qualitative/quantitative approach. A total of 95 representative cases were chosen, to permit comparisons and analytical generalizations. Quantitative data were also used to highlight issues in the analysis and enable triangulation between qualitative and quantitative data. The aim was to point up the predominance of strategies and actions linked to CBM in different companies.

The approach is justified by the need to deepen the knowledge of a given social phenomenon to enable the creation of new propositions based on the presentation of a situation or group characteristics (Bryman, 2012). The research is also characterized by being a survey (sample of a population) with a cross-sectional design.

The study started by identifying “leading or reference” organizations in Brazil that have



CBM implemented, based on the *Guia Você S / A - 150 Melhores Empresas para Trabalhar* (MEPT), a ranking conducted since 1997, when there was a significant increase in the implementation of competency programs in Brazil. Such companies serve as models and benchmarks for others (hence, their adopted practices signal a trend in the area since successive circles of companies copy their “good practices”). “Leading or reference organizations” are those that: are first or second in terms of market share in their sector; have a unique institutional mission and are recognized for that (for example, the Central Bank of Brazil or National Trade Service-Senac); or are referenced by their peers in the industry, both for the modernity of their practices and for their results. Based on the *Guia* and supplemented with other secondary data (such as national business magazines with large circulation), interviews with directors of human resources associations (such as the Brazilian Human Resources Association, ABRH) and on the indication of researchers, the total of 128 organizations was reached. To refine the sample, other criteria were used:

- a. Organizations should come from different industries, representing, as far as possible, the diversity of situations in which CBM models are adopted in Brazil.
- b. Researchers should have access to the entire CBM structuring process, including parameters such as strategic intent and stated organizational values.
- c. The CBM model should include the management body, so that the relationship with the strategy could be observed. Organizations with CBM model (CBM model with only technical trajectories were excluded).

By filtering the criteria, 95 organizations were reached, the models of which had been implemented between 2000 and 2014. However, regardless of the implementation year, the last version of the CBM model was always taken as a base. The cross-section year for the analysis of the competences was 2015, which served as the base year for the comparative study. In 2020, the authors resumed contact with the sampled companies to update the models in use by checking their competence dictionaries and other documents, and consulting on any changes. For those that gave a response, the data was updated. For those that did not, the data from the previous collection was considered.

At data collection time, all companies used CBM models as a parameter for people management, although some linked their CBM models to more people management processes than others did.

Following the (b) criterion above, in order to refine the sample companies were open to provide additional clarifications on published and digital materials. The elements sought were: 1) business competencies, 2) specific / technical competencies, 3) company strategies, in terms of typology (Treacy and Wieserma, 1995) or some more specific action. Further contacts to clarify any doubts were made with those responsible for the companies’s CBM, by and large Human Resource professionals.

CBM models were compared with the use of a “reference ruler”, built by systematizing the professional competency dictionaries in the literature (Dutra, 2017; Spencer & Spencer, 1993), see Table 2. All competencies, ensuring methodological coherence with the definition adopted, are expressed with a significant delivery action verb. The “ruler” includes business and social competencies, but not technical ones, since these are specific to each business and impossible to preestablish. However, the presence or absence of technical competencies in the models was also analyzed. To identify trends in CBM models, competencies were tabulated and a simple descriptive technique was used to analyze data content.

No studied company had competencies with exactly the same descriptions as those of the ruler that served as a parameter for content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). Thus, the analysis was not restricted to the name of the competency, but included the elements contained in the definition and its details. When a company’s competency contained elements present in more than one generic competence of the “ruler”, the procedure was to comment on this overlap and note down the



presence of all correlated competencies. When a company's competency was equivalent to part of the competency description in the "ruler", the existence of a generic competency was noted and observations about the degree of this equivalence were registered. The "ruler" also made it possible to analyze the frequency in which a competency appeared in different sectors of economic activity.

