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Mind the Gap: Closing the Strategy-Execution Gap, Designing a Competency Framework for Sales Operations at PT LTI Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategy-execution gap within PT LTI's Sales Operations team in Indonesia, manifested in annual attrition above 20%, employee engagement of 68/100 (11 points below global benchmark), and persistent inconsistency in store performance. Despite PT LTI paying 1.4–1.8 times the market rate for equivalent roles, these problems persist, ruling out compensation as the primary driver. A qualitative-primary, quantitative-supplementary research design was adopted, applying fishbone root cause analysis, thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, and a pilot Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS) assessment of 116 Sales Operations employees. The study proposes a hybrid competency framework integrating top-down organizational competency identification with behavioral anchoring principles. The resulting Development Matrix, with four tiers across eleven competencies at three role levels, was piloted across 99 Store Managers and 17 District Managers, producing 4.3% high, 83.6% medium, and 12.1% low performers. Analytical Thinking (mean 60.3%, gap −14.7 pts) and People Development (63.3%, −11.7 pts) are the most critical gaps. A management-validated Operations Manager-first implementation cascade, supported by ADKAR change management and a 12-month 70:20:10 training roadmap, operationalizes the findings.

JEL Classification : M12, M53, M54

Introduction

The gap between strategy formulation and operational execution represents one of the most persistently documented challenges in management research. Hrebiniak (2005) argues that execution, rather than strategic planning, is the primary management challenge, as it requires simultaneous alignment across people, processes, structures, incentives, and culture. Kaplan and Norton (2008) estimate that 60–80% of organizations fail to meet their strategic targets due to execution failures at the translational layer, where senior leadership direction meets the daily behavioral decisions of front-line managers. In people-intensive retail operations, this translational failure is directly costly. Store-level performance is produced by the behavioral capability of the managers who interact with customers, develop teams, and make commercial decisions in real time. PT LTI

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Indonesia — the Indonesian subsidiary of a global apparel company operating 300+ standalone stores through a hybrid franchise and distributor model provides the empirical context for this study. Its Sales Operations team, comprising four Operations Managers (OMs), seventeen District Managers (DMs), and ninety-nine Store Managers (SMs), exhibits three measurable strategy-execution symptoms: attrition consistently above 20%; an engagement score of 68/100, sitting 11 points below the LTI Global Overall benchmark; and significant KPI variance across stores within the same regions and mall categories.

Before pursuing competency as the primary intervention, this study evaluated three alternative explanations for these symptoms. A compensation benchmark analysis across the Indonesian retail fashion industry found that PT LTI pays 1.4–1.8 times the market rate for equivalent Store Manager and District Manager roles compared to MAP Group and Kanmo Group (see Table 1). The persistence of above-20% attrition despite above-market pay rules out compensation as the primary driver and points instead to non-financial structural conditions. Leadership quality and top-down communication ineffectiveness, while genuinely present in the organization, were identified as downstream symptoms of the underlying structural cause the absence of shared behavioral standards, fair evaluation mechanisms, and visible career pathways — rather than independent root causes requiring separate interventions.

Table 1. Compensation Benchmark, Indonesian Retail Fashion Industry

Company	SM Range (IDR/mo)	DM Range (IDR/mo)	vs PT LTI
PT LTI	8.5M – 12.0M	14.0M – 20.0M	Baseline (1.0x)
MAP	5.5M – 8.5M	9.0M – 14.0M	0.65x–0.72x
Kanmo	5.0M – 8.0M	8.5M – 13.0M	0.55x–0.70x

Source: Industry interviews, market salary surveys, job posting data (2024–2025)

The study addresses three research questions: (RQ1) What competencies are required for the Sales Operations team to effectively translate strategy into execution? (RQ2) How can a scoring system assess these competencies objectively? (RQ3) How can the competency framework be translated into clear guidance for training and career development?. The theoretical foundation draws on five bodies of literature. The strategy-execution gap literature (Hrebiniak, 2005; Kaplan and Norton, 2008; Sull, Homkes, and Sull, 2015) establishes that execution failure is fundamentally a people capability problem, requiring behavioral expectations to be made explicit, observable, and assessable. The resource-based view (Barney, 1991) provides a strategic rationale: human capital is Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable (VRIN), making competency development a strategic investment rather than an HR activity. Competency theory traces from McClelland's (1973) criterion-referenced identification approach through Boyatzis's (1982) person-centric model to Spencer and Spencer's (1993) operationally influential definition 'an underlying characteristic causally related to criterion-referenced effective performance', grounded in the Iceberg Model distinguishing visible knowledge and skills from deeper motivational drivers. Armstrong (2021) positions competency management as a system integrating performance management, training, selection, and career development into a coherent HR architecture. The Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1992) locates employee capability as the foundation of the learning and growth perspective, prerequisite to operational, customer, and financial performance improvement.

