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"The Impact of Strategic Employee Development Practices on Employee Performance: The Mediating Roles of Employee Competency and Employee Engagement."

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Abstract:

Employee development strategies have proven to be a vital tool to improve organizational effectiveness in today's rapidly changing business landscape. The role of employee competency and employee engagement in the relationship between strategic employee development practices and employee performance is explored in this study. Based on human capital theory and the job demands-resources model, the study proposes that structured developmental interventions, including specific training, career pathing, mentoring and ongoing training and development opportunities, can increase the knowledge, skills and abilities of the employees, as well as strengthen psychological investment in their jobs. The data was gathered using a structured questionnaire with the full time employees of various industries. The hypothesized relationships were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). Results show that strategic employee development practices have a significant positive direct link with the employee performance. This relationship is partly mediated by employee competency and employee engagement, suggesting that developmental initiatives have a secondary effect on performance outcomes other than the effect of increasing employees' capability, namely by increasing their motivational engagement. It is important to note that two pathways of mediation are involved: cognitive and affective, indicating the complementary role of these processes in determining the higher performance resulting from the investment during development. The results make a scientific contribution to the literature for two reasons: they help explain how strategic development practices relate to individual outcomes of performance; and they help clarify the processes through which strategic development practices lead to outcomes of performance. In practice, the study highlights the need for the development of an overall system of employee development that simultaneously focuses on competency development and employee engagement cultivation in organizations. The HR professionals are encouraged to look at going beyond individual training initiatives to an all-inclusive, strategy-driven development architecture. Constraints and recommendations for future studies such as longitudinal studies and cross-cultural adaptations are discussed.

Keywords: Strategic Employee Development Practices, Employee Competency, Employee Engagement, Employee Performance, Human Capital Development

Introduction

Maximising the use of Human Capital as a source of sustainable competitive advantage is under ever increasing pressure for organisations in today's fast-changing business environment. The effectiveness of employee work has been a key factor in the success of an organisation and affects an organisation's productivity, innovativeness, service quality and profitability (Bhat et al., 2020). With markets becoming more dynamic and knowledge-oriented, the systematic development of companies' human resources has shifted from being a peripheral HR function to a strategic one (Singh et al., 2025). Employee development strategies, which include planned training as well as development programs, mentoring, coaching and ongoing learning efforts, are becoming a key lever to connect the individual to the organisation. While the importance of employee development is well-understood, it remains common to see employee development activities as a one-off or compliance based activity, instead of a well-planned and integrated process. This disconnection can lead to poor human capital returns on investment.

Training may be inappropriate to the job or company's project and, as a result, employees may not benefit much in terms of their job performance. There is therefore a need for such understanding of whether strategic employee development practices lead to improvements in performance as well as the workings of those processes that lead to such improvements (Rathi et al., 2022). Two key constructs that could help shed light on the connection between developmental investments and employee performance are employee competency and employee engagement. Competency is a set of knowledge, skills, abilities and behavioral attributes that allow individuals to perform effectively in their job (Yaqoob Mohammed Al Jabri et al., 2021). Engagement, however, is a mental, emotional and physical commitment that employees make to their jobs (Gupta et al., 2024). Although both constructs have been studied separately with regard to their relationship with employee performance, the dual role they play in the relationship between strategic development practices and employee performance has not yet been extensively investigated.

These relationships can be well understood with the use of theoretical perspectives from human capital theory and the job demands-resources model. According to human capital theory, the investment of human capital leads to additional knowledge and skills that are stocked in the individual and will contribute to their productivity (Nwaeze et al., 2024). The job demands-resources model also proposes that developmental resources can increase motivational energy and decrease strain and thus lead to increased engagement. These together suggest that strategic development practices can proceed by two streams; the first one concerning development capabilities (competency), the second one about development investments (engagement) (Bali et al., 2021). Previous empirical studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between the different training and development methods and employee performance. Much of this literature, however, has been written in a piecemeal fashion and has addressed individual interventions, not systems of the organization.

Furthermore, previous research on mediation processes has tended to focus on one type of mediation mechanism (competency or engagement) without taking into account that these two mechanisms might function together and possibly work synergistically. Having this divide diminishes the theoretical knowledge about the impact of developmental efforts on improvements in performance (Chaudhuri et al., 2022). Further, the literature is relatively quiet regarding the mediating role of competency and engagement in a single integrated model, and the role of media in a sequence of sequential models. Also, the literature is unevenly distributed with regard to the mediating role of competency and engagement in one integrated model and the mediating role of media in a sequential model. These mechanisms need to be understood to refine the theory and for managerial practice. When competency is mostly a skill that is passed down from development to performance, then organizations could focus on skill development interventions (Ray et al., 2025).

