IPN Journal of Research and Practice in Public Sector Accounting and Management
Vol. 15, No. 2, 2025, pp. 137 - 157

Developing a Non-Technical Professional Competency Framework for Succession Planning Among Public Sector Accountants in Malaysia

Erlane K. Ghani[1,*], Kamaruzzaman Muhammad[2], Azleen Ilias[3], Nur Hayati Ab. Samad[4]

[1,2,4]Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, Puncak Alam, Malaysia

[3]UNITEN Business School, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Muadzam Shah, Pahang, Malaysia

**Corresponding Author: erlanekg@uitm.edu.my*

https://doi.org/10.58458/ipnj.v15.02.06.0122

Received: 30 June 2025 *Reviewed: 23 September 2025* *Accepted: 30 October 2025* *Published: 24 December 2025*

Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to define the criteria for accountants' professional competence in the public sector, focusing on non-technical competency criteria for inclusion in the Jabatan Akauntan Negara Malaysia (JANM) succession planning framework.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach: A questionnaire survey was conducted among accountants holding strategic public sector positions from Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak. This study was guided by the Malaysian Institute of Accountants' Framework and the Competency Framework used in the education sector. Initially, six (6) non-technical competencies were proposed: intellectual, interpersonal, and communication skills; personal and organisational skills; professional scepticism and judgement; ethical principles; and commitment to the public interest.

Findings: Factor analysis revealed seven (7) components: organisational, intellectual, personal, interpersonal, and communication skills; professional scepticism and judgement; ethical values; and commitment to the public good. Of the 31 items analysed, 23 were suitable for inclusion in the proposed framework. The findings suggest that incorporating professional scepticism, integrity, values, and ethics enhances accountants' vigilance and effectiveness in fulfilling public sector responsibilities.

Research Limitations/ Implications: This study provides a validated framework that broadens understanding of non-technical competencies essential for public sector accountants and supports further research in

competency development, succession planning, and human capital strategies within government accounting institutions.

Practical Implications: The framework supports strategic talent development, recruitment, and promotion decisions in the public accounting service, strengthening ethical practice and accountability in Malaysia's public financial management.

Originality/ Value: This study presents an empirically validated, context-specific framework of non-technical competencies for public sector accountants in Malaysia, offering direct value to JANM's succession planning and professional development initiatives.

Keywords: Professional competency, non-technical skills, accountants, public sector, Malaysia

1.0 Introduction

Succession planning is a strategic method of risk management (Rothwell, 2010) that involves identifying and preparing individuals to take over key leadership positions after they leave the organisation (Burdett, 1993). The traditional method of succession planning, which involves appointing specific individuals to specific positions, is ineffective in the current dynamic environment, which is characterised by aggressive competition, adaptable work arrangements, unforeseen external influences, streamlined organisational hierarchies, and constant organisational restructuring. Consequently, organisations require a cohort of employees who are highly successful at every hierarchy level (Mamprin, 2002). During this period, organisations routinely search for potential successors to key employees who will be leaving the organisation. Consequently, organisations struggle to find suitable individuals to fill the vacancies left by departing employees. Furthermore, employers have increasingly realised that they can identify potential managers and leaders within their own organisations (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2011). Hence, employers have realised that the strategic use of tools, such as succession planning, enables them to effectively address future challenges.

Currently, the JANM is attempting to effectively supervise the recruitment and development of qualified personnel to facilitate the implementation of its succession plan. This plan highlights the need for JANM to improve its succession planning and human resource management to meet industry standards in Malaysia and those of similar organisations internationally. Improving the methodology for cultivating key skills and competencies is essential for the successful implementation of JANM succession planning and future talent management. This approach would ensure that JANM services are delivered by competent professionals who enable the realisation of JANM vision and goals.

A major challenge in succession planning is the lack of a thorough human resource management database. Such a database is essential to identify and train future JANM accountants and to measure employees' performance, competencies, and career development. Without a suitable database, JANM may encounter challenges, such as knowledge gaps, limited development opportunities, extended decision timelines, and challenges in identifying talent. Hence, JANM is establishing a succession planning framework for the talent

management of public sector accountants to ensure the future implementation of its talent management and succession planning efforts. This approach will ensure that the exemplary JANM staff deliver services effectively aligned with JANM vision and objectives. The JANM can achieve these objectives by establishing professional competency criteria to determine an auditor's necessary skills before creating the talent management database. Accordingly, this study aimed to determine the competency criteria required for accounting positions at JANM.

2.0 Literature Review

Public sector accountants are essential for the efficient use of public resources, financial accountability, transparency, and compliance with government regulations. Public sector accountants' role is important for maintaining trust in public institutions, as their responsibilities frequently overlap with public policy, administration, and the public interest. Public sector auditors significantly influence government fund management. Hence, auditors are important for the efficient delivery of public services, the promotion of sound governance, and the maintenance of public trust by ensuring that public funds are used transparently, accountably, and efficiently.

