

## Competency of Cooperative Board Members: An Empirical Study in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Competency is the ability of a person to perform or carry out a task properly. Co-operative Board Members (CBM) need to have a specific set of competencies in order to perform their duties and responsibilities. This quantitative study aimed to analyse CBM's current level of competency and competency gaps based on 44 basic competency items. This research involved 420 respondents who were also CBM that held the positions of Chairmen, Secretaries, and Treasurers. Data for the study were collected using questionnaires and analysed using Rasch Measurement Model. Results of the study revealed that majority or 211 CBM (50.2%) had a high competency level, 170 CBM (40.5%) had a moderate competency level, and 39 CBM (9.3%) had a low competency level. In terms of competency gaps analysis, CBM felt that it was difficult to perform the 26 competency items. As a conclusion, it is crucial to provide focused training programmes for CBM to improve their performance and competency level.

**Keywords:** Competency Gaps, CBM Job Scopes, Human Resource Development

### Introduction

The Government, through the National Entrepreneurship Policy (NEP2030), aims to increase the revenue of the co-operative sector to RM100 billion by 2030. Statistically, co-operatives in Malaysia continue to record increasing revenue year-on-year (between 2015 and 2019), although a decline in revenue was recorded in year 2020 (Malaysia Co-operative Societies Commission, 2015). However, records show that there are 2,000 inactive and 3,000 dormant co-operatives that require assistance so that they can contribute to achieve the said goal (Kasim, 2021). All registered co-operatives should be more active, progressive, and competitive as well as have the ability to generate higher revenue to achieve the goal set by

the Government as the sector is left with a limited period of time to achieve the NEP2030's target (Kawi, 2020).

Revenue is one of the methods used to measure a co-operative's financial performance. Among the criteria required for a co-operative to be listed as one of the 100 Best Co-operatives in Malaysia include high revenue and good governance (Kassim, 2021). In terms of good governance, a co-operative needs to ensure that it employs competent Co-operative Board Members (CBM) in performing the required tasks and responsibilities (Laws of Malaysia, 2021). In principle, CBM are a co-operative's human resources that determine the direction and success of the entity. Competent CBM are needed to improve sales and properly manage a co-operative (Din et al., 2012). Competency is vital in improving employees' efficiency and skills, as well as ensuring tasks are completed according to plans.

Thus, a study on CBM competency is vital due to these points. In the literature, Din et al (2012) conducted a research on Analysis on the Competency of School CBM in Malaysia for 100 grade A schools. However, the study only involved school co-operatives and did not review the job scopes of CBM comprehensively. Another work by Ali et al (2020) studied the influence of interpersonal traits competency, involvement effectiveness competency, employees community relationship competency, and financial and planning competency of CBM on co-operative's performance.

In general, this study aimed to determine CBM's current competency level, and in specific, to understand the challenges faced by CBM in performing their five job scopes namely management and administration, financial management, strategic management, governance management, and business management. Not many studies have been done on CBM competency gaps, and this research aimed to assist CBM and their organisations in improving their competency.

## **Literature Review**

### **Competency Theory**

Various researchers found that competency is the combination of three main elements namely knowledge, skills, and attitude, which are required to perform a responsibility or task (Abdullah, 2017; Fuad, 2016; Yusoff & Liew, 2002; Triwani et al., 2020)

Iceberg Competency Model by Hay McBer explains that there are three main components of competency, namely knowledge, skills, and attitude (personality). Knowledge competency means an individual's ability to continuously improve their knowledge to effectively improve their individual performance. Meanwhile, skills competency is an individual's ability to utilise and take advantage of their knowledge and skills to successfully perform a task. Next, attitude competency is the personal values and traits that are embodied and practised by a working individual (Abdullah, 2017).

Iceberg Competency Model developed by Hay McBer views that knowledge and skills are important to perform a task, and these factors can be obtained or acquired. However, a person's attitude is a factor that is hard to observe, measure, change, and control. Between these different factors, a person's attitude should be referred to in order to determine a person true nature (Abbas, 2018; Yusoff & Liew, 2002; Shariff, 2015).

Triangle of Success Model introduced by Van Hooser also lists down three components that influence success, namely knowledge, skills, and attitude (Abdullah, 2017). This shows that all these components are crucial in ensuring that a person has the ability to perform a designated job and at the same time ensuring the success of an organisation.

