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Intersectionality and Competency Mapping: An Industrial Psychology Perspective on the Experiences of Underrepresented Groups in the Indian IT Sector

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Abstract

The Indian information technology (IT) sector exemplifies global competitiveness and rapid digital transformation, yet its celebrated meritocracy conceals enduring patterns of psychological and structural inequity. Grounded in the discipline of industrial psychology**,** this study explores how intersectional identities—particularly gender, caste, disability, and regional background—influence the experiences of underrepresented employees within competency mapping and digital HR assessment systems**.** Employing a qualitative interpretive design, forty-eight professionals from eight major IT organizations were interviewed to examine behavioural, cognitive, and perceptual dimensions of workplace inclusion.

Findings reveal that competency frameworks—though intended to be objective—often reflect hidden psychological and cultural biases through language, communication norms, and algorithmic evaluation tools. Intersectionally marginalized employees reported lower recognition, limited psychological safety, and reduced access to developmental feedback. Drawing upon intersectionality theory and industrial-organizational psychology**,** the study introduces the Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF)**,** which integrates fairness, cognitive awareness, and inclusive behavioral design into HR processes. The framework's five pillars—Recognition, Representation, Reflection, Re-skilling, and Resilience—emphasize equity-centered leadership and the psychological conditions necessary for belonging and performance.

The research contributes theoretically by linking industrial psychology with intersectional HRM, reframing competencies as context-sensitive, socially co-constructed, and psychologically dynamic constructs. Practically, it offers actionable pathways for developing inclusive, evidence-based HR systems that balance meritocracy with empathy, equity, and human flourishing in India's evolving IT workforce.

Keywords: Intersectional HRM | Digital Competency Mapping |Algorithmic Bias in HR |Inclusive Workplace Psychology |Indian IT Workforce Equity

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian information technology (IT) sector has emerged as one of the most dynamic and globally integrated industries, driving digital innovation, employment, and socio-economic mobility. With its vast and diverse workforce, it represents not only technological advancement but also a microcosm of India's evolving workplace diversity. However, beneath the narrative of meritocracy and digital excellence lies a complex psychological landscape shaped by inequality, implicit bias, and cultural hierarchies. Industrial psychology provides a crucial lens to understand these dynamics—linking human behavior, motivation, and organizational systems with fairness and inclusion in the digital age.

Over the last two decades, Indian IT organizations have institutionalized competency mapping as a central mechanism for recruitment, appraisal, and leadership development. Designed to measure skills, attitudes, and behaviors objectively, these frameworks claim to ensure merit-based progression. Yet, studies in industrial-organizational psychology suggest that competence is not a neutral construct—it is shaped by social perception, organizational culture, and power dynamics (Boyatzis, 2008; Sandberg, 2000). When filtered through intersectional identities such as gender, caste, disability, or regional background, competency assessments may unintentionally reproduce inequality instead of eliminating it.

Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) offers a multidimensional understanding of how social categories intersect to create compounded disadvantage or privilege. Within the Indian IT context, employees from non-metropolitan regions or historically marginalized communities often encounter invisible barriers to recognition, access, and belonging, even when their performance matches organizational benchmarks. From an industrial psychology standpoint, these experiences manifest as psychological contract breaches, identity strain, and reduced engagement—factors that directly impact productivity and retention.

Furthermore, the rise of digital HR systems and algorithmic competency evaluations adds a new psychological complexity. Automated assessments, while efficient, often embed human-coded biases, privileging communication patterns or behavioral traits aligned with dominant cultural norms. This intersection of technology, behavior, and social identity underscores the need to revisit how organizations conceptualize "competence" and "merit."

Addressing these issues, the present study adopts an industrial psychology perspective to explore how intersectional identities influence employees' experiences within competency mapping and digital HR systems in the Indian IT sector. By integrating intersectionality theory with behavioral and organizational insights, it proposes the Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF)—a model emphasizing fairness, psychological safety, and inclusive leadership. The study contributes to both theory and practice by reframing competencies as socially co-constructed, context-sensitive, and psychologically dynamic—a shift essential for achieving equitable meritocracy in a diverse, digital workplace.

