A CONCEPTUAL CORE COMPETENCY MODEL FOR HALAL EXECUTIVES IN FOOD MANUFACTURING COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

A competent halal executive is essential and an integral part of the Halal Management System in Halal-certified companies. Core competencies in general are linked with job productivity, job performance, and organisational performance. In Malaysia, initiatives are currently underway to produce competent and professional Halal executives. As for now, the competencies of halal executives are yet to be defined. Defining and identifying the core competencies is pivotal as the Malaysian Halal industry needs to appoint more competent halal executives to serve the halal-certified companies. Thus, this article aims to identify the set of competencies for halal executives via a literature review. This would allow for the further development of the Halal executive core competencies conceptual model. In addition, the background of Halal executives in the Malaysian Halal industry is also discussed to provide context for this review article. The conceptual model proposed is useful in discussing and developing the idea of core competencies, especially in the halal manufacturing industry context. A comprehensive core competencies model is useful for preparing future halal executives, evaluating halal executives' practises in the workplace, and for their lifelong professional development. Other countries could use the same core competencies framework to inform the development of the human resource related to Halal.

Keywords: *Halal Industry, Food Manufacturing, Core Competencies, Halal Executive, Job performance*

1.   Introduction

Over the past decades, the global halal industry market has expanded due to high demand. Powering this demand are two major demographic shifts: Muslim population growth and socio-economic changes. First, the world Muslim population is estimated to have reached 1.9 billion in 2020. It covers almost 25% of the global population (Mohamed Bashir, 2020). Muslims are growing twice as fast as the non-Muslim population, and this trend is expected to remain the same over the next decade. Muslims are projected to grow to 2 billion in number by 2030 and 3 billion by 2060, covering around 30% of the global population. The second driver is the changes in the socio-economic profile of the Muslim population due to the growing number of middle-class segments. Compared to the previous generation, Muslims nowadays are more knowledgeable and educated. The growing Muslim middle class means that Muslim consumers now are more assertive, demanding, and ready to take an interest in their purchase behaviour (Bamba et al., 2017). These shifts have enhanced the growth of halal market demand globally. The halal industry is not just for Muslims; it has also gained popularity among non-Muslims who are looking for safe, quality, and ethical products offered by halal products and services.

The halal industry involves several important sectors such as food, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, media, recreation, travel, and modest fashion. Of these sectors, the halal food industry is the most prominent, as all Muslims are obligated to consume halal food that complies with the Shariah requirements. The halal food sector has turned into a solid monetary power locally and all around. Figure 1 shows the growth of the halal economy sector. The halal food sector has contributed most to the growth of the global halal economy as stated in the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2022.