### Competency of Co-operative Board Members

Section 2 of the Co-operative Societies Act 1993 defines “Board” as the governing body of a co-operative society to whom the management of its affairs is entrusted. The Board is also termed as the co-operative “Officers” who are entrusted to carry out duties under the authority of the Co-operative Act and by-laws. Section 42 of the Co-Operative Societies Act 1993 states that “every co-operative society shall have a Board, which shall consist of not less than three and not more than fifteen members duly appointed at the annual general meeting”(Laws of Malaysia, 2021). The exact number and the composition of CBM are specified in co-operative by-laws based on the requirement of each co-operative.

The Board is an indispensable component of a co-operative. They are given the mandate and trust to manage and administer the entity. The study by Din et al (2012) outlined several knowledge and skills required by CBM including (i) management and administration, (ii) financial management, (iii) strategic management, (iv) governance management, and (v) business management.

### Research Framework

Previous studies have found that it is crucial to review a person’s specific job scope to analyse their competency (Ahmad & Ahmad Khalid, 2009; Baharuddin & Hashim, 2004). From the review conducted, Figure 1 outlines the proposed framework for this research to find out the ways to identify CBM competency level. The figure shows the relationship between job scopes, current competency, and result of competency gaps obtained in this research. This study adapted the elements of CBM competency used in Din et al (2012) and developed the elements based on the basic competencies required (knowledge, skills, and attitude).

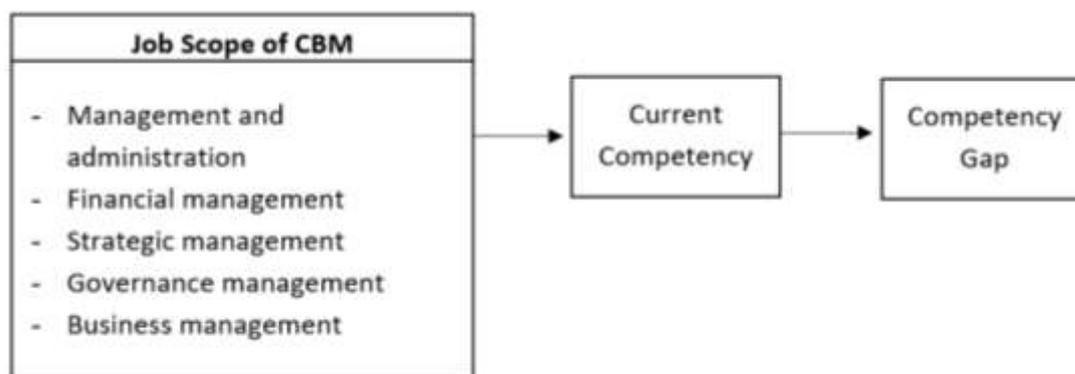


Figure 1. Research Framework

### Methodology

This is a quantitative study utilising the questionnaire method. The questionnaire was divided into five areas of job scope namely (i) management and administration (12 items), (ii) financial management (9 items), (iii) strategic management (7 items), (iv) governance management (9 items), and (v) business management (7 items). The respondents were required to choose the best answers based on four options (1 = Very Not Proficient, 2 = Not Proficient, 3 = Proficient, 4 = Very Proficient). The questionnaire was distributed online (via email and WhatsApp) as well as offline (via postal service).

Overall, the instrument used in this study consisted of 44 items from five constructs as shown in Table 1. The result of analysis conducted on the study’s questionnaire reliability

index was between 0.96 and 0.98, while the study's overall reliability index was 0.97. This showed that the study's instrument was very reliable, effective, and highly consistent. Thus, it can be used in a real study (Bond & Fox, 2015). A pilot study was also conducted to test the reliability of the instrument developed for this research.

Table 1

*Content of Questionnaire and Number of Items based on Constructs.*

No.	Construct	Basic Concept	Item No.	Total
1	Management and Administration	Knowledge (K)	AK1-AK3	3
		Skills (S)	AS1-AS5	5
		Attitude (A)	AA1-AA4	4
2	Financial Management	Knowledge (K)	BK1-BK2	2
		Skills (S)	BS1-BS5	5
		Attitude (A)	BA1-BA2	2
3	Strategic Management	Knowledge (K)	CK1-CK2	2
		Skills (S)	CS1-CS3	3
		Attitude (A)	CA1-CA2	2
4	Governance Management	Knowledge (K)	DK1-DK3	3
		Skills (S)	DS1-DS4	4
		Attitude (A)	DA1-DA2	2
5	Business Management	Knowledge (K)	EK1-EK3	3
		Skills (S)	ES1-ES2	2
		Attitude (A)	EA1-EA2	2
			<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>

Population for this study consisted of co-operatives from the medium and small clusters only. The objective of this study was to determine the competency level of selected CBM (Chairmen, Secretaries, and Treasurers). Samples for this study involved 420 respondents, and each state was represented by respondents. This research required 30 respondents for each state as the minimum sample size to obtain accurate and consistent data at 95% confidence level based on the Rasch Measurement Model. According to Linacre (1994), this number of samples is sufficient for a stable measurement determination (Bakar, et al., 2023; Said et al., 2019).