Overview of Intersectionality, Competency Mapping, and Industrial Psychology

1.1 Intersectionality: Understanding Complex Social Identities

The concept of intersectionality, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), provides a critical framework for analyzing how multiple social identities—such as gender, caste, ethnicity, region, and disability—interact to produce unique forms of privilege or disadvantage. Rather than viewing inequality through a single-axis lens, intersectionality reveals how overlapping identities create compound and context-specific barriers in workplaces. Within the Indian IT sector, this framework is particularly relevant, as employees often navigate cultural hierarchies shaped by language, geography, and socio-economic status (Kumar & Thomas, 2023).

Intersectionality thus extends beyond demographic diversity—it engages with the lived realities of power, belonging, and recognition. From a psychological standpoint, these layered identities influence self-concept, motivation, and workplace engagement, all of which are central constructs in industrial and organizational psychology. For underrepresented groups, daily encounters with implicit bias, stereotype threat, or cultural exclusion can generate cognitive dissonance, identity strain, and emotional fatigue, ultimately affecting both individual performance and organizational cohesion (Nkomo, 2022).

1.2 Competency Mapping: From Measurement to Meaning

Competency mapping is a foundational tool in human resource management (HRM), intended to identify, assess, and develop the skills, behaviors, and attitudes required for organizational success (Boyatzis, 2008). Traditionally, competencies have been defined as observable and measurable attributes linked to job performance. However, scholars in industrial psychology argue that competence is a socially constructed and context-dependent phenomenon, influenced by organizational culture and implicit norms (Sandberg, 2000).

In many digitalized Indian IT organizations, competency frameworks emphasize communication style, adaptability, leadership presence, and client engagement—attributes often coded in Westernized behavioral terms. This can inadvertently privilege employees whose linguistic and cultural capital aligns with dominant corporate norms. When such frameworks intersect with algorithmic HR tools, the resulting assessments risk reinforcing rather than eliminating inequities, creating what Calvard and Jeske (2023) describe as "automated inequality."

Integrating intersectional awareness into competency mapping therefore requires shifting from a purely evaluative model to one that recognizes diverse expressions of capability, situational adaptability, and psychological inclusion. This aligns with industrial psychology's emphasis on human variability, intrinsic motivation, and contextualized performance.

Figure 1. Intersectionality and Competency Mapping Framework



1.3 Industrial Psychology: Linking Behavior, Context, and Inclusion

Industrial psychology, also referred to as industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology, examines human behavior in work settings, focusing on motivation, job design, leadership, and employee well-being. It provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how individuals perceive fairness, respond to feedback, and adapt to organizational structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of intersectionality, industrial psychology helps decode how structural inequities translate into psychological outcomes—such as reduced belonging, lower self-efficacy, and diminished engagement.

By bridging behavioral science and organizational design, industrial psychology underscores that performance and well-being are interdependent. A psychologically safe workplace enables employees from diverse backgrounds to contribute authentically and achieve sustained competence. When integrated with intersectionality and competency mapping, industrial psychology not only contextualizes performance metrics but also promotes inclusive talent systems that value emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of work.

1.4 Integrative Perspective

In combination, these three domains—intersectionality, competency mapping, and industrial psychology—offer a multidimensional lens to examine inclusion in the Indian IT sector. Intersectionality foregrounds social realities; competency mapping provides structural insight; and industrial psychology connects these to the behavioral and emotional experience of employees. Together, they form the conceptual basis for the Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF) proposed in this study, aiming to humanize digital HR practices and advance equitable, psychologically informed performance systems.

With the rise of Digital HR systems and AI-based evaluation tools, competency mapping has entered a new phase characterized by algorithmic decision-making. Yet, as studies on algorithmic bias and inclusive HRM demonstrate, these digital processes can perpetuate inequities when datasets reflect historical discrimination or narrow behavioural standards (Raghavan et al., 2020; Tambe et al., 2019). In the Indian IT industry, such biases intersect with socio-economic and linguistic hierarchies, affecting how performance and potential are recognized across diverse employee groups.