Auditors' responsibilities exceed traditional accounting and include budgeting, auditing, financial planning, risk management, and advisory activities. Thus, auditors are key players in the public administration system. Mamprin (2002) stated that fostering comprehensive skills that enhance adaptability and leadership potential at all organisational levels made more sense than focusing on developing skills for specific positions, and emphasised the need to involve all employees in succession planning.

In modern organisations, implementing strategies to cultivate adaptability skills, promote flexibility, and improve leadership competencies at all levels is a strategic decision (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2011). Furthermore, companies have recognised the potential of identifying future managers and leaders within their organisations. This approach is consistent with studies indicating that organisations can efficiently meet their future needs through succession planning (Byham et al., 2001). While the need is obvious for succession planning in commercial, for-profit organisations, government and non-profit organisations more commonly operate without such preparation. The literature suggests that substantive research on succession planning within governmental organisations is lacking (Al-Tamimi et al., 2017). Furthermore, government organisations, such as JANM, lack of knowledge about succession planning.

Professional competence is the ability to perform a function to a specific standard defined by a specific set of expectations of a professional organisation (MIA, 2020). Thus, professional competence refers to the totality of information, skills, talents, and behaviours that enable a person to perform their job or profession competently and to the required standard. Professional competence includes the mastery of certain technical or domain-specific activities while maintaining thorough interpersonal and ethical behaviour (Epstein & Hundert, 2002). Stuebs et al., (2021, p. 38) stated that soft skills "are important for accountants to fulfil their moral broker role in society". Epstein and Hundert (2002) stated that competence is dynamic and develops over time through experience, practice, and continuous learning. Epstein and Hundert's (2002) seminal work characterised competence not as a static trait, but as a quality that can develop and improve over the course of a career. The researchers stated that competence is dynamic

and develops through lifelong learning, practice, and self-improvement over the course of a career, and involves the following (Epstein & Hundert, 2002, p. 226):

> The habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served.

Accounting research aims to identify the essential components of professional competence an accountant needs to improve their skills (Sarapaivanich et al., 2019; Joshi, 2023). These studies recognised that accounting requires a mix of technical knowledge and broader skills for effective practice. Numerous studies have described essential competencies for accountants, which have frequently been categorised into two (2) overarching areas: technical and non-technical skills. A mastery of accounting and finance are essential to the accounting profession. Nonetheless, accountants have rarely or never used general knowledge and information technology in their work (Rufino et al., 2022). Conversely, professional accountants typically use non-technical skills related to intellectual, interpersonal, and communication skills. Professional accountants emphasise the need for collaboration, critical thinking, and written and verbal communication skills (Asabeh et al., 2023).

Accountants consistently adhere to professional standards, ethics, and morals when providing accounting services to clients (Palmer et al., 2004). Kane (1992) stated that assessing professional skills is challenging and occasionally frustrating due to the complexity and intellectual rigour of professional practice. Consequently, such skills are challenging to accurately describe or assess. Experts occasionally disagree about the mastery of certain scenarios in professional practice, which renders it challenging to evaluate a candidate's performance in such cases. Kane (1992) stated that assessing job skills can be easy if a basic understanding of skills in many areas is present. This understanding can be achieved by identifying the challenges in assessing job skills and suggesting methods to mitigate the influence of these challenges.

Professional accounting organisations, such as the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) have attempted to create a competency framework that encompasses fundamental areas, such as professional knowledge, personal skills, and leadership skills. Additionally, accounting education researchers frequently focus on the importance of developing technical accounting skills and critical thinking, communication, and ethical reasoning to respond to the changing nature of the profession (Hunter et al., 2023). These studies consistently emphasised the need for the comprehensive development of accountants who combine technical expertise with interpersonal and strategic business insight to succeed in a more complicated and global financial landscape.

Numerous studies have analysed the professional competence of accountants and identified key competencies for accountants in two (2) primary categories: technical and non-technical skills (Palmer et al., 2004; Douglas & Gammie, 2019; Rufino et al., 2022). The professional competency criteria for accountants were developed based on the literature and professional organisations in the USA, Uganda, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore, and Malaysia (see Table 1). All professional organisations have divided the criteria into technical and non-technical skills. The USA, Uganda, and Malaysia categorised technical skills into three (3) dimensions: basic, intermediate, and advanced.

Table 1: Professional Competency Criteria

Countries or Professional Associations	Framework	Source
USA	International Education Standards	IFAC (2021)
Australia	International Accreditation Guidelines	CPA Australia (2024)
Canada	The Chartered Professional Accountant Competency Map	Certified Public Accountants (CPA) Canada (2022)
New Zealand	Chartered Accountant Capability Model	Chartered Accountants of Australia and New Zealand (CAANZ) (2023)
Singapore	ACRA Skills Framework for Accountancy	Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) (2023)
Uganda	CPA Uganda Competency Framework	Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Uganda (ICPAU) (2021)
Malaysia	MIA Competency Framework	MIA (2020)
American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA)	Core Competency Framework	AICPA (2018)
Chartered Global Management Accountant (CGMA)	CGMA Competency Framework	CGMA (2019)
World Bank	Competency Frameworks for Professional Accountants and Auditors	Centre for Financial Reporting Reform (2018)
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)	Professional Development Ladders	ICAEW (2023)
Institute of Management Accountants	IMA Management Accounting Competency Framework	Institute of Management Accountants (2019)
Higher Education Leadership Academy	Leadership Competency Framework	Mohamed Jais, Yahya and Ghani (2020)

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Sample Selection

The study population was 880 public sector accountants in strategic positions from grade WA44 to JUSA B as of July 2024. This study selected 265 accountants employed with the JANM as the sample. In this study, the sample involved accountants in strategic positions who were assigned to the main JANM in Putrajaya, and government agencies, state governments, and ministries throughout Malaysia.