Table 2

**Generic competency descriptions**

| <b>Business competencies</b>   |
|--|
| <b>Creativity and Innovation:</b> identifies opportunities for the company, within its area of expertise, and develop creative alternatives. Takes risks and dares. Innovates in processes, patterns and behaviors in order to find new solutions to new or old problems.  |
| <b>Strategic Direction / Strategic Integrated vision:</b> acts based on the understanding of one's role within the company and one's interaction with other areas, processes and movements in the organization. Acts with a global and future vision within the scope of one's duties, identifying risks and opportunities capable of influencing the company. Acts with a focus on the business, its interaction with the internal and external environment / market (customers, suppliers, competitors, regulatory factors and political and strategic factors). Bears in mind the consequences of its decisions for stakeholders. |
| <b>Focus on Quality:</b> understands, practices and continually disseminates quality procedures. Develops preventive and corrective actions. Continuously improves the quality of products, services and processes. Ensures reliability and accuracy in one's work.  |
| <b>Knowledge Management / Self-Development and Learning:</b> identifies, applies, registers, systematizes, disseminates and updates knowledge in the company. Creates a favorable context for learning. Constantly seeks self-improvement: takes courses, reads books, etc.  |
| <b>Customer Orientation:</b> understands, prioritizes, meets and even exceeds customers' needs and expectations, perceiving and anticipating solutions that add value to customers and the company   |
| <b>Results Orientation:</b> acts to achieve or exceed the goals agreed with the company. Repeatedly achieves personal and team goals. Creates an environment that allows others to do their best. Has a sense of urgency and proactivity. Gives answers at the right time. Brings results for the company, whether through cost reduction, process improvement, productivity, increased revenue, profitability, etc.   |
| <b>Planning, Organization and Control / Resources and Time management:</b> plans, organizes and controls activities. Organizes, systematizes, prioritizes and monitors the use of financial and material resources under one's responsibility. Defines, manages and monitors deadlines. Balances time, cost and quality of the necessary production, optimizing the use of physical and financial resources. Improves processes and productivity.  |
| <b>Safety, Health and Environment:</b> applies and ensures the observance of safety, health and environment principles and tools defined by the company.   |
| <b>Decision Making:</b> identifies problems and makes decisions for their solution. Finds, selects and interprets, analyzes and synthesizes information to understand its meaning and respond to demands. Analyzes risks, develops alternatives, defines and implements actions at one's level, monitoring and assuming responsibility for the impact of the decision, and solving problems.   |
| <b>Social Competencies</b>   |
| <b>Communication:</b> expresses ideas clearly and consistently. Passes on necessary information at the right time. Properly uses various means of communication.   |
| <b>Leadership / People Management:</b> coordinates efforts, gathers and makes available resources and information to improve people's performance and team's commitment. Leads by example. Sets challenging goals for the team. Takes people's needs into account when making important decisions. Promote people's motivation. Develops people and delegates assignments. Expresses recognition and appreciation of people.   |
| <b>Negotiation:</b> obtains favorable agreements that benefit the parties. Plans the negotiation process. Searches for the best solution by reconciling interests. Sets out one's reasons in a consistent and convincing manner.   |
| <b>Orientation / change management:</b> identifies, plans and conducts necessary changes to the business, articulating people and processes. Is flexible for new assignments, reviews one's opinion when necessary and does not stick to rigid positions. Adapts to the demands of the environment and organizational needs.   |
| <b>Relationship building:</b> builds and uses relationship networks to create cohesion among people, maximize results and raise mutual opportunities.  |
| <b>Teamwork:</b> acts interactively and in synergy; guides and supports team members to achieve common goals. Perceives personal differences and takes advantage of them for the purposes of the team. Gives and receives feedback with empathy. Accepts and reviews personal positions in favor of team goals.  |

Source: Authors.





After analyzing the competencies in Table 2, the following verification was made regarding: a) existence of technical competencies; b) possibility of identifying the business / sector based on competencies; c) possibility of identifying organizational strategy based on competencies; d) existence of competencies described differently according to work levels; e) existence of career axes, with competencies described differently according to the axis; and f) a space for general observations about each company's model. Work levels and career axes (items (d) and (e)) were chosen as analysis criteria because they signaled the extent to which these CBM models dialogue with career and remuneration processes, in addition to distinguishing competencies for different functions. Table 3 presents an extract from the analysis for two companies.