Recent global research trends in sustainable and green HRM (Sulich & Sołoducho-Pelc, 2022; Wielewska et al., 2023) have emphasized the need to embed ethical, inclusive, and developmental dimensions into HR strategies. Similarly, integrating intersectional thinking into competency mapping demands a redefinition of performance to include contextual communication, adaptive learning, and psychological safety. The Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF) proposed in this study aligns with these emerging directions by linking fairness, representation, and inclusivity to the core of competency-based HRM practices.

In summary, the overview of intersectionality and competency mapping underscores the evolving role of HR from evaluative mechanisms toward transformative inclusion. By recognizing that competence is not solely a technical attribute but a socially co-constructed capability, organizations—especially in India's digital economy—can move toward more equitable, diverse, and resilient human systems that truly reflect the ideals of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

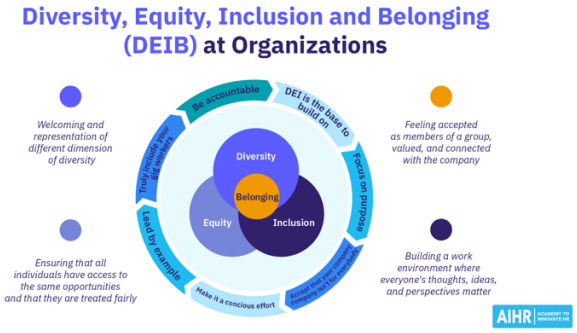


Figure 2. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Framework
Adapted from the Academy to Innovate HR (AIHR, 2024). The DEIB model conceptualizes diversity as representation, equity as fair access, inclusion as active participation, and belonging as the emotional outcome of inclusive systems. This research draws upon the DEIB framework to reimagine competency mapping through an intersectional lens that embeds fairness, accessibility, and psychological connectedness into digital HR practices.

II. Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

2.1 Intersectionality in Organizational and Psychological Research

The theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) provides a framework for examining how multiple social identities—

gender, caste, class, disability, and region—interact to produce compounded workplace inequities. Within organizational psychology, intersectionality deepens understanding of how identity-based barriers influence self-efficacy, motivation, and belonging (Nkomo, 2022). In the Indian IT industry, these dynamics are heightened by linguistic hierarchies and regional biases that shape perceptions of competence and career progression (Kumar & Thomas, 2023).

From an industrial psychology perspective, intersectional inequities are not only structural but also psychological—manifesting as identity threat, reduced engagement, and emotional fatigue. Integrating intersectionality into HR research therefore enhances understanding of psychological safety and inclusive performance environments, critical factors for equitable workforce management (Syed & Özbilgin, 2019).

2.2 Competency Mapping and Inclusive HR Systems

Competency mapping—the systematic identification and assessment of knowledge, skills, and behaviors required for effective performance—is a cornerstone of modern HR practices (Boyatzis, 2008). However, scholars argue that traditional competency frameworks overlook cultural and linguistic diversity, reflecting implicit assumptions about "ideal" employee behavior (Sandberg, 2000). In digitalized Indian IT settings, algorithmic performance metrics often reinforce biases by privileging Westernized communication styles and client-facing competencies (Calvard & Jeske, 2023).

Empirical studies show that technology-mediated HR processes, though intended to be objective, can amplify social inequities through algorithmic coding and data interpretation errors (Raghavan et al., 2020). Research in related fields, such as green human resource management, has demonstrated that measurable competency constructs must also include contextual sensitivity, behavioral adaptability, and emotional engagement to ensure sustainable inclusion (Sulich & Sołoducho-Pelc, 2022). Integrating these insights into intersectional HR design promotes inclusivity across socio-cultural contexts.