3.2 Research Instrument and Data Collection

The research instrument was a questionnaire, which was used to ensure that the professional competency criteria of accountants holding strategic positions matched that of JANM accountants or stakeholders. The original items for this framework were based on AICPA (2018), Centre for Financial Reporting Reform (2018), CGMA (2019), Institute of Management Accountants (2019), Mohamed Jais, Yahya and Ghani (2020), IFAC (2021), ICPAU (2021), MIA (2022), CPA Canada (2022), CAANZ (2023), ACRA (2023), ICAEW (2023), CPA Australia

(2024. The questionnaire was developed based on the Higher Education Competency Framework and MIA professional competency criteria. The questionnaire was improved after the completion of the second phase (interviews with public sector accountants).

The questionnaire consisted of five (5) sections. For Section A, respondents were required to indicate their current position and categorisation. Section B required respondents to respond to the professional competency criteria from a non-technical perspective. There were 31 non-technical competencies, which included conceptual thinking, strategic thinking, decision-making, and self-confidence. Section C required the respondents to answer the job competency criteria from a non-technical perspective. In Section D, respondents were required to respond to the professional competency criteria from a general technical viewpoint. This section contained 16 statements, such as "lead projects and tasks by combining ideas and theories from different technical fields and make recommendations tailored to stakeholder needs", "evaluate, research, and solve problems under limited supervision", and "communicate and explain relevant information consistently and convincingly to different stakeholders".

The final Section E required the respondents to respond to a series of questions about their demographic profile, such as age, gender, qualifications, current grade, and years of experience in the public sector. The responses for Sections B and D were answered using a six-point Likert scale to prevent respondents from choosing "neutral" as an easy escape. Hence, the results may provide clearer insight into whether the respondents' perceptions were truly positive or negative.

4.0 Data Collection

The questionnaire was conducted with JANM accountants. The participants were public-sector accountants in Putrajaya and governmental departments and ministries throughout Malaysia, and had been directly appointed by the state governments. Furthermore, accountants working at public universities were identified. The total number of accountants holding strategic positions in the public sector was reported to be 880 as of 31 July 2024. An appropriate sample size was determined by using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) stratified sample size table. The sample size was based on the total population rather than each position, as the number of accountants in each position varied significantly. Thus, the required sample size was 265 accountants.

The data were collected by distributing the questionnaires to public sector accountants in Malaysia from 1 October 2024 until 31 October 2024. The accountants were mainly approached via email and with the assistance of Institut Perakaunan Negara (IPN) and JANM. In total, 170 respondents completed and returned the questionnaires, which represented a 64% response rate.

5.0 Results and Discussion

5.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 2 indicates that 57 respondents (33.5%) were male, while 113 respondents (66.5%) were female. Table 1, Panel B, indicated that most respondents (59.4%) were between the ages of 41 and 50 years old, followed by those aged > 50 years old (34.7%). The remaining 10 respondents (5.9%) were under the age of 40 years. A significant proportion of the

respondents (63.5%) held an accounting degree, while three (3) respondents (1.8%) possessed a bachelor's degree in a non-accounting field (see Table 2). Furthermore, only one (1) respondent pursued an Advanced Diploma in Accounting, while 54 respondents pursued a master's in accounting (31.8%), and three (3) respondents (1.8%) held a PhD.

A considerable number of respondents had a professional qualification (see Table 2). This study shows One hundred and sixty-two of the 170 respondents (95.3%) had professional qualifications, such as Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), Malaysian Institute of Certified Public Accountants (MICPA), Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), and Chartered Public Finance Accountant (CPFA). Nevertheless, the remaining 4.7% of respondents had no professional qualifications.

Table 2: Individual-Related Profile

Panel A: Respondents' Gender	**N**	**Percentage**
Male	57	33.5
Female	113	66.5
Panel B: Respondents' Age	**N**	**Percentage**
< 30 years old	1	0.6
31 - 40 years old	9	5.3
41 - 50 years old	101	59.4
> 50 years old	59	34.7
Panel C: Education Level	**N**	**Percentage**
Advanced Diploma in Accounting	1	0.6
Bachelor's in Accounting	108	63.5
Bachelor's (non-accounting)	3	1.8
Master's	54	31.8
PhD	3	1.8
Other	1	0.6
Panel D: Professional Qualification	**N**	**Percentage**
Yes	162	95.3
No	8	4.7

5.2 Work-Related Profile

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the respondents' work-related profile. It was found that just over half of the respondents (53.5%) were in grades 48 to 52 positions, followed by respondents in grades 54 to JUSA (40.6%), and the remaining 10 respondents (5.9%) were in grades 41 to 44. The JANM-appointed accountants held different department and ministry positions. Therefore, their work scope may also have varied depending on the departments and ministries where they are employed. Furthermore, the respondents' positions would also determine the titles of their job positions. Of the 170 respondents, 55.3% have worked in the public sector for more than 20 years (see Table 2), while 37.1% of respondents have worked in this sector for between 16 and 20 years. The remaining 7.6% of respondents have worked in

the public sector for less than 15 years. Overall, these figures suggested that more than half of the respondents are well acquainted with their roles in the public sector.