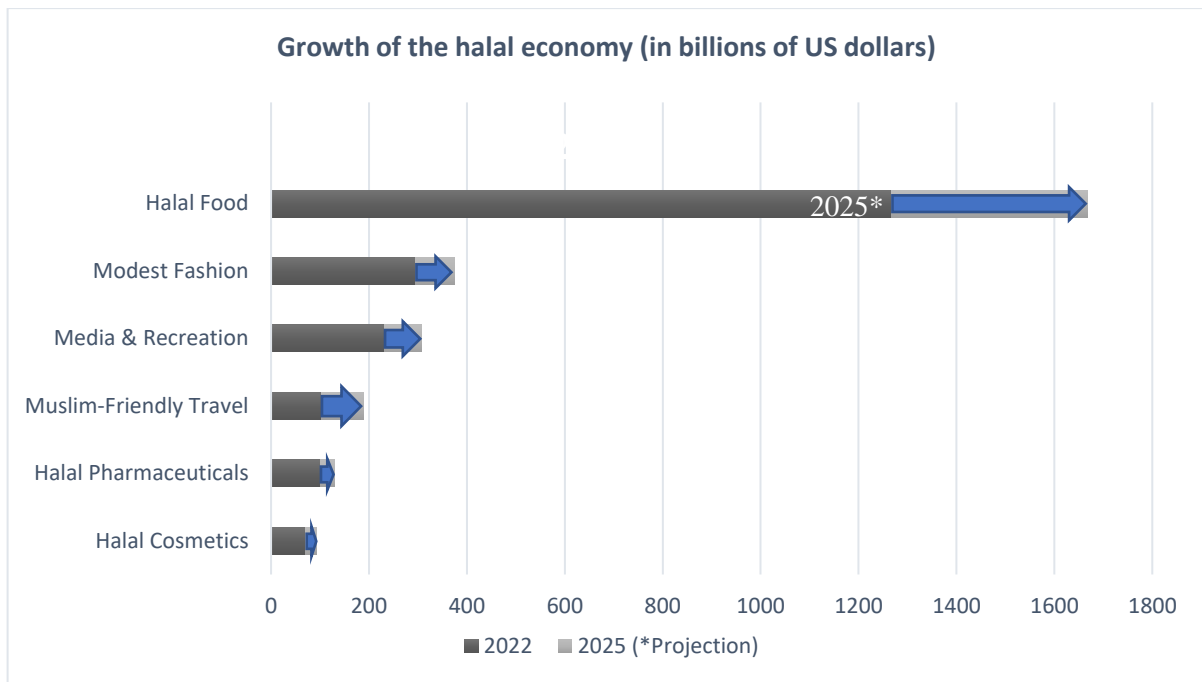**Growth of the halal economy (in billions of US dollars)**

Figure 1: The growth of the halal economy sector

Source: State of The Global Islamic Economy Report 2022

The growth of the market has attracted many countries to invest in the Halal economy and establish their Halal ecosystem. These ecosystems include the legislation and regulatory framework, physical infrastructure and connectivity, funding and incentive, industry standard and certification and public sector and delivery system. One of the countries with an established Halal ecosystem is Malaysia. Malaysia ranks first among countries best positioned to seize opportunities in the Islamic economy according to a State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2022 Figure 2.
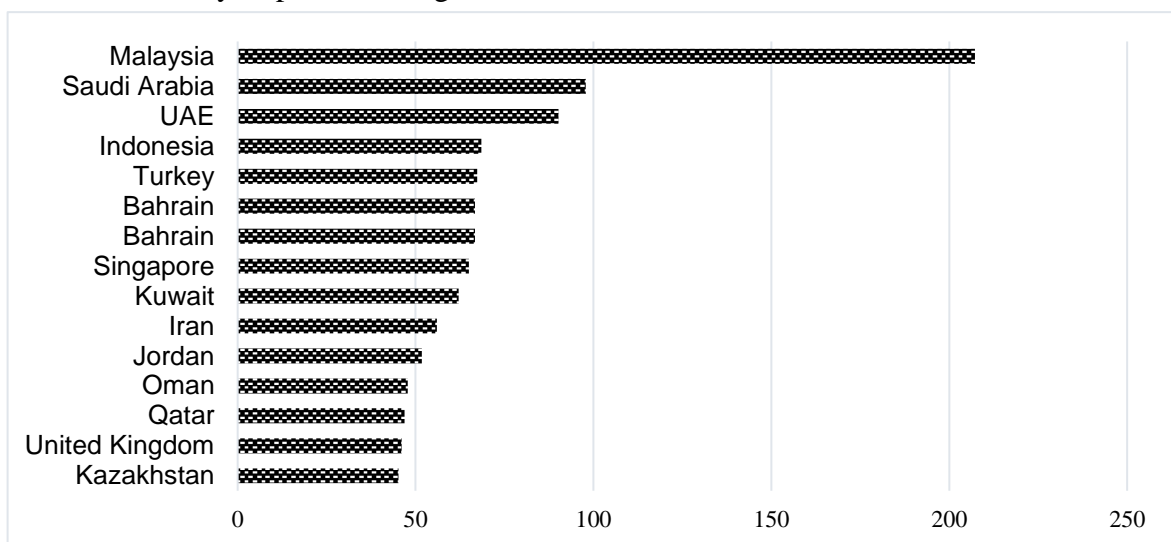