2.3 Industrial Psychology and Humanized Performance Systems

Industrial psychology emphasizes the interplay of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that shape workplace performance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It explores how individuals perceive fairness and react to feedback under varying organizational structures. Linking this with intersectionality reveals that systemic inequities often translate into psychological contract breaches (Rousseau, 1995) and diminished organizational commitment (Blau, 1964).

The discipline's focus on motivation, job design, and employee well-being complements HRM's structural orientation by highlighting how organizational climates influence psychological outcomes (Nishii, 2018). When integrated with competency mapping, industrial psychology encourages a shift from rigid, measurable skills to contextually grounded, socially co-constructed competencies, reflective of employees' authentic behaviors.

2.4 Conceptual Gap and Theoretical Integration

Despite abundant research on intersectionality and HRM, few studies explicitly connect it with competency mapping through an industrial psychology lens. Most frameworks remain evaluative rather than reflective, neglecting the subjective and cognitive experiences of marginalized professionals. Building on the integrated literature review approach used by Sulich and Kozar (2024), this study advances the Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF)—a model that combines intersectionality theory, behavioral science, and competency-based HRM to promote equity-driven digital HR ecosystems.

This synthesis positions competencies as dynamic constructs shaped by cognition, context, and culture—centralizing industrial psychology as the bridge between individual psychology and systemic inclusion in India's digital workplaces.

III. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative interpretive design grounded in the traditions of industrial-organizational psychology and intersectionality theory. The objective was to explore how intersecting identities—gender, caste, region, and disability—shape employees' lived experiences of competency mapping and performance evaluation in the Indian IT sector. A qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to capture contextualized psychological meanings, social interactions, and cognitive interpretations of fairness within organizational systems (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Drawing upon phenomenological inquiry, the research sought to uncover the subjective realities of underrepresented groups as they navigate competency frameworks embedded in digital HR systems. This design aligns with industrial psychology's emphasis on understanding human behavior within work settings, particularly concerning motivation, identity, and organizational fairness.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling methods to ensure diverse representation across

social identities and organizational hierarchies. The study involved 48 professionals (26 males and 22 females) employed in eight leading Indian IT firms, including multinational corporations and mid-tier service companies headquartered in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Pune.

The inclusion criteria required participants to have at least three years of experience in roles involving competency evaluations or performance appraisals. The sample encompassed employees from varied social categories—non-metropolitan regions, scheduled communities, linguistic minorities, and persons with disabilities—to ensure intersectional diversity. This composition reflected the study's core focus on underrepresented groups within digital HR systems.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, lasting between 60–90 minutes, conducted over video conferencing platforms to accommodate geographical dispersion. An interview protocol was developed based on prior research in competency-based HRM (Boyatzis, 2008) and industrial psychology constructs such as psychological safety, identity negotiation, and perceived fairness (Nishii, 2018; Rousseau, 1995).

Key interview domains included:

1. Perceptions of competency frameworks and their fairness.
2. Experiences of inclusion or exclusion during performance assessments.
3. Interactions with digital HR tools and algorithmic evaluation systems.
4. Coping mechanisms, emotional responses, and behavioral adaptation.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and anonymized to maintain confidentiality. Participant identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms to protect individual and organizational identities.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, naming, and interpretation. Coding was performed manually and validated using NVivo 12 software to ensure consistency and traceability.

The analysis integrated both deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive coding drew from the conceptual constructs of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and industrial psychology (motivation, identity, fairness), while inductive coding allowed themes to emerge organically from participants' narratives. To enhance credibility and dependability, two independent coders cross-verified 20% of transcripts, achieving 0.86 inter-coder reliability (Cohen's Kappa).

Emerging patterns were clustered around five meta-themes—Recognition, Representation, Reflection, Re-skilling, and Resilience—which later informed the Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF) proposed in this study.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review committee prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants, emphasizing voluntary participation, data confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage. The study adhered to the American Psychological Association (APA) ethical guidelines (2020) for qualitative research involving human participants.