Further analysis revealed that most respondents (91.2%) had less than 10 years of experience in their current position. Specifically, 118 respondents (69.4%) had less than five (5) years of experience in the position, which indicated that they were new or novices in their current position. In most cases, novices could have inadequate knowledge and skills when taking on a new position. Fifteen respondents (8.8%) had accumulated 5–10 years of experience in their current position (see Table 2, Panel C).

Table 3: Work-Related Profile

Panel A: Current Position Grade	**N**	**Percentage**
54–JUSA	69	40.6
48–52	91	53.5
41–44	10	5.9
Panel B: Years of Service	**N**	**Percentage**
1–5	2	1.2
6–10	5	2.9
11–15	6	3.5
16–20	63	37.1
> 20	94	55.3
Panel C: Years of Service	**N**	**Percentage**
1–5	118	69.4
6–10	37	21.8
11–15	1	0.6
16–20	7	4.1
> 20	7	4.1
Panel D: Current Placement	**N**	**Percentage**
Eastern region (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang)	6	3.5
Northern region (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak)	5	2.9
Southern region (Melaka, Johor)	4	2.4
Central region (Selangor, Federal Territory, Negri Sembilan, Putrajaya)	143	84.1
Sabah and Sarawak	12	7.1

A significant number of the respondents (n = 143, 84.1%) were in the central region of Malaysia (see Table 3), which was a common situation. In this study, the central region consists of Selangor, the Federal Territory, and Negri Sembilan. This region also includes Putrajaya, a city established in 1995 as the administrative and judicial capital of Malaysia (Moser, 2010). Therefore, most public sector accountants would reside in this city. Six (6) respondents (3.5%) worked in the eastern region (Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang), five (5) respondents (2.9%) worked in the northern region (Perlis, Kedah, Pahang, and Perak), and 12 respondents (7.1%) worked in Sabah and Sarawak. The remaining four (4) respondents (2.4%) were in the southern region (Melaka and Johor). Overall, all respondents resided in large cities.

5.3 Perceived Non-Technical Competency Skills

This study demonstrated the importance of non-technical skills for public sector accountants. Non-technical expertise is critical for accountants to navigate the unique challenges of the public sector, effectively engage stakeholders, and contribute to transparent and accountable governance. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics from the exploratory factor analysis, which focused on the non-technical skills from the questionnaire survey. The results demonstrated that the respondents considered 24 of the 31 related items important for non-technical skills.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Public Sector Accountants' Non-Technical Competency Skills (in percentages)

No.	Non-Technical Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	Conceptual thinking				2.5	40.9	56.6
2.	Analytical thinking				1.2	28.8	70.0
3.	Critical thinking				2.4	34.7	62.9
4.	Strategic thinking				2.9	25.9	71.2
5.	Decision-making ability					26.5	73.5
6.	Planning and organising ability				0.6	24.7	74.7
7.	Networking and relationship building				3.5	35.9	60.6
8.	Teamwork and team leadership				0.6	27.6	71.8
9.	Self-confidence				0.6	25.9	73.5
10.	Empathy			0.6	7.6	38.2	53.6
11.	Information seeker and lifelong learning and personal development				2.9	44.2	52.9
12.	Leveraging diversity				5.9	43.5	50.6
13.	Negotiation, impact, and influential				4.1	41.8	54.1
14.	Initiative and proactive behaviour				2.9	39.4	57.7
15.	Professional scepticism	0.6	1.2	0.6	11.1	40.0	46.5
16.	Professional judgment				0.6	31.2	68.2

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Public Sector Accountants' Non-Technical Competency Skills (in percentages) (continued)

No.	Non-Technical Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Moderately Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
17.	Integrity, values, and ethics					14.1	85.9
18.	Resilience				0.6	32.3	67.1
19.	Achievement orientation				3.5	40.6	55.9
20.	Organisational and environmental awareness			0.6	5.3	45.9	48.2
21.	Organisational commitment				4.1	32.4	63.5
22.	Forward thinking				1.2	34.1	64.7
23.	Coaching & mentoring		0.6		7.1	42.4	50.5
24.	Listening & considerate				4.1	44.1	51.8
25.	Pleasant appearance				7.1	43.5	49.4
26.	Self and time management				1.8	33.5	64.7
27.	Customer service			2.4	14.7	44.7	38.2
28.	Entrepreneurial	0.6	1.8	8.2	32.4	37.0	20.0
29.	Resource management			1.2	7.6	41.2	50.0
30.	Conflict resolution				2.4	40.0	57.6
31.	Adaptability				1.2	36.4	62.4