The empirical link between competency development and organizational performance is well established. Huselid (1995) found that a one standard deviation improvement in high-performance work practices reduced turnover by 7.05 employees per 100 and increased firm market value by USD 18,641 per employee. Becker and Huselid (1998) confirmed these effects across 740 firms. In retail contexts, Rogg, Schmidt, Shull, and Schmitt (2001) demonstrated that HR practices explained significant variance in customer satisfaction independently of financial factors. Cascio (2006) and Johan et al. (2026) identifies three mediating mechanisms: capability, engagement, and retention — all three directly relevant to PT LTI's current performance deficit.

Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS), developed by Smith and Kendall (1963), address the rater inconsistency of conventional rating scales by anchoring each performance tier with specific behavioral examples, shifting the rater's task from abstract judgment to behavioral recognition. Campbell, Dunnette, Arvey, and Hellervik (1973) demonstrated BARS's superior inter-rater reliability; Colquitt (2001) links BARS to procedural justice — the perception that evaluation is fair, consistent, and evidence-based — directly addressing PT LTI's thematic finding that perceived evaluation unfairness drives disengagement and attrition.

In the present study, the inter-rater reliability of the BARS Development Matrix was examined in the pilot assessment of all 116 employees using Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960), yielding κ = [insert value], which indicates [insert level, e.g., substantial] agreement between assessors. Training Needs Analysis (TNA) follows Goldstein and Ford's (2002) three-level model — organizational, task, and individual analysis — to translate competency gap data into prioritized development interventions. The 70:20:10 development model (Lombardo and Eichinger, 1996) provides the design principle: 70% on-the-job practice, 20% coaching and peer learning, 10% formal training. Within the context examined, a single retail fashion company in Indonesia, this study contributes a hybrid competency modeling methodology for an organization with a limited high-performer population, integrating McClelland's top-down approach with Spencer and Spencer's behavioral anchoring; its applicability to other industries, countries, and organizational settings has not been tested and requires further research.

Methodology

This study adopts a single case study design (Yin, 2018) with a qualitative-primary, quantitative-supplementary approach following an abductive logic of inquiry (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). A single case design was selected because PT LTI represents an unusual case in which a strategy-execution gap persists despite above-market compensation, allowing the mechanisms behind the gap to be examined in depth within their real organizational context and supporting theory building from case evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). The research proceeds through five integrated stages: (1) problem identification and literature synthesis; (2) semi-structured interviews with leadership and employees; (3) competency framework and BARS Development Matrix construction through thematic analysis; (4) quantitative pilot assessment of all 116 Sales Operations employees at SM and DM levels (99 SMs and 17 DMs), which constitutes a census of the target population rather than a sample, with the term pilot referring to the first implementation cycle of the assessment instrument; and (5) management validation and implementation planning. Primary data were collected through six semi-structured interviews: one with the Retail Director providing strategic behavioral expectations consistent with the Behavioral Event Interview methodology (McClelland, 1978; Spencer and Spencer, 1993) and five with Sales Operations employees at SM and DM levels, including both current and recently departed former employees across multiple OM regions. Former employees were included to access candid accounts of disengagement and departure drivers. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Secondary data included official job descriptions, three-year attrition records, engagement survey data, store-level KPI performance data across four OM regions, and LTI Global HR documentation.

Four analytical techniques were applied iteratively. First, fishbone (Ishikawa) root cause analysis coded interview data against five process areas Strategy Communication, Role Definition, Performance Measurement, Capability Development, and Leadership and Engagement evaluating each cause for evidence strength, organizational prevalence, and tractability. Second, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) generated over 200 initial codes from six transcripts, consolidated into five theoretically consequential themes. Interviews were concluded after the sixth transcript because data saturation had been reached: the final interviews produced no new codes or themes and only repeated patterns already identified in earlier transcripts, consistent with evidence that core themes in relatively homogeneous groups emerge within the first several interviews (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). Third, BARS Development Matrix construction followed a four-step process: competency identification, behavioral example extraction by performance tier and role level, anchor writing, and cluster weighting calibration. Fourth, TNA applied Goldstein and Ford's (2002) three-level model, prioritizing interventions by gap magnitude, prevalence, strategic leverage, and tractability. Validity was strengthened through triangulation of thematic findings against quantitative pilot data, where convergence on Analytical Thinking, People Development, and Impact/Ownership strengthens confidence in both streams. Coding reliability was further supported by an independent review of the codes and themes by a second researcher, with discrepancies resolved through discussion, and by member checking, in which summarized themes were shared with participants to confirm that they accurately reflected their accounts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study are broadly consistent with prior evidence that systematic HR practices shape retention and performance. Huselid (1995) and Becker and Huselid (1998) associated high-performance work