## Findings

### Demography of Respondents

Based on Table 2, results of respondents' demographics analysis showed that majority of the respondents were male (337, 82.2%) compared to female (83, 19.8%). In terms of age group, majority of the respondents were from the 41–50 age group (30.5%) with highest qualification of STPM/HSC/Diploma (157, 37.4%). 121 respondents had 10 years of experience (29%) in matters related to co-operative.

Table 2

*Demographic of Profile Respondents*

<b>Demography</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender		
Male	337	80.2
Female	83	19.8
Age Group		
18–20 years old	0	0
21–30 years old	6	1.4
31–40 years old	63	15.0
41–50 years old	128	30.5
51–60 years old	117	27.9
61 and above	106	25.2
Education Level		
Primary School	15	3.6
PMR/SRP	36	8.6
SPM	25	6.0
STPM/HSC/Diploma	157	37.4
Bachelor's Degree	142	33.8
Master's/PhD Degree	45	10.7
Year(s) of Experience in CBM		
Less than one year	76	18
1 to 3 years	84	20
4 to 6 years	85	20
7 to 9 years	54	13
10 and more	121	29

**To determine CBM's current competency level**

Based on Table 3, overall, the respondents' mean was at logit scale 2.36. Results of the analysis on current competency of CBM in Malaysia managed to successfully list the number of CBM with high (mean > 2.36), moderate (mean 0.00–2.36), and low (mean < 0.00) competency levels, according to each state. Overall, data analysis showed majority or 211 CBM (50.2%) recorded a high competency level, 170 CBM (40.5%) recorded a moderate competency level, while 39 CBM (9.3%) recorded a low competency level. The highest number of CBM with high competency were recorded in Perak, while the lowest number were in Perlis.

Table 3

*Respondents' Competency Level*

No.	State	Total number of CBM based on Competency Level		
		High	Moderate	Low
1	Perak	20	9	1
2	Kelantan	19	10	1
3	Terengganu	18	10	2
4	Sabah	17	9	4
5	Melaka	16	12	2
6	Selangor	16	11	3
7	Kuala Lumpur	15	12	3
8	Sarawak	14	14	2
9	Johor	14	14	2
10	Pulau Pinang	14	14	2
11	Kedah	14	10	6
12	Negeri Sembilan	13	13	4
13	Pahang	11	16	3
14	Perlis	10	16	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>211</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>39</b>

**To determine CBM's competency gaps**

Table 4 shows the 44 items evaluated and arranged using Rasch based on the questionnaire's difficulty level according to the respondents' answers. The items were listed from top to bottom based on decreasing competency level (hardest items were listed on the top, while easiest items were listed on the bottom). Overall, the mean for all items was at 0.00.

From the analysis conducted, three most difficult items for CBM to perform were conducting business activities via digital channels – ES1 (logit 1.74, 85.07%), adapting technology to record financial transactions – BS1 (logit 1.31, 78.75%), and sourcing for capital from internal and external sources – BK1 (logit 0.90, 71.09%). Aside from that, the three easiest items for CBM to perform were maintaining confidentiality and security of co-operative information – DA2 (logit -1.44, 19.15%), performing team-based tasks – AA2 (logit -1.34, 20.75%), and honesty in managing co-operative transactions – BA1 (logit -1.27, 21.93%).

Aside from that, based on the items mean, CBM identified 26 items as difficult to perform and required extra effort (items with logit higher than 0.00). The said items included 7 items in the financial management category, 5 items in the business management category, 5 items in the governance management category, 5 items in the strategic management category, and 4 items in the management and administration category.

This study found that financial management items were the most difficult scope to be performed by CBM. This result was in accordance with other literature on the topic of entrepreneurship, such as those conducted by (Ahmad and Yusop, 2021; Sepeai and Ramli, 2019); Zainol and Ramli, 2019). Aside from that, CBM also struggled to apply digitalisation for specific management categories, including management and administration (AS4 – MS Office, Google Meet), financial management (BS1 – MS Excel, Mr Accounting), and business management (ES1 – Shopee, Lazada) categories. In summary, CBM found that three out of the five categories especially those that involved technology usage to be challenging.