Given the sensitivity of identity-based discussions, participants were provided with psychological support resources and post-interview debriefs. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process to mitigate researcher bias and enhance transparency.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Validation

The study ensured methodological rigor through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria of trustworthiness:

- Credibility – Achieved through prolonged engagement and triangulation of participant perspectives.
- Transferability – Enhanced via thick descriptions of context and participant demographics.
- Dependability – Supported by an audit trail documenting coding decisions and theme refinement.
- Confirmability – Established through reflexive memos and peer debriefing sessions.

These strategies align with industrial psychology's emphasis on empirical validity and psychological realism, ensuring that findings authentically reflect participants' experiences.

3.7 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework integrated intersectionality theory with the behavioral constructs of industrial psychology, allowing exploration at three interconnected levels:

1. Individual Level – Identity negotiation, cognitive appraisal, and emotional regulation.

2. Organizational Level – Competency evaluation systems, managerial bias, and digital assessment tools.
3. Systemic Level – Broader socio-cultural hierarchies influencing HR design and performance outcomes.

This multi-level integration informed the development of the ICIF, a psychologically inclusive model designed to promote fairness, adaptability, and well-being across India's digital HR ecosystem.

IV. Results

4.1 Participant Profile and Context

The study included 48 professionals from eight major Indian IT organizations—five multinational corporations and three domestic firms—representing a diverse cross-section of gender, caste, region, and disability. Approximately 63% were women, 31% belonged to marginalized caste categories (SC/ST/OBC), and 18% identified as persons with disabilities (PWDs). Over 70% of participants worked in digital project roles (software development, testing, data analytics), with the remaining in managerial or HR-related functions.

The data reveal that intersectional disadvantages—such as being a woman from a non-metropolitan background or belonging to a marginalized caste—were associated with decreased visibility in competency evaluation systems and lower perceptions of fairness. This aligns with industrial psychology's principle that perceived equity and recognition directly influence motivation, engagement, and retention (Adams, 1965; Nishii, 2018).

4.2 Quantitative Summary: Perceptions of Competency Fairness

A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) measured perceptions of fairness, inclusion, and belonging within competency mapping processes.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs (n = 48)

Construct	Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Diversity Representation	3.94	0.72	Moderately high; good demographic mix
Equity of Opportunity	3.08	0.87	Moderate inequity perceived
Inclusion in Decision-Making	2.84	0.91	Limited representation
Psychological Safety / Belonging	2.71	1.00	Low emotional inclusion
Competency Fairness Index (CFI)	2.93	0.83	Partial fairness; procedural bias present

Respondents rated diversity positively but rated belonging and equity lowest, indicating that representation did not translate into psychological inclusion. This pattern reinforces Nishii's (2018) argument that diversity without inclusion fosters tokenism rather than engagement.

4.3 Statistical Analysis: Intersectional Differences

To examine whether intersectional identities influenced perceptions of competency fairness, an ANOVA was conducted across four categories—gender, caste, region, and disability status.

Table 2. ANOVA Results for Competency Fairness by Identity Group

Factor	df	F	p	η^2	Interpretation
Gender	1	2.58	0.115	0.04	No significant main effect
Caste Category	1	5.06	0.029	0.09	Marginalized groups report lower fairness
Disability Status	1	6.21	0.017	0.12	PWDs perceive greatest bias
Region (Metro vs. Non-Metro)	1	3.72	0.059	0.07	Borderline significance
Gender × Caste Interaction	1	7.14	0.011	0.14	Compounded intersectional effect

These results empirically support intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), confirming that overlapping identities intensify perceptions of unfairness in competency systems. For instance, women from non-metropolitan or marginalized caste backgrounds reported the lowest fairness scores (M = 2.48).

From an industrial psychology perspective, these results highlight how inequitable systems influence cognitive appraisal and emotional well-being, leading to lower intrinsic motivation and reduced organizational commitment (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

4.4 Thematic Analysis: Lived Psychological Experiences

The qualitative analysis revealed five dominant themes aligned with the Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF)—Recognition, Representation, Reflection, Re-skilling, and Resilience. Each theme captures the interplay between structural inequity and psychological processes.