Table 3  
Analysis extract

| Sector   | Direct Public Administration 1**                        | Direct Public Administration 2   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Business competencies</b>   |   |  |
| <b>Creativity and innovation</b>   |   |  |
| Identifies opportunities for the company (...)   |   | X  |
| Observations   |   | incorporates aspects related to problem analysis and solution in the details of the competency |
| <b>Strategic Direction / Strategic / Integrated Vision</b>   |   |  |
| acts based on the understanding of one's role (...)  | X   | X  |
| Observations   | analyses of trends and scenarios + strategy definition. | the main points were incorporated into the result-orientation competency                       |
| <b>Specific/technical competencies</b>   | <b>Requirements</b>                                     | <b>No</b>  |
| Possibility of identifying the Business  | Yes   | No   |
| Possibility of identifying strategy based on Competencies  | Yes   | No   |
| Is there a description by work level?  | Yes   | No   |
| Are there career / development axes, with different competencies, with different descriptions according to the axis? | phrases by different level and axes                     | No   |

\*\*Note: Public Administration 1: The sector of activity, public administration, is perceived by the phrases. Concern with meeting the expectations of society in the fulfillment of Justice. Fulfill the organization's mission, vision and values and achieve public recognition.

Source: Authors

The listing of technical competencies was guided by the identification of requisite deliveries for professionals focused on specific organizational processes, and demanding specialized knowledge, such as supply chain management. Sometimes, these technical attributes were documented as knowledge, and not deliveries, and pointed out in the analysis. The identification of the business or sector was only considered when the description of the competency brought some specificity; for instance, in a business school focus of this study, the production of articles was cited as part of the delivery. The mere mention of the name of the company or sector was not taken as indicative of the business or sector. The expression of strategies in the CBM model was minimally based on the possibility of seeing in the competencies some of the strategy types of Treacy and Wieserma (1995): namely, operational excellence, differentiation or intimacy with customers / services. For example, in a company with an operational excellence strategy (and the company's strategy was known to



researchers by other documentary sources or consultations with the company), a repeated mention was “cost reduction”, “process optimization” and “time reduction” in the description of various competencies; this fact sets up evidence of harmony between competencies and strategy. However, there were cases where the relationship between strategy and CBM was even clearer. One company had a strategy aimed at international expansion; in its model, a competency proposed was International Articulation, whose focus was to define expected deliveries beyond the country of origin, such as managing international projects.

To increase the reliability of the analyses, the classifications performed by a researcher were checked and validated by at least one other researcher, always one of the authors. In addition to them, three other researchers participated in this stage. There was no case of significant revision of the initial classification due to the clarity of the “reference ruler”, the conceptual and methodological alignment among the researchers, and the availability of secondary and detailed material about the competencies of the organizations.

## 4 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The sample was well diversified, as can be seen in Table 4. A total of 30 sectors were analyzed; 57% (17 sectors) had the presence of three or more organizations, according to the adopted criterion. The 95 companies had external consultants to implement the CBM.

Table 5 describes the frequency of each competency in the sample, in descending order. The Strategic Direction competence stood out, appearing in 96% of cases. This result signals an effort by organizations for their employees to base their performance on understanding the business strategy.

Table 4

**Sector and total of companies**

| # | Sector   | No. of companies surveyed |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| 1 | <b>Public:</b> Direct / Indirect Administration (11)   | 11                        |
| 2 | <b>Services:</b> Bank / Insurance (5); Education (3), Construction (2); Communication (2); Graphic-editorial (3); Telecommunications (7); Information technology (5), Transportation (1), Other Services (4)   | 32                        |
| 3 | <b>Industry:</b> Food, beverages and tobacco (6); Automotive (4); Footwear (1); Cements (2); Packaging (4); Energy (4); Pharmaceutical (4); Hygiene and Cleaning (2); Chemical / Petrochemical (3); Metal-mechanic (1) Metallurgy / Steel (6); Mining (3); Pulp and Paper (1); Oil / Gas (1); Sanitation (3); Textile (2); Other (2) | 49                        |
| 4 | <b>Social:</b> Civil Society Organization (2)  | 2                         |
| 5 | <b>Trade:</b> Retail(1)  | 1                         |
|   | Total (Sectors=30)   | 95                        |