The results demonstrated that some respondents disagree with some of the items. For example, the respondents disagreed that empathy, professional scepticism, and organisational and environmental awareness were important when holding a public sector position. Furthermore, customer service, entrepreneurial thinking, and people management were not considered important non-technical skills. The results suggested that some respondents considered empathy more relevant to social work or healthcare, and not crucial to accountancy, which is frequently perceived as a technical and number-orientated profession. Thus, such respondents may prioritise analytical skills over interpersonal understanding. Public sector accountants are heavily guided by regulations, guidelines, and standards. Therefore, some respondents may have believed that empathy plays a limited role in decision-making or financial reporting, where objectivity and compliance with rules are dominant.

In terms of professional scepticism, the respondents may have assumed that the structured public sector work, with rigorous audits and regulatory frameworks, reduces the need for individual scepticism. Some respondents may have underestimated professional scepticism as they perceived public sector accountants as less vulnerable to fraud or unethical behaviour than those in the private sector. In terms of organisational and environmental awareness,

the respondents may have considered that accountants are only required to focus on their technical tasks, and that broader organisational or environmental awareness is unnecessary. Furthermore, public sector accountants might mistakenly believe that their work is immune to political, economic, or social shifts, thereby downplaying the significance of environmental awareness. Although the respondents downplayed these skills, empathy, professional scepticism, and organisational and environmental awareness are important for effective public sector accounting. These skills improve accountability, adaptability, and stakeholder engagement, which are all are essential for responsible stewardship of public resources. Nonetheless, the results indicated a slight disagreement regarding the concept of coaching and mentoring.

5.4 Factor Analysis Loading of Non-Technical Competency Skills

Table 5 presents the results of Bartlett's test and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value. Watkins (2018) used the Bartlett's test to estimate the likelihood of factor analysis stability, while the KMO test ensures the suitability of the data for the factor analysis in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The EFA procedure was conducted by constructing elements using the principal component and the Varimax rotation extraction method. Based on Bahkia et al. (2019), the significance value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity must be < 0.05 for the factor analysis to be acceptable.

In this study, Bartlett's test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) demonstrated that the correlation matrix was not random, as Watkins (2018) stated [$\chi 2$ (170) = 4526, $p < 0.001$]. The KMO statistic, as suggested by Watkins (2018), was 0.934, which was > 0.9 and indicated a remarkable level of performance (see Table 5). Consequently, this study concluded that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis. Additionally, the KMO test for sampling adequacy yielded an outstanding result (KMO = 0.934). These results indicated that there were sufficient data to proceed with the data reduction process in EFA.

Table 5: Bartlett's Test and KMO Value

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.934
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. chi-square	4526.606
	df	465
	Sig.	< 0.001

Table 6 presents the proposed items for the seven (7) components, which total 31. The seven (7) components were similar to the proposed succession planning framework for public sector accountants. The results demonstrated that these components had a highly reliable loading factor (> 0.50), which aligned with Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson's (2010) suggestion that the loading should be > 0.5 to be considered adequate in an exploratory study and smaller sample sizes. For reliability, Nunnally (1978) suggested that a factor loading > 0.7 is considered acceptable for exploratory study, while factor loading > 0.8 indicates good reliability, > 0.9 indicates excellent reliability, but a factor loading < 0.6 indicates poor reliability.

For the organisational component, six (6) items had a factor loading > 0.5: teamwork and team leadership, negotiation, impact and influence, achievement orientation, organisational and environmental commitment, and forward thinking. For the intellectual component, four (4)

items had a factor loading > 0.5: conceptual thinking, analytical thinking, critical thinking, and strategic thinking.

The personal component encompassed three (3) key elements: the ability to make decisions, planning and organisational skills, and integrity, values, and ethics. Component 4 was the interpersonal and communication component, which included empathy, coaching, and mentoring, and listening and consideration. For the ethical principle components, the relevant items of pleasant demeanour, self-management, time management, and conflict resolution had a factor loading > 0.5. Three (3) of the five (5) commitment to the public interest component items had factor loadings > 0.5: customer service, entrepreneurship, and resource management. For the professional scepticism and professional judgement component, two (2) items had a factor loading > 0.5: professional scepticism and professional judgement.

Table 6: Factor Loading of Public Sector Accountants' Non-Technical Competency Skills

No.	Code	Non-Technical Competency	Organisational	Intellectual	Personal Effectiveness	Interpersonal and Communication	Ethical Principles	Commitment to Public Interest	Professional Scepticism and Professional Judgment
1.	N1	Conceptual thinking		0.571*			0.421		
2.	N2	Analytical thinking		0.866*					
3.	N3	Critical thinking		0.778*					
4.	N4	Strategic thinking		0.798*					
5.	N5	Decision-making ability			0.751*				
6.	N6	Planning and organising ability			0.695*				
7.	N7	Networking and relationship building	0.426			0.465			
8.	N8	Teamwork and team leadership	0.500		0.467				
9.	N9	Self-confidence			0.532				
10.	N10	Empathy				0.832*			
11.	N11	Information seeker and lifelong learning and personal development				0.498			
12.	N12	Leveraging diversity	0.433			0.498			
13.	N13	Negotiation, impact, and influential	0.570*			0.402			
14.	N14	Initiative and proactive behaviour	0.505						
15.	N15	Professional scepticism							0.826*
16.	N16	Professional judgment		0.447	0.428				0.455
17.	N17	Integrity, values, and ethics			0.776*				
18.	N18	Resilience	0.419		0.484		0.426		