Figure 2: Top 15 Global Islamic Economy Indicator Score

Source: State of The Global Islamic Economy Report 2022

Human capital is one of the enablers that supports the whole Malaysian Halal ecosystem. Initiatives are currently underway to produce competent and professional human capital, including Halal executives. A Halal executive is one of the crucial positions in

various industries related to Halal such as food, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, logistics, medical devices, slaughterhouses, and consumer goods. Despite the importance of Halal executives, previous literature suggests that not all halal executives can perform their job optimally or competently (Ahmad et al., 2018). This may have some implications for the effectiveness of the whole food processing system, in the worst-case scenario, affecting the integrity of halal products manufactured. As such, this article aims to identify the set of competencies for halal executives via a literature review for the development of the Halal Executive core competencies conceptual model. Human capital development in the Malaysian Halal industry and Halal Executive are briefly described to provide context for a more in-depth discussion of core competencies. The concept of core competencies and job performance is also explained. The core competencies needed by Halal Executives in Halal food manufacturing are discussed in detail in the discussion section. Food manufacturing was chosen as this sector is one of the major contributors to the Halal economy.

1.1   Human Capital Development in Malaysian Halal Industry

Malaysia has been acknowledged as the pioneer of the halal food industry. The Malaysia Standard for halal food has become the basic reference for the development of halal food industries around the world (Scaldaferri & Devidè, 2013). Abdul Rahman, Rezai, Mohamed, Shamsudin and Sharifuddin (2013) stated that Malaysia has long aimed to become the global halal hub. At present, Malaysia has been retaining the top spot for the 9th consecutive year in the Global Islamic Economy Indicator (GIEI), the indicator that offers a comprehensive picture of countries that are currently best positioned to address the multitrillion-dollar global halal economy opportunity.

As the halal industry is of major significance to the Malaysian economy, strategies related to halal have been integrated into several national plans. In 2008, the Halal Industry Master Plan (HIMP) was introduced and is used as a blueprint for the development of the halal industry (Scaldaferri & Devidè, 2013). Human capital is one of the enablers that are identified in the Master plan, thus the Malaysian government has placed much emphasis on its development. Che Hashim and Mohd Shariff (2016) stated that human capital is defined as the people's ability to transform funds and raw materials into goods and services. Working effectively and delivering success to the company can only be done with adequate skills that can be learned in many ways, including via the formal education system. Human capital also is explained as a collection of resources consisting of knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training and wisdom possessed collectively by individuals in a population, an organization or a country (Rafiki & Abdul Wahab, 2016).

In line with Malaysia's aspiration to become the global halal hub and to support the development of human capital for the halal industry, the department of skills development, Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR), has established an occupational framework specifically for the halal industry. This framework is a preliminary process in developing the relevant National Occupational Skills Standard (NOSS) and is used as a basis to conduct skills training and certification of competent personnel. Five sub-sectors are classified in this framework: halal food manufacturing, halal meat processing, halal logistics, halal livestock production, and halal industry management services. Five job areas under the same framework are halal compliance, production, purchasing, quality assurance (QA), and research and development (R&D). These job areas focus on several clusters that are significantly important in halal food manufacturing. In addition, the job levels are categorised into five levels, which are level five (manager), level four (executive), level three (supervisor), level two (operator/assistant) and level one (HDC, 2018). Table 1 shows the job area and level for sub-sector halal food manufacturing. The halal executive is positioned

at level four under the halal compliance job area. Halal executive clustering under Halal food manufacturing is responsible for assisting the manager in all halal related matters, focusing on the halal certification process, halal internal auditing, halal awareness training for the staff, and monitoring the halal food production process starting from preparation up to packaging.