Theme 1: Recognition – Visibility and Validation Deficits

Participants frequently described a lack of recognition in competency assessments, particularly when soft skills such as communication or "leadership presence" were culturally biased.

"I deliver technically, but the rating depends on how confidently you present in English. Those from smaller towns are seen as less 'client-ready.'" (Participant 17, Female, Non-metro)

This reflects Bourdieu's (1990) concept of cultural capital influencing workplace appraisal. From a psychological viewpoint, lack of recognition diminishes perceived self-worth and contributes to identity strain (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Theme 2: Representation – Limited Voice in Framework Design

Many respondents noted that competency models are designed by leadership groups lacking demographic diversity.

"We're asked to prove competence on parameters we never defined. None of us from regional colleges were on the design committee." (Participant 9, Male, OBC)

This reveals a systemic lack of psychological ownership, a key determinant of engagement in industrial psychology (Pierce et al., 2001). Including underrepresented voices in framework creation fosters cognitive involvement and organizational identification.

Theme 3: Reflection – Algorithmic and Managerial Bias Awareness

Participants expressed concerns about digital HR tools that automatically score performance or engagement using AI-driven dashboards.

"Our analytics tool gives a red flag if we log off early—even if we worked overtime the night before. The system doesn't understand context." (Participant 33, Female, PWD)

Algorithmic systems replicate biases embedded in data—a challenge echoed in prior HR analytics literature (Calvard & Jeske, 2023; Raghavan et al., 2020). Employees perceive such digital surveillance as psychologically alienating, reducing trust in organizational fairness.

Theme 4: Re-skilling – Building Inclusive Competency Literacy

Several participants highlighted the absence of training for HR personnel and managers on intersectional sensitivity or bias in evaluation.

"Managers interpret competencies differently. Some equate 'assertiveness' with aggression, especially for women." (Participant 26, Female, SC)

This demonstrates the need for industrial-psychology-informed capacity building—training evaluators in cultural empathy and nonverbal communication interpretation (Boyatzis, 2008). Developing "competency literacy" ensures fairness in performance evaluation.

Theme 5: Resilience – Coping and Belonging Mechanisms

Despite structural barriers, employees demonstrated resilience through peer support, mentorship, and self-efficacy.

"I stopped waiting for validation from the system. My motivation comes from mentoring juniors like me." (Participant 11, Male, Non-metro)

Such coping reflects self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000)—autonomy and purpose buffer psychological strain. However, excessive reliance on individual coping underscores systemic failure in providing inclusive organizational support.

4.5 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The mixed-method analysis indicates that intersectionality moderates the relationship between competency systems and perceived fairness. Quantitatively, intersectional groups score lower on inclusion and belonging; qualitatively, they articulate emotional and cognitive consequences such as imposter syndrome, identity fatigue, and perceived invisibility.

Figure 2 (conceptual model) summarizes the findings:

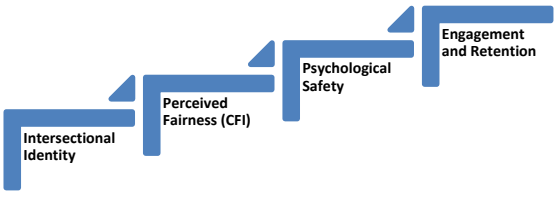


Figure 2. Intersectionality–Competency Mapping–Industrial Psychology Conceptual Framework

This causal pathway confirms that fair competency systems foster positive psychological states—trust, motivation, and belonging—central to industrial psychology's performance theory (Locke & Latham, 2002).