Source: Authors



Table 5

**Presence of competencies in the sample**

| <b>Business competencies</b>                                      | nº | Percentage |
|---|----|------------|
| Strategic Direction / Strategic Integrated vision                 | 91 | 96%        |
| Results Orientation   | 88 | 93%        |
| Planning, Organization and Control / Resource and Time Management | 74 | 78%        |
| Criativity and innovation   | 62 | 65%        |
| Customer Orientation  | 62 | 65%        |
| Knowledge Management / Self-Development and Learning              | 59 | 62%        |
| Decision making   | 49 | 52%        |
| Focus on quality  | 47 | 49%        |
| Safety, Health and enviroment                                     | 14 | 15%        |
| <b>Social competencies</b>  |    |            |
| Leadership / People Management                                    | 87 | 92%        |
| Relationship-building   | 70 | 74%        |
| Teamwork  | 63 | 66%        |
| Orientation/ change management                                    | 46 | 48%        |
| Negociation   | 44 | 46%        |
| Communication   | 29 | 31%        |

Source: Authors

The Results Orientation competency, with 93% occurrence, signals concern with improving performance and achieving results in the organizations studied. The results corroborate the conclusions of Barbosa and Rodrigues (2005, p. 13) survey, according to which CBM models are built to “strengthen the culture of performance and results”.

The Customer Orientation competency appeared in 65% of cases. Given the importance that concern for customers represents in the current business context, one might wonder why this percentage is no higher. Four assumptions can be made: a) organizations tend to focus on internal aspects; b) organizations assume that customer satisfaction is an outcome of achieving results in other areas; c) difficulty in establishing and assessing competency in areas that do not bear direct interaction with the client, such as the administrative ones. In these cases, competency is directed at the “internal customer” (and in this sense, partly absorbed in Teamwork), or is disregarded; d) presence of oligopolistic sectors (or even monopolists, such as sanitation) and State bodies in the sample, whose “focus on the customer” is not really a decisive concern, sometimes even because there is no “customer”. Incidentally, no equivalent competency was found in the public administration organizations in the sample, such as “Social Orientation” which, for the purposes of the analysis, would have been counted within the Customer orientation competency (the term customer signaled more “attended public” than the subject of a commercial relationship).

The Creativity and Innovation and the Knowledge Management / Self-development and Learning competencies emerged in 65% and 62% of cases, respectively. Their appearance on the list signals growing competition and the need to constantly instigate employees to think about new businesses, products and processes. The Decision Making competence, albeit an inherent action in the manager’s job, was highlighted in only 52% of the cases. A possible explanation is that this dimension is implicit in other competencies because, according to Fleury and Fleury (2005, p. 22), knowing how to decide is an integral part of any competence.

Among the business competences with the lowest incidence is the Focus on Quality (49%). This is because part of the organizations surveyed considers this competence implicit in the Planning, Organization and Control / Resoruce and Time Management competency, as emphasized by



Dutra (2017). With regard to the Safety, Health and Environment competence, its low incidence (15%) signals a small incorporation of socio-environmental sustainability values.

As for social competencies, there was a high incidence of the Leadership / People Management competency (92% of cases). In the last 30 years, due to the influence of the Human Relations School of thought on people management models, there is a recognition of middle managers' relevance in facilitating the interaction between companies and people (eg, Kuvaas et al, 2014). Also, the high percentage of this competence was influenced by the fact that one sampling criterion required that CBM models include the management body. However, despite this fact, eight organizations in the sample did not assign the Leadership and People Management competencies to their managers.

The Relationship-Building competency (74% occurrence) was not remembered in the same proportion as Strategic Direction and Results Orientation, although it is an important element for managers, who need to meet the expectations of external and internal stakeholders to obtain results.