practices with lower turnover and stronger firm performance; in PT LTI, the absence of formal behavioral standards, structured evaluation, and development pathways coincides with attrition above 20% and an engagement score of 68/100, which supports the same relationship from the opposite direction. The findings also agree with Rogg, Schmidt, Shull, and Schmitt (2001), since store performance varied across stores operating under the same pay structure, pointing to management practice rather than financial factors as the source of variance. However, the findings differ from explanations that treat pay as the main lever for retention: PT LTI pays 1.4–1.8 times the market rate, yet attrition remains high, suggesting that in this context perceived procedural justice (Colquitt, 2001) and visible career progression carry more weight than compensation. A further difference concerns competency modeling practice. Spencer and Spencer (1993) rely on a sufficiently large group of superior performers from which effective behaviors can be derived, whereas only 4.3% of PT LTI's Sales Operations employees were classified as high performers, which required the hybrid approach adopted in this study. These comparisons are drawn from a single organization and should be read as context-specific rather than as a general test of earlier findings.

Root Cause Analysis and Thematic Findings

Table 2. Thematic Analysis Summary

Theme	Key Insight	Framework Response
Invisible behavioral expectations	Standards exist but are not formalized; no shared definition of 'excellent'	BARS tiers with real examples per role level
Strategy-execution disconnect	Communication is 'what to do' not 'why it matters'; prevents commercial autonomy	Strategy-connected behavioral indicators in Analytical Thinking anchors
Evaluation perceived as unfair	Promotions attributed to visibility; bias acknowledged by leadership	BARS requires observable evidence for every tier rating
No structured development pathway	Career progression depends on manager initiative; advancement opaque	Development Matrix shows explicit SM→DM→OM behavioral progression
Leadership readiness as enabler	Managers lack tools and language for developmental conversations	OM-first implementation: develop OMs before cascading

Source : Author, 2026

The fishbone analysis identified Role Definition, specifically the absence of a formal, behaviorally grounded competency framework as the most critical and tractable structural cause of PT LTI's strategy-execution gap. Without a shared behavioral reference standard, all downstream HR processes operate on individual manager judgment, producing regional inconsistency and perceived unfairness. Performance Measurement was the second most critical cause: the Retail Director acknowledged that qualitative assessments are inherently biased ('every senior management team member has their own standard of excellence'), producing the perceived unfairness that employee interviews confirm as a primary attrition driver. Thematic analysis produced five recurring themes. (1) Invisible behavioral expectations: behavioral standards exist in leadership cognition but have never been formalized, creating subjective evaluation conditions associated with perceived unfairness. (2) Strategy-execution disconnect: employees describe strategic communication as operationally prescriptive rather than strategically interpretive, preventing autonomous commercial decision-making. (3) Evaluation perceived as unfair: promotions attributed to visibility rather than demonstrated capability, directly motivating the BARS-based evaluation design. (4) Absence of structured development pathways: without explicit role-to-role behavioral progression standards, employees cannot self-direct development or evaluate advancement probability. (5) Leadership readiness as enabler: managers' capacity to develop their teams is not a motivation problem but a structural one — tools, language, and institutionalized expectations for developmental conversations are absent — motivating the OM-first implementation sequence.

Competency Framework Structure

The PT LTI Competency Framework organizes eleven competencies into three weighted clusters derived from thematic analysis of leadership interview data: Business Insight (Analytical Thinking, Commercial Focus, Data Insight; 30%); Managing Business (Customer Focus, People Development, Developing Customer Capacity; 40%); and Professional Effectiveness (Impact/Ownership, Planning, Communication, Negotiating, Achieving; 20%), supplemented by KPI results (10%). The 40% weight for Managing Business reflects the people-intensive nature of retail execution; the 30% for Business Insight reflects the strategic importance of

data-driven commercial thinking, the most acutely underdeveloped competency cluster. A minimum readiness threshold of 75% applies per cluster, calibrated against high-performer behavioral profiles and confirmed against official job descriptions.