Table 1: Job area and level for sub-sector halal food manufacturing

Sector	MSIC Section C: Manufacturing				
Sub – Sector	Halal Food Manufacturing @ MSIC Division 10: Manufacture of Food Products				
Job Area / Level	Halal Compliance	Production	Purchasing	Quality Assurance (QA)	Research &Development (R&D)
Level 5	Manager, Halal Food Manufacturing			QA Manager, Halal Food Manufacturing	R&D Manager, Halal Food Manufacturing*
Level 4	Halal Executive	Production Executive	Purchasing Executive*	QA Executive	R&D Executive / Food Technologist
Level 3	N/A	Supervisor	N/A	QA Supervisor	N/A
Level 2	N/A	Production Operator*	Document Assistant		
Level 1	N / A				

Source: Occupational Framework Halal Industry

1.2   Halal Executive

A Halal executive is one of the crucial positions in a halal-certified company. The role was introduced partly to reduce the reliance of the company on the certification bodies in overseeing and implementing halal at the operational level (Jais, 2019). The requirement for companies to have halal executives was first mentioned in the second revision of the Malaysian standards for food companies, the MS1500:2009 Halal Food-Production, Preparation, Handling, and Storage–General Guidelines (Second Revision). The Malaysian Standard (MS) is one of the reference documents used by the Malaysian halal certification holder or applicant as the guideline for halal certification procedures (Din & Daud, 2014). Besides the food sector, there are several Malaysian Standard developed for the Halal industry in different sectors such as logistics, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. One important similarity among those standards was the inclusion of Halal Executives as part of the internal Halal control for the certificate holder. This requirement is supported and must be viewed together with the Manual Procedure for Halal Certification 2020, the document established by JAKIM which defines which scheme should assign and not assign halal executives.

Current requirements state that the manual certification procedures require the halal certificate applicants, especially for medium and multinational companies, to appoint halal executives, apart from establishing Halal Assurance Systems (HAS) and Internal Halal Committees (IHC) (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2014). All these requirements are mentioned under the clause "Management Responsibilities" in the series of Malaysian Halal Standards (MS) and "Specific Requirements" for each scheme in the Malaysian Manual Procedures for Halal Certification. It should also be remarked that in the revision of MS1500:2019, the terms "Halal Executive" has been taken out from the "Management Responsibility" clause. The terms are now replaced by a more generic

description of "Muslim Personnel". However, the newly proposed Halal Certification Manual Procedure still retains the need for the halal executive. Thus, it is significant for all the halal-certified food manufacturing companies to comply with this clause.

There are specific criteria for Halal Executive set by the authorities. Manual Procedure for Malaysia Halal Certification (Third Revision) 2014 stated that Halal Executive shall be Muslim and a Malaysian citizen with an Islamic education background. However, in this manual, it is also stated that those without an Islamic educational background ought to have at least five years of experience in the Halal industry(Rafiki & Abdul Wahab, 2016). Another prerequisite required by JAKIM is for companies to hire candidates with halal executive certificates, certified by the Halal Professional Board (HPB).

The halal executive is appointed to carry out activities which include the monitoring of Shariah, and halal matters, and this task shall be continuously conducted. In addition, the Halal Executive is responsible for assisting the managers in all Halal related matters, focusing on Halal certification and management roles. The job scope of the Halal Executive includes ensuring the products and processes comply with all the halal requirements, providing in-house training on halal, safety, and hygiene to production staff, as well as planning and executing a halal internal audit in the company. Besides that, the halal executive is responsible for liaising with government authorities such as JAKIM, the Ministry of Health, and other related authorities on matters of halal and safety, handling documentation related to halal such as halal assurance system files, and halal certification of raw materials. These tasks indirectly help ensure that the halal status of the products manufactured is maintained at the highest level.