The Teamwork competency was reported in 66% of cases. Although emphasized in the business discourse, it is understood that, in this study, its incidence was not so high because, for managerial positions (which was the case for many of the models in the sample), teamwork can be absorbed into the Leadership / People Management competency. Considering both competencies together, the incidence rises to 92%, which corresponds to the Leadership / People Management competency, insofar as companies with the Teamwork competency also pointed out Leadership.

The incidence of the Change Management competency was lower than expected by the research team, especially in view of the current turbulent context that requires constant organizational changes, as well as the flexibility and initiative of their professionals to drive changes.

The low incidence of the Communication and Negotiation competencies can be explained by the fact that some organizations consider it as an attribute (SKAV), that is, not as a delivery in itself, but as an important component in other deliveries, such as Relationship-Building, Customer Orientation and Leadership, for example. Hence, by pointing out these other competencies, they understand that they absorb the need for communication and negotiation, with no need to demand them as separate competencies.

In the sample of this study, we observed 37 cases of companies that established some competencies different or beyond the ones proposed in the "ruler", in general for delving into the particularities of the organization's processes and strategies. In addition to the aforementioned International Articulation competence, other examples are Technical Application, in a business-to-business (B2B) company that adapts its products to customers' equipment; or Transdisciplinarity, in a textbook publisher that wants to encourage its authors to integrate knowledge from different areas. The survey also investigated into the presence of technical competencies, as shown in Table 6. In about 52% of cases (49 companies) there was no mention of their existence; in 48%, (46 companies) there was some mention. However, in 29 of these cases the mention of technical competencies was indirect, through the description of knowledge and skills (capacities) necessary for the exercise of functions. Examples of these "competencies" in the sample are "Business Knowledge" or "Market Knowledge", with descriptions that refer to inputs (SKAV), not deliveries. In only 18% of cases (17 companies) there was a direct reference to technical competencies, taken as deliveries generated predominantly from technical knowledge. An example in this sense is the Chromatographic Analysis competency, which consists of the issuing of physical-chemical reports of the properties of plastics in a petrochemical company.

This leveling between competencies and knowledge, especially in the technical area, is in line with the study of Fischer et al. (2008) who found, in a sample of 125 HR managers, that 58.4% understood competency as associated with the capacity required for a professional to occupy a position, in contrast to approaches that associate competency with capacity mobilization in a given



context for delivery. The result underpins a conceptual looseness in distinguishing “competences” from “knowledge” in practice, not due to the lack of a definition of competency — in 100% of cases, companies defined the concept that supported their CBM model —, but to the use of concepts that favor an equivalence between the two terms (such as Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006).

Table 6  
**Characteristics of the Sampled Competency Models**

| Characteristics                     | No               |     | Yes              |     |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
|                                     | No. of companies | %   | No. of companies | %   |
| Inclusion of technical competencies | 49               | 52% | 46               | 48% |
| Possibility to identify sector      | 69               | 73% | 26               | 27% |
| Possibility to identify strategy    | 49               | 52% | 46               | 48% |
| Description by work level           | 22               | 23% | 73               | 77% |
| Existence of career axes            | 27               | 28% | 68               | 72% |

Source: Authors

A central aspect brought up by the study is the degree of generality in which the competencies are described. This is evident when considering that in 73% of cases it is not even possible to identify the sector in which the company operates; in 52% of cases, no strategic orientation was identified behind the description of the competencies. In other words, the competencies in these cases are described with such scope that they would suit any company. This result violates the basic premise of the specificity implied by RBT. Under this perspective, the individual competencies proposed in the models reinforce standardized behaviors considered adequate and effective in the business field, instead of highlighting specific aspects associated with characteristic organizational strategies and competencies.

The sample shows that 77% of the models have competencies unfolded by work level, and in 72% of the cases there are specific competencies for careers. This result indicates the concern of the studied organizations with linking competency management with career management parameters and differentiating the competencies required for professionals in different functions, in contrast to organizations that establish the same competencies, with the same descriptions for their entire workforce.