### **Conclusion**

The study has successfully identified the difficult items and competency level of 420 respondents. In conclusion, the study found that the respondents had varying levels of competencies (high, moderate, and low). The respondents who obtained high competency level were proposed to be appointed as mentors to assist other CBM in improving their competency level.

The respondents who at moderate level may need specific and focused support. This was because CBM in this group should be closely guided to improve specific categories. On the other hand, CBM who scored under the minimum item level (low) were deemed as incompetent. Co-operatives should have the administrative power on their Board nomination system to ensure each CBM meets the minimum requirement outlined in the co-operative's by-laws and governance practices guidelines.

Finance is a vital aspect in co-operatives, and digitalisation is a crucial element in the current management system. Co-operatives should embrace and adapt advancement and current technology by expanding their business, saving in terms of management cost, and competing at the global level. Issues of financial management competency are not only experienced by the co-operative sector but also other similar entrepreneurial sectors. Thus, CBM need to be exposed with the latest knowledge and skills to ensure they can effectively and efficiently formulate the best decisions for their co-operatives.

The results of the study found that the competency instrument needed to be measured periodically and continuously so that training and development programmes can be conducted in line with the current competency requirements. This study was essential as it acted as the performance indicator for CBM that arguably played the most important role in a co-operative.

The contribution of this study emphasises how crucial it is to match organisational competencies with its strategic goals. Organization can improve their overall performance and competitive advantage by identifying and cultivating competencies that support the organization's vision and goals. Numerous organisations all over the world have improved their talent management procedures and improved individual and team performance thanks to its systematic and comprehensive approach based on the Iceberg Competency Model. It provides a framework for the formulation of individualised development plans that support ongoing education and career advancement. Programmes for training and development can therefore be made to address these specific needs, resulting in learning experiences that are more effective and impactful.

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Table 4  
Level of Difficulty for 44 Competency Items