1.3   Core Competencies

Competencies indicate the combination of observable and measurable elements. These include knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal attributes. The concept of competencies implies that employees' cognitive, emotional, and motivational characteristics are important for performing a job effectively. Core competencies offer a common shared language for all professionals in defining what they are expected to be able to work optimally (Albarqouni et al., 2018). It is important to note that the competencies model is different and more comprehensive than the task-oriented skills in job descriptions. It can be used to clarify common goals with all personnel, identify personnel skill gaps, develop training programmes and plans, recruit qualified personnel, reward achievements, and retain personnel. It is important to note that the definition of core competencies is different for different scholars.

There are several frameworks and indices regarding core competencies that have been published in multiple fields, such as healthcare (Hopkins et al., 2015), education (Tomal et al., 2014), food safety (Johnston et al., 2014), information system (Skulmoski & Hartman, 2010), library (Fisher, 2001), management (Baum, n.d.), counselling (Sperry, 2011) and construction (Dainty et al., 2005). Some of the core competencies are similar but the emphasis may be different depending on the fields and scopes of the job. For example, seven groups of competencies (leadership, self-management, interpersonal, communication, technical, productivity and managerial were identified for the project manager (Alvarenga et al., 2019). In contrast, project managers in soft information systems need to be competent in six elements such as communication, leadership, negotiation, personal attributes, professionalism, and social skills (Skulmoski & Hartman, 2010). There is also a generic model generated for the manager (Smutny et al., 2014). This is shown in Figure 3. On the other hand, Fisher (2001) classified acquisitions librarians' core competencies into four

{Bibliography}elements which are acquisitions competencies, technology competencies, management competencies and personal competencies.

Competency	Skills / Knowledge		Personal attributes
	managerial	vocational / other	
LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY	Communication skill Cooperability Motivational skill Evaluation and supervisory skill	University education in technical or economic field — Other vocational knowledge — Orientation in the given branch — Computer literacy — Driving license (ability) — English and German Language	Self-reliance — Responsibility / Accountability — Diligence — Activity / initiative — Self-development orientation — Stress resistance
COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY	Communication skill		
MANAGERIAL COMPETENCY	Cognitive skills Organizational skill Creativity Flexibility/Adaptability Communication skill		

Figure 3: A generic competency model for managers

Source: Smutny et al. (2014)

Competency is often demonstrated through behaviour which could result in an outstanding performance in a particular work context (Chouhan and Srivastava, 2014), Figure 3). This behaviour is focused on the individual's behaviour that can affect the organizational goals. Job performance could be a positive and/or negative response of a workforce towards the attainment of organizational goals. Naturally, organizations need competent, satisfied, and committed employees to perform and ensure the success of organizational goals. As such, theories of job performance often emphasise that employees should be competent and equipped with relevant and up to date skills (Khan et al., 2015).

The advent of globalization and the digital revolution has further fuelled the expansion of the theory of job performance as it received even more attention from researchers as a subject of interest. There is multiple evidence that supports the link between competency and job performance (Levenson et al., 2006). Performance is an action often viewed in terms of results. However, objectively, job performance is conceptualized differently in the literature. Some scholars view performance as the level of achievement of results for the implementation of certain tasks or a collection of work results according to quantity, quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of work in achieving goals (Simanjuntak, 2005; Davis, 2005). Others postulate that performance is a record of the results obtained from certain job functions or activities over a period of time (Dessler, 2009). But some scholars attribute job performance to the behaviour and actions of workers that contribute to the success of organizational aims (Khan et al., 2015). Rather than the results of the action

itself, Rotundo and Sackett (2002) defined job performance based on behaviour and actions. In the nursing context, for example, job performance refers to how effective employees are in accomplishing their tasks and responsibilities. Professional nurses' work involves task and contextual performance. Example of task performance includes the provision of information, technical care, provision of support and coordination of care, while contextual performance includes job-task support, interpersonal support, compliance, and volunteering for additional duties (Greenslade & Jimmieson, 2007). On the other hand, for assembly line workers of automobile parts manufacturing plants, their job performance dimension is classified into job time, job quality and job quantity. These reflect that elements of core competencies and performance for different positions and fields may be different(Na-Nan et al., 2018).