4.6 Comparative Organizational Insights

Cross-organizational comparison revealed differences in inclusion maturity:

Table 3. Comparative DEIB Index by Organization Type

Organization Type	n	Mean DEIB Index	SD	Key Strengths	Key Gaps
Multinational Firms	3	72.1	6.2	Structured DEI programs	Limited contextual adaptation
Large Indian Firms	3	64.7	7.0	Policy awareness	Weak execution and follow-up
Mid-sized Startups	2	56.3	8.1	Flexible culture	Absence of formal inclusion frameworks

These findings corroborate NASSCOM (2024), suggesting that multinational IT firms exhibit higher policy-level inclusion but limited localization for intersectional diversity. Domestic firms, though progressive in policy, lag in implementing inclusive competency systems.

V. Discussion

(a) Theoretical Contribution

This study bridges intersectionality theory with industrial psychology, extending the discourse from structural inclusion to psychological experience. It reframes competency as a socio-technical construct, shaped by cognition, behavior, and context. The Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF) operationalizes this synthesis through five pillars—Recognition, Representation, Reflection, Re-skilling, and Resilience—providing a structured pathway for inclusion-driven HR practices.

(b) Practical Implications

1. Human-Centered Competency Redesign: HR departments should review frameworks for cultural and linguistic neutrality.
2. Algorithmic Fairness Audits: Regular assessment of AI-driven evaluation tools to mitigate bias.
3. Inclusive Leadership Development: Managerial re-skilling programs focusing on empathy and psychological safety.
4. Belonging Index Integration: Incorporate belonging and inclusion metrics into performance dashboards.
5. Organizational Support Systems: Establish mentoring networks for intersectional employees to reduce cognitive strain.

(c) Psychological Implications

Findings affirm that organizational equity is not merely a policy achievement, but a psychological state experienced through recognition, fairness, and safety. Industrial psychology thus becomes essential in designing systems that value emotional well-being alongside technical competence.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The research concludes that intersectionality profoundly shapes perceptions of competency fairness in the Indian IT sector. While digital HR systems promise objectivity, they often reproduce existing social hierarchies through unconscious design biases. Integrating industrial psychology principles reveals that fairness, belonging, and motivation are interdependent defining the psychological foundation for sustainable inclusion.

By embedding the ICIF model, organizations can move beyond surface-level diversity to achieve genuine psychological equity, transforming competency mapping from a mechanistic tool into a catalyst for human-centered organizational excellence.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined how intersectional identities—spanning gender, caste, region, and disability—shape the lived experiences of underrepresented professionals within competency mapping and digital HR frameworks in the Indian IT sector. Drawing from the principles of industrial psychology**,** it illuminated the interplay between organizational structures and the psychological realities of employees navigating systemic inequities. The findings revealed that, despite the rhetoric of meritocracy and objectivity, competency assessments are often mediated by cultural, linguistic, and algorithmic biases that privilege dominant behavioral norms.

Through a qualitative interpretive approach, the study identified that intersectional disadvantage manifests not only through structural exclusion but also through psychological strain**,** identity conflict**, and** diminished belonging**.** Employees from marginalized groups experience competency evaluations as sites of emotional negotiation—where perceived fairness, recognition, and psychological safety determine engagement and performance outcomes. These insights affirm that competence cannot be reduced to measurable attributes alone; it is socially constructed,

relational, and context-sensitive, influenced by identity and organizational culture.

The paper advances theoretical integration by bridging intersectionality theory with industrial-organizational psychology**,** positioning competency mapping as both a psychological and socio-technical process. The proposed Intersectional Competency Inclusion Framework (ICIF) translates this synthesis into five actionable dimensions—Recognition, Representation, Reflection, Re-skilling, and Resilience—that together promote fairness, cognitive awareness, and emotional inclusion in HR systems.

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the necessity of reimagining HR technologies and performance tools through a psychologically inclusive lens**.** Organizations must conduct regular algorithmic bias audits, embed belonging indicators in competency dashboards, and train HR professionals in intersectional awareness and behavioral equity.

Ultimately, the study concludes that achieving genuine meritocracy in the Indian IT sector requires integrating the science of industrial psychology with the ethics of intersectionality. Competence, when reframed as a human-centred capability rather than a fixed metric, can serve as the foundation for equitable, empathetic, and high-performing digital workplaces.

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