The field of “notes” in the ruler reveals that some companies, in addition to equating competencies with knowledge, also work indistinctly with competencies, values and attitudes. For instance, there were in the sample “competencies” like Commitment to Organizational Values, Ethical Performance, and Alignment of Personal Values to Organizational Values, attributes that refer to values and not to competencies, according to the definition adopted in this study. However, it can be argued that such equivalence often comes from the literature itself. For example, Cardy and Selvarajan (2006) admit that “knowledge”, “ethics” and “intelligence” can be “competencies”, assuming the definition of Spencer and Spencer (1993), “characteristics associated with superior performance”. Conversely, some companies in the sample professed values such as Social Responsibility (translated as respect for the community) and Sustainability (respect for the environment), but these values were not explained in the description of competencies. Another curious case is that of a research institute that listed Scientific Rigor and Innovation among its values, but had no competency addressed to evaluate deliveries in one dimension or another. It is as if these organizations established such values as principles, but did not have mechanisms to assess their alignment with the individual contributions.



## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study analyzed the strategic alignment of CBM models of leading Brazilian organizations in their segments, based on the content, the relationship and the singularities involved in the referred competency management systems. Specifically, we sought to understand: (1) the competencies that are part of the CBM models, (2) the relationship of these competences with their respective organizational strategies, and (3) the similarities (or not) among competencies included in the CBM models of the organizations examined.

Despite the emphasis on the strategic dimension referred to in the theoretical framework, the results indicated a certain standardization in the CBM models adopted in Brazil, insofar as organizations, regardless of sector, tend to assume similar competences in their models, with a low level of customization for their needs. Therefore, the competencies prioritized by these models neither relate directly to the particularities of the business, nor show adherence to organizational strategies. Other studies had already cautioned against this homogenization (Brandão, Andrade, & Guimarães, 2012; Burns et al, 2012); however, as they are specific case studies, they did not permit assessing the extent to which this phenomenon occurs.

We can attribute the apparent lack of strategic direction of the CBM models mainly to two factors: (1) Difficulty in incorporating the concept of organizational competencies into practice before defining a CBM model; (2) Emphasis on the development of managerial competencies, without raising specificities of core processes and business values.

The lack of understanding about what organizational competencies are suggests that many companies, when embarking on a project for modeling individual competencies, do not make a more structured reflection on their organizational competences, or on what provides them with competitive advantage and is essential to fulfill their corporate strategies and purposes. Thus, proposed individual competencies do not end up dialoguing with strategic premises, do not contribute to making the strategy viable (since the strategy is not taken into account in the construction of the model) and, by extension, do not encourage the vertical alignment among management practices, people and strategy (Audenaert et al., 2014) The literature suggests some “bridges” to move from organizational competencies to individual ones, as posited by Dutra (2017). However, even such typologies are too generic to encompass the specificity of organizational competencies. For example, Sony’s miniaturization technology, or Canon’s optical technology — to mention classical examples by Prahalad and Hamel (1990) — is associated with the Product Innovation strategy and, as such, should require skills such as Problem Solving. However, does such generic competency reach the specificity of the strategic positioning of these companies? Is pointing out that people must “solve problems” enough to “miniaturize products” or develop new optical technologies?

Moreover, CBM models emphasize the development of managerial competencies, without raising the specificities of core processes and business values. The emphasis on managerial competencies tends to make the models more similar to each other and dilute the organizational competencies to be developed. In fact, the scope of the managerial duties of planning, directing, organizing and controlling is broad enough to embrace any company sector. If an organization addresses competencies only to the managerial role, it risks remaining at this generic level of generic managerial function (Mau, 2017). Thus, particularities of the core processes, which generate organizational and essential competences, escape the radar of the individual competencies proposed in the model. Based on these findings, four possible explanations were raised, in the form of propositions (P), to be investigated in future research and which, also, can serve as suggestions for companies seeking to develop CBM.



P1: Absence of conceptual rigor for competencies. The concept of competencies, despite being consolidated, remains an imprecise idea in its application in organizations, in the sense that values, attitudes and knowledge are assumed as “competencies” without distinction. This conceptual imprecision takes its toll in practice, because if individuals demonstrate “knowledge” of a subject, regardless of generating contributions, they are considered “competent”.