1.4   Halal Executive Core Competencies

As for now, there appears to be no information in the literature about core competencies related to halal executives. The closest work on this subject is the Occupational Framework for the Halal Industry, developed by the Department of Skills Development. The Occupational Framework for the Halal Industry stated that halal executives need knowledge and understanding of halal and Shariah requirements, be well-versed in halal food manufacturing operations and the Halal Assurance System, have management skills, and possess the attributes of good practising Muslims. Another effort that the Malaysian government is currently in the process of developing is to meet Malaysia's standards regarding the halal profession (still in the development stage). This standard is for halal professionals including halal executives, halal auditors, halal trainers, halal supervisors, halal slaughter men, halal checkers and any halal consultancy service provider (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2019). The proposed competency following this drafted standard is personal attributes; education, knowledge, and skills; knowledge and skills specific to halal compliance (Halal Malaysia Standard); knowledge and skills specific to technical requirements; work experience; maintenance and improvement of competence and Islamic ethics. Although there are several competencies of halal professionals that are highlighted in the draft standard, the standard is not developed specifically for the halal executive. To fill the gap, this review paper aims to develop a conceptual core competencies framework for halal executives.

2.   Methodology

This article draws on the extant literature to develop a preliminary conceptual framework to examine the core competencies of the Halal Executive specifically in the context of the Malaysian Halal food industry. Given the dearth of the topic in a halal context, a predefined protocol for systematic literature review is not possible. As such, a literature review of published work within the core competencies of other fields such as healthcare, education, food safety, information system, library, management, public sector, counselling, and constructions, forms a basis for the model. In addition, Malaysia's standard regarding the halal profession was also used to inform the model development.

3.   Discussion

The review classified Halal Executive core competencies into four categories: knowledge, personal competencies, managerial competencies, and skills. In the following section, these core competencies are discussed in detail.

3.1   Knowledge Competencies

Knowledge competencies are one of the most important competencies. Knowledge refers to the practical or theoretical understanding of a subject (Othman et al., 2017). The halal professional should have education and experience to acquire knowledge and skills related to halal compliance and technical requirements to perform the job effectively. The research found that micro and small enterprises find it extremely difficult to get halal status, although it is very important to expand the market. They also do not have a deep understanding of the demand for this certification among consumers. They claimed that the procedure was too complicated and that they needed to invest a huge capital amount (Tawil et al., 2015). To get halal certification from the governing body, the applicants need to know about the procedure and requirements needed. Thus, a halal executive needs to have deep knowledge of the technical requirements of the halal certification procedure to assist the company in obtaining halal certification.

In practice, most food companies are hiring halal executives from either Islamic or food (science or technology) backgrounds due to cost restrictions. However, it is mentioned that some of these executives may not have enough knowledge to perform the job effectively. For example, a person who has an Islamic background could lack food safety knowledge and may not be able to perform well on food safety and quality requirements. It is the same for individuals with a food (science or technology) background who may not be able to interpret the Fiqh and fatwa that relate to halal (Ahmad et al., 2017). This claim is supported by similar research done by Hassan, Arif and Sidek (2017) who found that the halal executives lack knowledge on how to effectively implement the Internal Halal Assurance System (IHAS) as they were trained mainly in the fundamental and practical aspects of Islam. This research found that spiritual knowledge, technical knowledge, understanding and skills in managing food premises are important in implementing IHAS.

In addition Din & Daud (2014) highlighted that education is so important by providing knowledge, information, and understanding that become the key factor of halal quality implementation. It is also supported by Othman, Md Shaarani and Bahron (2016), who argue that appointed halal executives must have specific knowledge rather than solely using their fundamental Islamic knowledge to ensure the efficiency of halal assurance system implementation. Although these executives have a high understanding of the halal concept, they lack the halal assurance system and halalan toyyiban. Technical knowledge is also needed, for example in product knowledge, product safety (cross-contamination) and product quality.