Item STATISTICS: MEASURE ORDER

ENTRY NUMBER	TOTAL SCORE	TOTAL COUNT	JMLE MEASURE	MODEL S.E.	INFIT [MNSQ ZSTD]	OUTFIT [MNSQ ZSTD]	PTMEASUR-AL [CORR. EXP.]	EXACT MATCH [OBS% EXP%]	Item
41	1167	420	1.74	.09	1.82 9.45	2.04 9.90	.60 .73	52.6 65.5	ES1_PERNIAGAAN.DIGITAL
15	1214	420	1.31	.10	1.55 6.64	1.68 7.39	.65 .72	63.0 67.0	BS1_APPS.KEWANGAN
13	1257	420	.90	.10	1.12 1.56	1.15 1.87	.68 .71	67.7 68.9	BK1 SUMBER.MODAL
42	1264	420	.83	.10	1.16 2.05	1.20 2.41	.69 .71	68.5 69.1	ES2_JARING.NIAGA
40	1271	420	.76	.10	1.35 4.36	1.37 4.21	.67 .71	62.8 69.4	EK3 ANAK.SYARIKAT
30	1280	420	.67	.10	.91 -1.20	.91 -1.19	.75 .70	73.9 69.7	DK2_SEDIA.REKOD
16	1281	420	.66	.10	.92 -1.03	.89 -1.34	.73 .70	74.4 69.7	BS2_BELANJAWAN
24	1282	420	.65	.10	.80 -2.89	.79 -2.77	.76 .70	75.2 69.8	CS1_STRATEGI.PERNIAGAAN
7	1288	420	.59	.10	1.70 7.84	1.71 7.21	.60 .70	63.3 70.0	AS4_APPS.PENTADBIRAN
19	1290	420	.57	.10	.85 -2.09	.86 -1.82	.73 .70	73.2 70.0	BS5_MODAL.KERJA
6	1298	420	.49	.10	1.14 1.77	1.13 1.52	.64 .70	64.0 70.2	AS3_REKOD.FAIL
23	1302	420	.45	.10	.81 -2.73	.78 -2.88	.75 .70	77.4 70.3	CK2_ANALISIS.SWOT
43	1304	420	.43	.10	.93 -.99	1.01 .09	.73 .70	69.7 70.3	EA1_MINDA.USAHAWAN
18	1310	420	.36	.10	.87 -1.86	.81 -2.33	.75 .70	73.0 70.4	BS4_PULANGAN.FAEDAH
33	1311	420	.35	.10	.80 -2.93	.78 -2.78	.76 .70	76.9 70.4	DS2_SKD.RISIKO
34	1313	420	.33	.10	.88 -1.70	.87 -1.58	.73 .70	73.7 70.5	DS3_WUJUD.KPI
14	1320	420	.26	.10	.82 -2.48	.79 -2.57	.74 .69	72.2 70.6	BK2_LAPORAN.KEWANGAN
17	1320	420	.26	.10	.80 -2.82	.78 -2.75	.74 .69	76.4 70.6	BS3_DAFTR.ASET
26	1325	420	.21	.10	.74 -3.74	.71 -3.77	.76 .69	78.4 70.7	CS3_PELAN.TINDAKAN
31	1326	420	.20	.10	.92 -1.08	.88 -1.40	.74 .69	75.2 70.7	DS1_CANGGAH.KEPENTINGAN
29	1327	420	.18	.10	.81 -2.76	.83 -2.04	.73 .69	74.9 70.7	DK1_STRUKTUR.PERUNDANGAN
3	1341	420	.03	.10	.97 -.41	.92 -.84	.70 .69	72.2 71.0	AK3_CARTA.ORGANISASI
22	1341	420	.03	.10	.70 -4.52	.69 -3.95	.76 .69	78.7 71.0	CK1_VISI.MISI
25	1341	420	.03	.10	.79 -3.01	.76 -2.92	.74 .69	73.7 71.0	CS2_KAWAL.AKTIVITI
4	1342	420	.02	.10	1.03 .38	1.02 .22	.68 .69	71.2 71.0	AS1_KENDALI.MESYUARAT
39	1343	420	.01	.10	.92 -1.01	.88 -1.33	.72 .69	71.7 71.0	EK2_WANG.LEBIHAN
1	1351	420	-.07	.10	1.15 1.95	1.17 1.83	.64 .69	68.7 71.2	AK1_NILAI.KOPERASI
35	1359	420	-.16	.11	.83 -2.36	.78 -2.58	.71 .68	77.7 71.4	DS4_NILAI.PRESTASI
32	1362	420	-.20	.11	.89 -1.47	.83 -1.89	.71 .68	75.9 71.5	DK3_PANDANGAN.AUDIT
38	1365	420	-.23	.11	.72 -4.10	.67 -3.98	.75 .68	78.2 71.6	EK1_ATURAN.AKTIVITI
5	1369	420	-.27	.11	.87 -1.77	.92 -.80	.68 .68	74.7 71.6	AS2_DAFTR.ANGGOTA
28	1379	420	-.39	.11	.68 -4.77	.63 -4.35	.73 .68	78.9 71.8	CA2_KERJA.BERKUALITI
21	1380	420	-.40	.11	1.05 .69	1.05 .53	.65 .68	71.2 71.8	BA2_BERHEMAT.TEKUN
2	1384	420	-.44	.11	.85 -2.10	.84 -1.66	.70 .67	74.9 71.9	AK2_PRINSIP.KOPERASI
11	1408	420	-.72	.11	.94 -.80	.89 -1.00	.65 .66	75.2 72.5	AS5_MAKLUMAT.JELAS
12	1415	420	-.80	.11	.91 -1.21	.90 -.92	.64 .66	75.4 72.6	AA4_KAWAL.EMOSI
36	1415	420	-.80	.11	.83 -2.37	.84 -1.55	.68 .66	75.9 72.6	DA1_PROAKTIF
44	1419	420	-.85	.11	.95 -.70	.98 -.14	.64 .66	75.9 72.8	EA2_TERIMA.TANGGUNGJWB
8	1423	420	-.90	.11	.96 -.56	.91 -.84	.64 .66	74.4 72.8	AA1_PROFESIONAL
10	1428	420	-.96	.11	.90 -1.44	.88 -1.11	.65 .65	76.2 73.0	AA3_JALANKAN.TUGAS
27	1439	420	-1.09	.11	1.21 2.75	1.23 1.80	.57 .65	71.5 73.2	CA1_KERPUTUSAN.MAJORITI
20	1453	420	-1.27	.11	1.19 2.54	1.09 .74	.58 .64	68.5 73.7	BA1_BERSIKAP.JUJUR
9	1459	420	-1.34	.11	1.02 .28	.96 -.29	.60 .64	76.2 73.9	AA2_BERPASUKAN
37	1467	420	-1.44	.11	1.19 2.46	1.24 1.68	.55 .63	72.7 74.1	DA2_KERAHSAAN
MEAN	1341.7	420.0	.00	.10	.98 -.41	.98 -.41		72.6 71.0	
P.SD	64.7	.0	.70	.00	.24 3.06	.28 2.98		5.2 1.6	

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