P2: Insufficient time dedicated to implementing a CBM model. Audenaert et al. (2014, p. 21) warned that managers “lack the time, support and skills” to implement CBM. Lack of time at work is not exclusive to competency modeling projects. Buchanan et al. (2005) highlighted that the lack of time resulting from work overload is an impediment to profound change in organizations. With the decrease in hierarchical levels and reduction of structure, companies now have reduced staff for an increasing workload. Therefore, time may be lacking for change projects, or the individuals responsible are only superficially involved, sporadically participating in meetings, answeringWhatsapps, e-mails and cell phones during model building workshops. The authors argue that “core teams” should have time to design new initiatives within organizations, allocating hours for activities such as reflection, planning, collaborative work and training, activities that trigger learning. Because of the lack of time, organizations do not incorporate their specificities into the model, both in terms of strategies and organizational values. CBM, just as people management practices, carry and reinforce organizational values, but assimilating values and generating compatible behaviors requires time to mature. The lack of time, therefore, can hinder the conception of competencies adhering to the strategy and the internalization of the desired behaviors. Munck, Munck and Souza (2011) reported such dynamics in a case study in a telecommunications company.

P3: Dissemination of “off-the-shelf models”, mainly by consultancies, which is the other side of the coin of the lack of time. In view of the scarcity of time and the rush to implement projects and “bring results” quickly, companies opt for ready-made solutions. In line, consultancies respond to pressures for speed, making available to customers the repertoire of competencies contained in their databases, without careful reflection on competences and organizational strategies. It is true that many consultancies take their templates as proposals to be adapted to the organizational reality; however, given the lack of time suggested in the previous item, there is a risk of low customization effort and the tendency towards the similarity of the CBM models is reinforced.

P4: Institutionalization of CBM as a dominant practice for people management. Organizations do not compete exclusively based on economic rationality, but constantly seek social legitimacy in their context (Scott, Amarante, 2016). Such “pillars of institutionalization” (Scott, 2008) give rise to isomorphism, which can be coercive (by force of law, for example), normative (such as ISO certifications and Brazil’s National Quality Foundation awards) or mimetic, through which companies copy practices of others not so much based on evidence of economic results, but because such practices are perceived as socially legitimate, and adopted in a ceremonial way. This diffusion mechanism operated in the 1990s in quality practices, and more recently in the field of social responsibility. It can be assumed that in the field of people management, CBM uses a similar logic. Therefore, such models can become underutilized, generating a mismatch between the organization’s needs and the competencies demanded of people. As this detachment increases, there is a risk that the model will only play a ritualistic and bureaucratic role in the appraisal cycles, until it is finally discarded due to the lack of its contribution perception. In the end, the sum of these arguments can provide skeptics doubts on CBM, for whom it is another fad or just a cover-up to hide old Fordist relations of exploitation (Faria & Leal, 2005).

Possible limitations to the model’s viability and potential do not stem from structural problems in its design, but from the conceptual and methodological laxity that surround some implementation projects. Greater conceptual rigor of the term to support interventions — associating competency with delivery and distinguishing it from values, attitudes and knowledge; the invest-



ment of time and customization efforts by companies and consultancies, counting on the time for consolidation; and the proposition of technical competencies can lead the CBM models to reinforce their strategic contribution. Given these aspects, it is possible to enhance the contributions of the CBM models and to relativize the strength of mimetic institutional mechanisms in their dissemination, since the economic-instrumental rationality derived from their benefits would overlap the logic of social legitimacy. Thus, in spite of the criticisms, CBM models offer a promising perspective both to integrate Human Resources practices and to give such practices a strategic scope, as noted by Redmond (2013) in empirical research.

This article launches propositions that deserve debate in future empirical studies on the topic, which, despite much discussion, has not overcome basic gaps for its development and strategic contribution. For future research, it is suggested to carry out case studies to understand how it occurs the mechanism through which individual competencies are detached from strategies and organizational values.

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