3.1.1   Personal Competencies

Personal competencies are inseparable from the core competencies concept put forward by several previous researchers, including Afiah (2010), Wahyuningsih and Sakti (2010), and Labay (2012). There are a few personal competencies proposed in the review article such as firmness, integrity, commitment and observance. Halal executives need to be firm and have integrity while handling halal matters. Ahmad et al. (2020) argue that the halal executive has the power to halt the production, shipment or reject the raw materials if there is any non-halal risk occur that might affect the halal compliance. In the halal industry, sometimes halal executives will be facing some halal issues that need to be solved as soon as possible. If that occurs, the halal executive must come up with a firm decision to avoid any problems in the future. In addition, being observant is also important as Halal executives are also involved in their internal halal audits. As such, Halal executives need to be observant to analyse their work environment, adherence to clothing requirements and safety rules, the flow of activities, positioning of products, etc.

3.1.2   Managerial Competencies

Several sub-elements are being highlighted for managerial competencies related to the food halal industry. These include elements such as leadership, teamwork, decision making, problem-solving, organizing, and communication. One of the managerial competencies that halal executives need to have is leadership. According to Arif, Sidek, & Hassan (2016), a halal executive is being appointed to ensure the effectiveness of the halal control system. Thus, the halal executive needs to have strong leadership to monitor and guide the committee in complying with all the halal requirements and standards. Usually, in the halal industry, an internal halal committee will be established, and a halal executive will be appointed as the secretary or coordinator of the committee. As the person who is fully in charge of halal, the halal executive will manage the meeting and guide each of the committees in their roles. Other than that, the halal executive is also a person that others will look up to regarding halal matters. Thus, with leadership competency, a halal executive can perform at the managerial level.

Besides that, Halal Executives also need to be competent in ensuring teamwork within the Halal team. Several aspects need to be focused on the halal management system and it involves the whole party and each of them needs to cooperate with the halal executive to ensure the success of halal integrity. As mentioned, all the department have their role in the halal management system such as the production department, quality control/ quality assurance department, warehouse department, purchasing department and human resource department. As such, according to Tamam, Abang Abdurahman, Abdullah and Subramaniam (2020), halal executives need to build and maintain relationships to work effectively with others.

Ramli, Jamaludin and Kamarudin (2015) found that problem-solving is an important skill because, in the halal industry, halal executives need to face a lot of challenges when practising and implementing halal requirements. The problems could come from various aspects, especially when dealing with individuals from different work levels such as management, general workers, suppliers, and authority bodies. Halal executives must devise a method for solving problems based on the theoretical knowledge they gained while learning. As mentioned above, halal executives also need to know how to plan and organize work. The halal executive needs to plan the halal internal audit, the halal meeting, and also halal training. The plan needs to be executed precisely as certain plans are stated as requirements for halal certification. Furthermore, the halal executive also needs to organize all the work by making a schedule or timetable. They also need to know the level of priority and which tasks should be done first instead of others.

Another important competency element is communication. Ahmad, Abdul Rahman, Othman and Ungku Zainal Abidin (2017) mentioned that halal executives need to find a creative way to communicate, especially when the employees are not fluent in English or Malay. One of the methods used to overcome the barrier is by the halal executives to use body language and all the information is translated into graphics for easy understanding, especially when presenting. Communication is important to deliver the message effectively. For instance, if the executive needs to discuss the financial budget with the management. Most importantly, they need to know how to communicate when approaching employees from different levels of job designations.