Table 3. Competency Framework Structure and Role Expectations

Cluster	Wt	Competencies	Min.	Role Expectation
Business Insight	30%	Analytical Thinking, Commercial Focus, Data Insight	75%	SM: Good | DM: Good | OM: Excellent
Managing Business	40%	Customer Focus, People Dev, Dev. Customer Capacity	75%	SM: Good | DM: Good–Exc | OM: Excellent
Professional Effectiveness	20%	Impact/Ownership, Planning, Comm, Negotiating, Achieving	75%	SM: Good | DM: Good–Exc | OM: Excellent
KPI Results	10%	Sales vs Target (SALES, SOT, UPT)	75%	All roles

Source : Author, 2026

The Development Matrix: BARS Scoring System

The Development Matrix translates each competency into four behavioral tiers Basic (1), Fair (2), Good (3), Excellent (4) with role-specific behavioral anchors at SM, DM, and OM levels. Anchors were constructed directly from management interview examples, consistent with Smith and Kendall's (1963) methodology. Table 4 presents the representative excerpt for Analytical Thinking, the most critical gap competency.

Table 4. Development Matrix (BARS Excerpt): Analytical Thinking [Business Insight]

Tier	Store Manager (SM)	District Manager (DM)	Operations Manager (OM)
Basic (1)	Needs guidance to interpret data. Reviews weekly sales report but needs superior's help to understand drop in bottom category.	Flags a UPT drop in one store but misses broader regional pattern.	Analyzes sell-through but doesn't combine with merchandising input.
Fair (2)	Independently identifies store-level issues. Notices correlation between declining traffic and poor customer service.	Spots declining UPT trend in 3 of 5 stores in one region.	Reviews promo launches with KPI uplift across stores.
Good (3)	Tracks category performance and re-merchandises to increase sell-through on slow movers.	Recommends stock consolidation based on slow-mover trends.	Combines ATV, UPT, and marketing insights to drive transactions during promo.
Excellent (4)	Coaches team to use data daily. Trains ASM to monitor top/bottom SKUs weekly and adjust floor layout.	Implements dashboard; reviews top/bottom performance weekly with Store Managers.	Builds commercial playbook from sales, VM, stock, and campaign data.

Source : Author,2026

Pilot Assessment Results

The pilot assessment covered 116 Sales Operations employees (99 SMs, 17 DMs) across four OM regions (BA: n=35; SH: n=39; AM: n=29; RA: n=13). Performance band distribution: High (≥80%): 5 employees (4.3%); Medium (65–79%): 97 employees (83.6%); Low (<65%): 14 employees (12.1%). All three cluster averages fell below the 75% minimum threshold Business Insight (67.4%), Managing Business (71.5%), Professional Effectiveness (73.3%) confirming systemic rather than isolated capability deficits.

Table 5. Overall Competency Assessment Results (n=116)

Competency	Cluster	Mean	Gap	Priority
Analytical Thinking	Business Insight	60.3%	−14.7	Critical
People Development	Managing Business	63.3%	−11.7	Critical
Achieving	Professional Effectiveness	68.5%	−6.5	High

Competency	Cluster	Mean	Gap	Priority
Commercial Focus	Business Insight	69.2%	−5.8	High
Impact / Ownership	Professional Effectiveness	69.6%	−5.4	High
Planning	Professional Effectiveness	73.9%	−1.1	Moderate
Dev. Customer Capacity	Managing Business	74.7%	−0.3	Moderate
Data Insight	Business Insight	72.8%	−2.2	Moderate
Negotiating	Professional Effectiveness	75.0%	±0.0	Met
Customer Focus	Managing Business	76.3%	+1.3	Met
Communication	Professional Effectiveness	79.5%	+4.5	Met

Source : Author, 2026

Comparative analysis between SMs and DMs confirms that gaps are not confined to the SM level. At the DM level, Analytical Thinking averages 65.0% (−10.0 pts), Achieving 67.4% (−7.6 pts), Impact/Ownership 68.4% (−6.6 pts), and Planning 69.4% (−5.6 pts) all below the 75% threshold. This finding is the primary empirical justification for the management-endorsed OM-first implementation sequence: the managers expected to cascade development downward are themselves below the behavioral standard.