Table 6: Factor Loading of Public Sector Accountants' Non-Technical Competency Skills (continued)

No.	Code	Non-Technical Competency	Organisational	Intellectual	Personal Effectiveness	Interpersonal and Communication	Ethical Principles	Commitment to Public Interest	Professional Scepticism and Professional Judgment
19.	N19	Achievement orientation	0.575*						
20.	N20	Organisational and environmental awareness	0.637*			0.46			
21.	N21	Organisational commitment	0.811*						
22.	N22	Forward thinking	0.616*						
23.	N23	Coaching and mentoring				0.552*		0.414	
24.	N24	Listening and considerate				0.57*	0.551		
25.	N25	Pleasant appearance					0.595*		
26.	N26	Self and time management					0.669*		
27.	N27	Customer service						0.752*	
28.	N28	Entrepreneurial						0.762*	
29.	N29	Resource management						0.694*	
30.	N30	Conflict resolution	0.441				0.629*		
31.	N31	Adaptability	0.629*				0.522		

IPN Journal of Research and Practice in Public Sector Accounting and Management
Vol. 15, No. 2, 2025, pp. 137 - 157

A factor analysis revealed a change in the components from six (6) to seven (7). The seven (7) components consist of organisational, intellectual, personal effectiveness, interpersonal and communication, professional scepticism and judgment, ethical principles, and commitment to the public interest. The items related to each component were identified and included in the proposed succession planning framework for JANM accountants. Thirty-one items were tested using factor analysis to determine the appropriateness of each item for each component. Of the 31 items, 23 items were suitable for the respective components (see Table 7). The Cronbach's alpha for each component suggested that they had good and excellent reliability, while the commitment to public interest component had acceptable reliability. Only the professional scepticism component retained more than one (1) element.

Table 7: Final Items of Public Sector Accountants' Non-Technical Competency Skills

No.	Code	Statement	Loading	Cronbach' Alpha for Internal Reliability
Organisational				
1.	N19	Achievement orientation	0.575	0.917
2.	N20	Organisational and environmental awareness	0.637	
3.	N21	Organisational commitment	0.811	
4.	N22	Forward thinking	0.616	
5.	N13	Negotiation, impact, and influential	0.57	
6.	N31	Adaptability	0.629	
Intellectual				
7.	N1	Conceptual thinking	0.571	0.894
8.	N2	Analytical thinking	0.866	
9.	N3	Critical thinking	0.778	
10.	N4	Strategic thinking	0.798	
Personal Effectiveness				
11.	N5	Decision-making ability	0.751	0.863
12.	N6	Planning and organising ability	0.695	
13.	N17	Integrity, values, and ethics	0.776	
Interpersonal and Communication				
14.	N10	Empathy	0.832	0.867
15.	N23	Coaching and mentoring	0.552	
16.	N24	Listening and considerate	0.57	
17.	N15	Professional scepticism	0.826	-
Professional Scepticism and Professional Judgment				
17.	N15	Professional scepticism	0.826	-

Table 7: Final Items of Public Sector Accountants' Non-Technical Competency Skills (continued)

No.	Code	Statement	Loading	Cronbach' Alpha for Internal Reliability
Ethical Principles				
18.	N25	Pleasant appearance	0.595	0.840
19.	N26	Self and time management	0.669	
20.	N30	Conflict resolution	0.629	
Commitment to Public Interest				
21.	N27	Customer service	0.752	0.745
22.	N28	Entrepreneurial	0.762	
23.	N29	Resource management	0.694	

5.5 The Implication of Non-Technical Competency Skills

This exploratory study conducted on the Malaysian public sector used a research methodology that enabled replication by researchers and practitioners in other countries or government agencies. Thus, this study is relevant to the accounting profession. The replicable methodology used in this study provided a foundation for comparative research and the potential for benchmarking non-technical competency development across various public sector settings. This replicability enhanced the value of the results and encouraged broader application and validation in diverse governmental contexts.

The validated items from this study can be used as measurement indicators for future quantitative studies on competency development. Researchers who use these items can assess the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at enhancing public sector accountants' non-technical skills. This approach will enable the development of competency growth and provide valuable data to inform the continuous improvement of training programmes. Furthermore, these measurement indicators support the development of more robust and generalisable findings, and contribute to the advancement of competency frameworks within the Malaysian public sector accounting profession.

5.6 Limitations and Future Research

This study aimed to identify a set of criteria for public sector accountants' professional competency, specifically the non-technical competencies. This study suggested the inclusion of non-technical competency skills in the succession planning framework. The finalised non-technical competency skills suggested in this study (see Table 8) included intellectual, interpersonal, and communication skills; personal and organisational skills; professional scepticism and judgment; ethical principles; and a commitment to public interest.