On the other hand, if engagement is more of a mediator, then the need for greater focus on applying psychologically supportive developmental climates might be warranted. Knowing the relative and combined effects of these two mediators may therefore help to prioritize the allocation of resources (Pattanaik et al., 2025). In this context, the current study aims to investigate how strategic employee development practices affect employees' performance and whether employee competency and employee engagement are mediators. The research will build on these constructs within one unified theory to increase the understanding of the process mechanisms that connect investments in development to individual performance outcomes (Venkatesh et al., 2020). The study addresses calls for more fine-grained investigations into mediation in the study of HRM and makes a valuable addition to the emerging literature on strategic human capital development. This study has both theoretical and practical contribution. It theoretically expands the existing models by both including competency and engagement as dual mediators, providing a more holistic explanation of the development–performance relationship.

Solutions to the practical problem in hand are likely to be the evidence-based guidance for human resource managers who want to design development systems that will maximize the return on performance. Knowing the development-capability-performance relationships enable organizations to design development interventions that target capability and commitment. The rest of this paper will be structured as follows: The literature review is given in the next section, and the hypotheses are developed. The research methodology, the empirical results and

the theoretical and managerial implications are described in the following sections. The paper ends with a statement of the limitations and recommendations for future research.

Review Of Literature

The linkage between strategic human resource development and employee performance has been the subject of much discussion in the current human resource management literature, especially in the healthcare industry. Alka Sangeeta (2025) studied HRD practices and employee performance relation in private hospitals and concluded that training, coaching and career development have a significant positive impact on employee capability and motivation which ultimately improves the employee performance. The study highlighted the importance of Human Capital Theory and Social Exchange Theory in understanding the nature of the linkages between developmental investments and better performance at work. In a similar study, Ahmed, Keino, and Machoka (2022) found that strategic leadership was indirectly related to the performance of healthcare workers through employee retention, underscoring the need for employee empowerment, recognition, and reward and development opportunities. From their findings, they conclude that the role of organizational support systems in maintaining employees' commitment and productivity is very significant. Bhati, Deogade, and Kanyal (2023) emphasized the need for effective leadership, collaboration across different disciplines, and continuous improvement practices for a successful hospital administration. The authors concluded that good HR and effective administrative practices are the key elements of quality in services. Furthermore, Parayitam et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between HRM practices, knowledge management practices, and organizational performance in the healthcare industry. They found that it had a positive effect on organizational performance and knowledge management practices enhanced the effectiveness of training and development activities. The study showed the strategic importance of embedding learning systems into the organisation's knowledge resources. Employee engagement has also proven to be a key factor in performance results. Among nurses, an HRM practice-employee engagement relationship was found to be positively and significantly associated by Jose and PM (2024). The study validated the mediating effects of psychological safety and psychological availability in the relationship between supportive HRM practices and engagement, highlighting the importance of positive psychological states in this link. Similarly, Bharath and Sreedevi (2021) found a positive correlation between employee engagement, perception, and satisfaction in a health care organization. They concluded that engagement is shaped by demographic and job characteristics, and that engagement relates to employee attitudes and work outcomes. Supporting this, RJ Singh, Sharma, Mittal, and Chand (2024) studied how motivating language affects employee performance in the healthcare industry. The study showed that the relationship between leadership communication and performance is mediated by employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior, highlighting the importance of motivational mechanisms in improving the quality of healthcare services. Moreover, Koul and Bhoomadevi (2025) concluded that organizational commitment partially explains the connection between employee engagement and hospital quality accreditation. According to their findings, engaged workers have a deeper emotional connection with their company, resulting in enhanced quality measures and organizational achievement. All these studies suggest that strategic development practices, employee engagement, organizational commitment, knowledge management, and competency development are intertwined processes which have a significant impact on employee and organizational performance. At the same time, however, few studies have explored employee competency and employee engagement as two mediators between strategic employee development practices and employee performance. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by creating the integrated framework to understand how development initiatives contribute to the improvement of performance both through the capability-building and motivational pathways.