Training Needs Analysis

The TNA applied Goldstein and Ford's (2002) three-level model, yielding four immediate cross-role priorities: Analytical Thinking (−14.7 pts), People Development (−11.7 pts), Achieving (−6.5 pts), and Impact/Ownership (−5.4 pts). Role-specific priorities include Commercial Focus for SMs (−7.3 pts) and Planning for DMs (−5.6 pts). All interventions are structured on the 70:20:10 model. The highest-return intervention is the weekly data synthesis note: every SM synthesizes KPI data into one insight note for their DM; every DM synthesizes cross-store patterns for their OM. This single habit develops Analytical Thinking — the most critical gap — across the entire hierarchy simultaneously at zero incremental cost, embedded in existing reporting routines.

Management Validation and Implementation

The pilot findings were presented to PT LTI's Retail Director, Country Manager, and HR Director for validation. All four critical gaps were confirmed as consistent with direct field observations. The Retail Director confirmed that Analytical Thinking and People Development gaps align with observed reactive KPI tracking and task-based (rather than development-oriented) management practices. Communication (79.5%) and Customer Focus (76.3%) were confirmed as genuine relative strengths. The verbatim management validation: 'The overall assessment has captured our indication of what the competency gaps are. We want to start with Operations Managers first to ensure team leaders' competency is aligned with our expectations, so they can cascade to the bigger team. The management-validated four-phase implementation cascade applies the ADKAR change management model (Hiatt, 2006): Phase 1 (Months 1–3) targets four OMs with 12-week IDPs; Phase 2 (Months 3–6) cascades BARS assessments to 17 DMs; Phase 3 (Months 6–10) extends to all 99 SMs; Phase 4 (Months 10–12) initiates the second assessment cycle, integrates the framework into annual HR review, and identifies succession candidates. The implementation also integrates the organization's existing 9-Grid talent mapping: High Performers (n=5) receive accelerated succession development; Medium with Growth Potential (n=38) receive differentiated IDPs; Medium Stagnant (n=22) receive mandatory career conversations; Low Performers (n=13) trigger a formal Performance Improvement Plan within the evidence-based BARS structure.
not a horizontal line).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that PT LTI's strategy-execution gap, manifested in >20% attrition, 68/100 engagement, and inconsistent store performance, is a competency infrastructure problem, not a compensation problem. PT LTI pays 1.4–1.8 times the market rate; the problem is structural conditions: absent behavioral standards, subjective evaluation, and opaque career pathways. In response to RQ1, eleven competencies across three clusters were identified through a hybrid top-down/bottom-up methodology integrating McClelland's (1973) strategic identification with Spencer and Spencer's (1993) behavioral anchoring appropriate for organizations with insufficient high-performer populations (4.3% in PT LTI's case). Business Insight is the

most acute cluster gap (67.4%); Analytical Thinking (60.3%) and People Development (63.3%) are the most critical individual competency gaps. In response to RQ2, the BARS Development Matrix — four tiers across eleven competencies across three role levels produces evidence-based scoring that reduces evaluator bias and provides actionable gap data. Pilot assessment confirmed discriminant validity (4.3% high, 83.6% medium, 12.1% low) and management alignment. The matrix simultaneously addresses two root causes: subjective evaluation (via behavioral anchoring) and absent career pathways (via explicit role-to-role behavioral progression).

In response to RQ3, three integrated mechanisms translate the framework: the TNA prioritizing four critical gaps with 70:20:10 interventions; IDP co-creation per employee; and the OM-first cascade ensuring behavioral standards are met at each management level before assessment is cascaded downward. Six recommendations for PT LTI include: formal adoption with Country Manager endorsement; Analytical Thinking as the immediate investment priority through the weekly data synthesis note routine; introduction of the one-on-one coaching template; career conversation integration as a retention strategy; threshold review after the first full cycle; and a quarterly OM review cadence. Beyond these practical implications, the study offers three theoretical propositions that can be tested in other organizations and industries: (P1) where the high-performer population is too small for bottom-up competency modeling, a hybrid top-down/bottom-up approach can produce a valid competency framework; (P2) behaviorally anchored evaluation narrows the strategy-execution gap by increasing perceived procedural justice, which in turn reduces attrition; and (P3) the effect of a competency framework on frontline execution is moderated by the competency level of the managers responsible for cascading it. Future research priorities include longitudinal outcome tracking, cross-industry replication of the hybrid methodology, examination of OM capability as a moderating variable, and large-scale quantitative validation of the competency-engagement-retention relationship.)

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