Table 8: Final Items of Public-Sector Accountants' Non-Technical Skills

No.	Code	Statement
		Organisational
1.	N19	Achievement orientation
2.	N20	Organisational and environmental awareness
3.	N21	Organisational commitment
4.	N22	Forward-thinking
5.	N13	Negotiation, impact, and influential
6.	N31	Adaptability
		Intellectual
7.	N1	Conceptual thinking
8.	N2	Analytical thinking
9.	N3	Critical thinking
10.	N4	Strategic thinking
		Personal Effectiveness
11.	N5	Decision-making ability
12.	N6	Planning and organising abilities
13.	N17	Integrity, values, and ethics
		Interpersonal and Communication
14.	N10	Empathy
15.	N23	Coaching and mentoring
16.	N24	Listening and considerate
		Professional Scepticism and Professional Judgment
17.	N15	Professional scepticism
		Ethical Principles
18.	N25	Pleasant appearance
19.	N26	Self and time management
20.	N30	Conflict resolution
		Commitment to the Public Interest
21.	N27	Customer service
22.	N28	Entrepreneurial
23.	N29	Resource management

The results suggested that the key competencies indicated the importance of enhancing development that can emphasise their role in public sector accounting. Therefore, JANM can enhance non-technical competency through training and also mentorship based on each accountant's function and role. The JANM can ensure the usefulness of this succession planning framework by implementing regular evaluations based on continuous feedback from its internal and external stakeholders to ensure the prioritisation of the skills needed. Furthermore, the development of non-technical skills should be tailored to roles, operations, and functions, which can also fit with accountants' expertise and the JANM objective.

The first limitation of this study is that the number of public sector accountants participated in this study was considerably smaller compared to the population. The distribution of respondents was focused on the Central region, with limited representation from the Northern, Southern, Eastern, and East Malaysia regions. Thus, this focus limited the generalisability of the results to all regions in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the sample size was considered sufficient to achieve the study objectives. Hence, future studies should focus on stratified sampling based on each state to reflect the application in the public sector. Second, the quantitative analyses used in this study were limited to descriptive and simple statistical tools, such as factor analysis. Hence, the implementation of professional competency should be investigated further.

6.0 Conclusion

The JANM is important in aiding public sector accountants in improving their level of competency skills by providing training to improve these competencies. An introduction to the concepts of non-technical competency skills (professional scepticism, integrity, values, and ethics) can encourage accountants to be more alert and attentive when performing their public sector duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, JANM can provide mentoring programmes where young accountants are paired with experienced accountants to develop practical knowledge and leadership skills.

The results contributed significantly by identifying 23 distinct items related to non-technical skills, which are crucial for the professional competency framework tailored to Malaysian public sector accountants. This framework integrates behavioural, ethical, and cognitive dimensions derived from factor loadings. The analysis revealed high factor loadings for these items, which underscored their importance and provided valuable insights into which non-technical skills should be prioritised. These high-loading items can inform the JANM focus areas when designing and delivering training programmes aimed at enhancing public sector accountants' competencies. In the future, these 23 non-technical skill items are intended to be a foundational blueprint for the ongoing development and construction of a comprehensive competency framework. This framework will guide future efforts to systematically advance accountants' non-technical skills and ensure that training and professional development initiatives are aligned with the most critical areas for improvement.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the Institut Perakaunan Negara awarded by JANM. The authors extend gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) for their invaluable support, without which this research would not have been possible.

References

ACRA. (2023). *Skills framework for accountancy*. https://www.acra.gov.sg/accountancy/professional-development/career-development/skills-framework

AICPA. (2018). *Core competency framework*. https://us.aicpa.org/content/dam/aicpa/interestareas/accountingeducation/resources/downloadabledocuments/aicpa-pre-certification-core-compentency-framework.pdf

Al-Tamimi, A .R. M., Agarwal, M. & Hamner, M. (2017). What if you don't have the data? Acquiring and exploring data to initiate government programs, *Procedia Computer Science, 118*, 1–14.

Asabeh, S. A., Alzboon, R., Alkhakaileh, R., & Alshurafat, H. (2023). Soft skills and knowledge required for a professional accountant evidence from Jordan. *Cogent Education, 10*(2), 2254157. DOI:10.1080/2331186X.2023.2254157

Bahkia, A. S., Awang, Z., Afthanorhan, A., Ghazali, P. L., Foziah, H. (2019). *Exploratory factor analysis on occupational stress in context of Malaysian sewerage operations*. In: AIP Conference Proceedings

Bartlett, F. C. (1954). *Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology*. Cambridge University Press.

Burdett, J. O. (1993). Crafting tomorrow's leadership today: A practitioner's view of succession and replacement planning. *International Journal of Manpower, 14*(8), 23 –33. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437729310044023

Byham, W. C., Smith, A. B. &. Paese, M. J. (2001). *Grow your own leaders, acceleration pools: A new method of succession management*. Bridgeville: DDI Press.