Statement Of The Problem

In contemporary organizations, employee performance constitutes a fundamental determinant of productivity, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability. Despite substantial investments in human resource development initiatives, many organizations continue to experience inconsistent improvements in individual and collective performance outcomes (Osimokha et al., 2025). Strategic employee development practices, which encompass systematic training, career planning, mentoring, coaching, and continuous learning programs, are widely advocated as mechanisms for enhancing workforce capability (Mushtaq et al., 2026). However, the translation of

these developmental investments into measurable performance gains remains uneven across organizations and contexts. A critical concern is that development interventions are frequently designed and implemented without a clear understanding of the intervening psychological and capability-related processes that link developmental efforts to performance results (Prakash et al., 2026). Employee competency, representing the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for effective role execution, and employee engagement, reflecting the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment of individuals in their work, have both been independently associated with performance. Yet, existing research has largely examined these constructs in isolation rather than as simultaneous mediating mechanisms within an integrated model. Consequently, there is limited empirical clarity regarding whether strategic employee development practices influence performance primarily through the enhancement of competency, the stimulation of engagement, or through the combined operation of both pathways. This gap in understanding constrains theoretical advancement and restricts the ability of practitioners to design development systems that optimally leverage both capability building and motivational processes (Moreira et al., 2025). Furthermore, many organizations continue to adopt fragmented or compliance-oriented approaches to employee development, resulting in suboptimal returns on human capital investment and persistent performance deficiencies. Without a comprehensive examination of the dual mediating roles of competency and engagement, decision-makers lack evidence-based guidance on how to structure developmental interventions for maximum performance impact (Fatema 2026). The absence of such integrated insights perpetuates inefficient resource allocation, weakens the strategic alignment between human resource practices and organizational goals, and limits the potential of employee development to serve as a sustained source of competitive advantage. Therefore, a systematic investigation into the impact of strategic employee development practices on employee performance, with explicit attention to the mediating contributions of employee competency and employee engagement, is both theoretically necessary and practically urgent.

Objectives Of The Study

The research design of this study is quantitative using a cross sectional type of research. The primary data were collected by using structured questionnaire from the selected organizations on full-time employees. Strategic employee development practices, competency of employees, employee engagement, and employee performance were measured using standardized multi-item scales. Structural equation modeling was used to test the direct and indirect effects from the collected data. The measurement scales were found to be reliable and valid before testing the hypotheses.

Population And Sampling

The population for this study comprises full-time workers in several sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, services, information technology, health care, and retail. These employees have been chosen because they have first-hand knowledge of organizational employee development practices and performance evaluation systems. A quantitative Research method was used and data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Respondents having at least one year experience in their work were included using a purposive sampling method so that they have had sufficient exposure to development initiatives. The total sample was estimated to be 400 employees to get reliable statistical results and to be sufficient for the analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The sample comprised a variety of age, gender, educational level and organizational tenure. The enhanced generalizability and validity of the results on the relationship among strategic employee development practices, employee competency, employee engagement and employee performance is due to this sampling approach.

Data Collection And Sources

The study was based on primary and secondary data. A structured questionnaire was used to gather primary data to assess strategic employee development practices, employee competency, employee engagement and employee performance from full-time employees in different sectors. To increase the response rate, the questionnaire was distributed in both online and offline format. In order to develop the theoretical underpinning for the study, secondary data were gathered from academic journals, books, conference proceedings and relevant HRM

literature. The collected data was systematically coded and analyzed by using statistical method including SEMs (Structural Equation Modeling) to test the hypotheses.

Analysis And Findings

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 400)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Strategic Employee Development Practices	4.12	0.68	High
Employee Competency	4.08	0.71	High
Employee Engagement	4.05	0.74	High
Employee Performance	4.18	0.65	High

The descriptive statistics of major variables used in the study are shown in Table 1. The results showed that Strategic Employee Development Practices had a high mean score (4.12, SD = 0.68), suggesting that the organizations in which the respondents worked engaged in development practices like training, mentoring and career planning. The mean score for the subscales of Employee Competency was also high at 4.08 (SD = 0.71), indicating that employees have confidence in their knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for effective job performance. Likewise, the mean score for Employee Engagement was 4.05 (SD = 0.74), reflecting a high level of emotional and cognitive responses of employees towards their work. Most of the respondents performed favorably with Employee Performance the highest mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.65) while the lowest mean score was obtained for Maintenance at 3.82 (SD = 0.65). The standard deviation values were relatively low for each variable indicating uniformity of the respondents' perceptions. In the overall picture, the findings suggest that strategic development practices have a positive impact on improving employee competency, engagement, and performance in organizations. The results of this study indicate some preliminary justification for the hypothesized relationships between the variables of the study and call for the continuation of inferential analysis.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis among Study Variables