3.2   Skills

The term skill has become widely recognised as a focus for analytical research and contemporary policy intervention (Buchanan et al., 2010; Green, 2011), and yet the very meaning of skill(s) has become somewhat vague (Bryson, 2010). The problem may be

largely attributable to the significant expansion of the term over recent decades into a much broader application than historically when the skill was concerned mainly with physical dexterity and technical ability (Green, 2011; Keep and Payne, 2004). Nowadays theoretical perspectives on skill tend to differ according to whether the skill is seen to reside in the job or is socially constructed and resident in the individual (Evans and Waite, 2010; Warhurst and Findlay, 2012). Within the Leitch Review of Skills (HM Treasury, 2006, p. 6) skills are "capabilities and expertise in a particular occupation or activity". There are several specific skills related to halal executives such as audit management and documentation management (Ramli et al., 2015). In managing halal matters, Halal executives need to verify and manage halal documentation and records. They also need specific skills to execute Halal documentation process control. In addition, another specific skill needed is the ability to perform an internal halal audit and supplier audit to assess compliance with halal requirements. In order to be competent in these skills, the executives need to observe and evaluate audit findings and organize and facilitate an external halal audit with authorities (Huda et al., 2021). Based on the explanation provided above, the proposed conceptual model is depicted in Figure 3. In this model, core competencies are categorized into four elements: knowledge, personal competencies, managerial competencies, and skills.
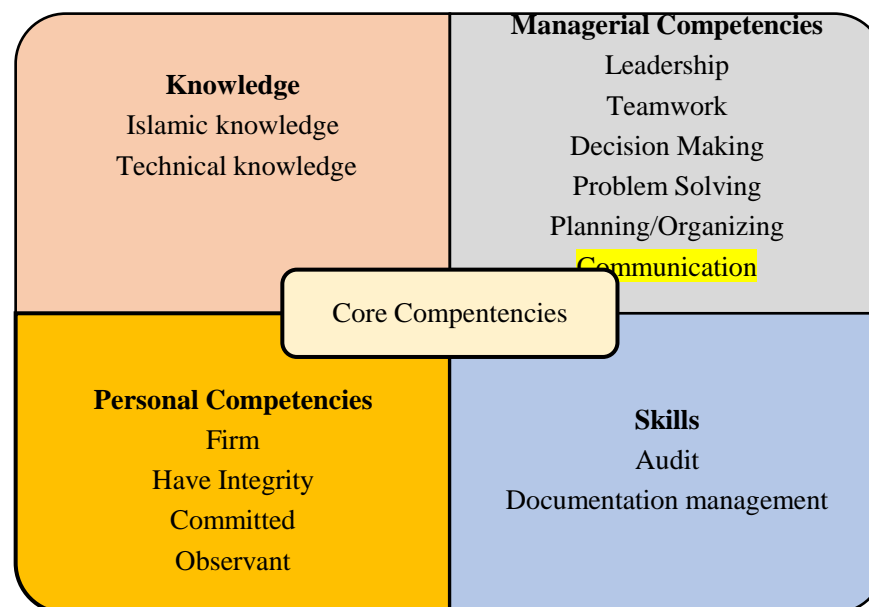

Figure 3: The proposed core competencies conceptual model for Halal Executives

4   Conclusion

Identifying the specific elements of core competencies that are most related to performance could potentially help ensure qualified personnel in the halal industry. Specifically, the identification of core competencies could help in further defining the requirements of halal executives. It is important to note that this review, however, is only supported by previous literature; there is a need to conduct empirical research to explore and confirm the conceptual framework proposed. This preliminary identification is important to pave the way for further development of the core competencies model. Companies may then use the valid model to assess the readiness of halal executives to perform their roles. Competencies provide a sound basis for an effective performance management program. Using the information obtained during the review of competencies required by the job and those possessed by the person performing that job, an integrated process can be introduced linking competencies with the annual performance review program and the determination of objectives. From different

angles, Halal executives and those who intend to pursue this career need to be aware of these skills to ensure job performance. The core competencies model could potentially improve mutual understanding between stakeholders and halal executives.

5 Acknowledgement

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