CAANZ. (2023). *A capability model to help shape profession of the futur*e. https://www.charteredaccountantsanz.com/learning-andevents/learning/capability-mode

Centre for Financial Reporting Reform. (2018). *Competency-based accounting education, training and certification*. https://cfrr.worldbank.org/publications/competency-based-accounting-education-training-certification-implementation-guide

CGMA. (2019). *CGMA competency framework: 2019 update*. https://us.aicpa.org/content/dam/cgma/resources/tools/downloadabledocuments/cgma-competency-framework-2019-edition.pdf

CPA Australia. (2024). *Professional accreditation guidelines*. https://www.cpaaustralia.com.au/get-involved/academic-institution-support/ professional-accreditation-guidelines

CPA Canada. (2022). *The CPA competency map: Qualifications for the Canadian CPA Designation*.https://www.cpacanada.ca/become-a-cpa/why-become-a-cpa/the-cpa-certification-program/the-cpa-competency-map

Douglas, S. & Gammie., E. (2019). An investigation into the development of non-technical skills by undergraduate accounting programmes. *Accounting Education, 28*(3), 304 – 332. https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2019.1605532

Epstein, R. M. & Hundert, E. M. (2002). Defining and assessing professional competence. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 287*(2), 226–235. DOI: 10.1001/jama.287.2.226

Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis*. 7th Edition, Pearson, New York.

Hunter, K., Lee, J. & Massey, D. W. (2023). Professional competencies for accountants: Advancing our understanding of soft skills, in Shawver, T.J. (Ed.). *Research on Professional Responsibility and Ethics in Accounting, 25*, 1–24.

ICAEW. (2023). *Continuing Professional Development Regulations 2023*. https://www.icaew.com/regulation/training-and-education/cpd-regulations-2023

ICPAU. (2021). *CPA Uganda competency framework.* https://www.icpau.co.ug/sites/default/files/Resources/CPA%20Competency%20Framework%20for%20Professional%20Accountants.pdf

IFAC. (2021). *Syllabus and competencies matrix for a three-level qualification.* https://www.ifac.org/knowledge-gateway/professional-accountancy-organization-pao-development/publications/syllabus-competencies-matrix-three-level-qualification

Institute of Management Accountants. (2019). *IMA management accounting competency framework*.https://asiapac.imanet.org/research-publications/statements-on management-accounting/ima-management-accounting-competency-framework

Joshi, P. L. (2023). A survey of the influence of skill sets on the performance of professional accountants, *Journal of Accounting, Finance and Auditing Studies, 9*(3), 162–196. DOI:10.32602/jafas.2023.029

Kane, M. T. (1992). The assessment of professional competence. *Evaluation and the Health Professions, 15*(2), 163–182. DOI: 10.1177/016327879201500203

Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 30*(3), 607–610. https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308

Mamprin, A. (2002). *Next in line: Five steps for successful succession planning*, Washington, DC: The Center for Association Leadership.

Mehrabani, S. E. & Mohamad, N. A. (2011). Succession planning: A necessary process in today's organisation. *International Journal of e-Education, E-Business, e-Management and e-Learning, 1*(5), 371–377. DOI:10.7763/IJEEEE.2011.V1.61

MIA. (2020). *MIA competency framework*. https://mia.org.my/mia-competency-framework/

Mohamed Jais, I. R., Yahaya, N., & Ghani, E. K. (2020). Higher education leadership competency framework in Malaysia: A refinement. *Humanities and Social Sciences Letters, 8*(4), 438–449. DOI:10.18488/journal.73.2020.84.438.449

Moser, D. V. (2010). An experimental examination of information bias in audit judgment. *The Accounting Review, 85*(3), 885–910.

Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric theory.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Palmer, K. N., Ziegenfuss, D. E., & Pinsker, R. E. (2004). International knowledge, skills, and abilities of auditors/ accountants: Evidence from recent competency studies. *Managerial Auditing Journal, 19*(7), 889–896. DOI:10.1108/02686900410549411

Rothwell, W. J. (2010). *Effective succession planning: Ensuring leadership continuity and building talent from within*. AMACOM, P.7.

Rufino, H., Payabyab, R. G., & Lim, G. T. (2022). Competency requirements for professional accountants: Basis for accounting curriculum enhancement. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research, 7*(3), 116–129. DOI:10.2139/ssrn.3172508

Sarapaivanich, N., Trakarnsirinont, W., Laohavisudhi, S., & Viriyachinkarn, T. (2019). Factors affecting the need to have accounting technical competence, professional skills and professional values, ethics and attitudes – The case of Thailand. *Asian Journal of Business and Accounting, 12*(1), 71–97. https://doi.org/10.22452/ajba.vol12no1.3

Stuebs, M., Miller, W., & Mintz, S. (2021). Advancing practical wisdom in ethics as an essential soft skill developed through experiential learning. *Research on Professional Responsibility and Ethics in Accounting, 24*(1), 37–53. DOI:10.1108/S1574-07652023002

Watkins, M. W. (2018). Exploratory factor analysis: A guide to best practice. *Journal of Black Psychology, 44*(3), 219–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798418771807