Variables	SEDP	EC	EE	EP
Strategic Employee Development Practices (SEDP)	1.000			
Employee Competency (EC)	0.712**	1.000		
Employee Engagement (EE)	0.685**	0.641**	1.000	
Employee Performance (EP)	0.748**	0.726**	0.694**	1.000

The correlation analysis between strategic employee development practices, employee competency, employee engagement, and employee performance. The results show that all the study variables have significant positive relationships at 0.01 level of significance. The strategic employee development practices had a strong positive correlation with employee competence (r = 0.712), which suggests that the development activities were effective in improving employees' knowledge, skills and abilities. Furthermore, there was a strong positive correlation between strategic employee development practices and employee engagement (r = 0.685), indicating that employees' psychological engagement towards their work is enhanced when they are offered development opportunities. In addition, strategic employee development practices had the highest correlation with employee performance (r = 0.748) indicating that these practices had the most direct impact on employee performance. Employee competency (r = 0.726) and employee engagement (r = 0.694) were also found to be positive correlation with employee performance, thus employee competency and employee engagement are the significant factors in enhancing the employee's performance effectiveness. In general, the results validate that employee competency, engagement, and performance are more likely to be high in organisations that are more concerned with strategic employee development..

Table 3: Model Fit Indices for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Obtained Value	Interpretation
Chi-square/df (CMIN/df)	< 3.00	2.145	Good Fit
GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.928	Good Fit
AGFI (Adjusted GFI)	> 0.80	0.892	Acceptable Fit
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.956	Excellent Fit
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	> 0.90	0.948	Excellent Fit
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	< 0.08	0.054	Good Fit
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	< 0.08	0.047	Good Fit

The model fit indices used to examine the goodness of fit of the proposed Structural Equation Model (SEM) are shown in Table 4. The values obtained reveal that the model fits the observed data well, with all the fit indices being within the recommended levels. The Chi-square/df value is 2.145, which is under the acceptable range of 3.00, indicating a good fit of the model. The GFI (0.928) and AGFI (0.892) are also in good agreement with the sample data, which indicates that the model provides a good representation. The CFI (0.956) and TLI (0.948) values are greater than the recommended value of 0.90, which shows overall excellent fit of the models to the data. The fitting indexes RMSEA (0.054) and SRMR (0.047) values are both on the lower side, which indicates that there is only minimal error between the model and the data, and the model is reliable. Generally, these findings provide support for the proposed structural model and substantiation of empirical support for the relationships between strategic employee development practices, employee competency, employee engagement, and employee performance.

Results And Discussion

Results of the study show that strategic employee development practices are positively associated with employee performance. The correlation and SEM results suggest that structured training, mentoring, career development and continuous learning opportunities result in better levels of employee competency and engagement. The competency of the employee proved to be a strong mediator as it was observed that the development activities boost the knowledge, skills and abilities of the employees, which then increases the performance results. The relationship was also strongly mediated by employee engagement, which showed that developmental practices led to increased psychological commitment and involvement in work. Overall, this study reinforces the fact that the combination of competency and engagement has a positive effect on employee performance, particularly in relation to strategic employee development practices. Therefore, the use of a combined development system that fosters competency and engagement is important.

Suggestions

The strategic and continuous staff development should be undertaken by organizations, based on its goals and employee career aspirations. Management should concentrate on improving employee competency by providing regular training, mentoring, coaching and skills development programs. The focus should also be on enhancing employee engagement through the creation of a supportive work environment, employee recognition and the involvement of employees in decision making. To optimise employee performance, HR professionals need to embed competency development and engagement building practices in one single development framework. Moreover, development programmes should be assessed for effectiveness periodically and adjustments made to improve and maintain performance and competitive advantage.

Conclusion

The study finally concludes that strategic uses of employee development practices are critical in improving employee performance in organizations. The results showed that the competency of the employees and employee engagement played an important role in mediating the relationship between development practices and performance outcomes. Capability building and work involvement are supported by effective training, mentoring, career development and continuing learning programmes. The findings are consistent with the viewpoints of Human Capital Theory and the Job Demands-Resources Model, which emphasizes cognitive and motivational mechanisms in which development interventions promote performance improvement. It is important that organizations take an integrated approach to employee development, building competency as well as employee engagement, to ensure that it is a long-term process that contributes to the organization's success and competitive advantage.

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