Research Article

Competency Modelling for Category B Water Utility Services in The Bicol Region

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Abstract:

This study aimed to develop a *Competency Catalogue* for Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region in 2017. It assessed staffing patterns and competency levels of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), formulated a unified competency dictionary, and proposed an enhanced *Merit Selection Plan (MSP)*. Using a mixed-methods design and purposive sampling, the research found that Category B water districts conform to the standard structures of the Revised LWD MaCRO. Core competencies of key informants were rated *advanced* (mean = 2.55), while leadership and management competencies were *intermediate* (mean = 2.44). The districts have largely adopted the behavioural indicators from the government's Generic Competency Dictionary. The study underscores the importance of aligning human resources with organizational goals through structured competency-based frameworks. It is highly relevant for HR officers, as it offers a replicable model for improving recruitment, selection, and workforce development in public utilities. By establishing a clear competency standard, the organization ensures efficiency, accountability, and service quality. The Competency Catalogue not only strengthens internal processes but also supports long-term capacity building and institutional reform. It highlights the reciprocal dynamic between agency support and employee development in achieving public service excellence.

Keywords: Competency Catalogue, Merit Selection Plan, Subject Matter Experts, Human Resource, Development.

1. Introduction

The concept of competency as a factor in recruitment, selection, and hiring and employee performance evaluation has become very popular not only among human resource practitioners but to the management echelons as well. Yet, in the more than three decades since it became a buzzword, still many are really unfamiliar with the details of the concept. More so, with its appropriate application and utility (Zhang et al 2024).

Competency is still equated or defined as skills, ability to perform, capacity, and knowledge. Jacobs (2019) assumed that this is the sum total of skills, knowledge and attitudes, manifested in the employee's behaviour. It is the *"means"* to achieve the *"ends"*. It truly matters in job analysis to describe job requirements and performance standards. For managers, competencies are vital if they want better performance in their employees. Whether during recruitment and selection phases or while already on board, competencies should be identified and studied.   It should always be borne in mind that the competencies required of each job position differ from one another. In the job analysis and writing of job descriptions, quick guides can make the task easier.

Knowledge of competencies and competency modeling is increasingly important for workplace learning professionals tasked with learning results. Most front-line learning and performance professionals and their managers have encountered competencies or competency modelling in their careers, but few of these professionals have had any formal training on these topics. The goal is to address this deficiency so that an organization can put these powerful, productivity-enhancing tools to work in the organization (Rezgui & Mhiri 2018).

One of the best strategies for the organization to simultaneously upgrade its human resources is through a Competency-Based Training (CBT). As Khan et. al (2022) defines, CBT is a progression through training with reference to the demonstrated ability to perform certain tasks. Improving the quality of governance in the Philippines is fundamental to the country's development prospects. It helps enhance the skills and expertise of the public service workforce and helps build stronger government institutions. The creation of the Generic Competency Dictionary for the Public Sector of the Philippine Government published in 2016 defines all necessary information about competency, from core competencies, leadership competencies to functional competencies. This includes the behavioral indicators required for the KSA and behaviors/practices with the corresponding proficiency levels to which personnel will fit in to perform the required functions.

It is in this light that the researcher was prompted to undertake this study and intends to develop a Merit Selection Plan (MSP) and Competency Catalogue (CC) for the Key Positions in the Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region. Additionally, the researcher believed in the studies aim to improve the human resource system of Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region. It first looks at the current staffing pattern and checks if it follows the guidelines set by the Revised Local Water District

Manual (LWD-MaCRO). This helps determine if the organization's structure is aligned with national standards. Additionally, examines the competency levels of key employees, focusing on their core, leadership, and functional skills. This helps identify their strengths and areas that need development. Based on the findings, the study will create clear job competency profiles for key positions. Lastly, the researcher will develop a Merit Selection Plan and a Competency Catalogue. These tools will guide hiring and promotion processes, making them fair, transparent, and based on skills and qualifications. Overall, the goal is to support better staffing decisions and improve the overall performance of water utilities in the region.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The researcher imposed a convergent research approach, which collaboratively utilized descriptive-evaluative, comparative and developmental research design. The descriptive-evaluative design was employed on the examination of the existing staffing patterns in Category B Water Utility Services to assess compliance with the Revised LWD Manual. While, the developmental design was employed to create job competency profiles and to design a Merit Selection Plan and Competency Catalogue tailored to key positions.

Additionally, the Document analysis was utilized in reviewing the job descriptions and related materials, providing essential data on duties, performance indicators, and job-specific requirements. These combined approaches ensured a comprehensive and evidence-based foundation for enhancing human resource practices in the region.

2.2 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study are the incumbents of key positions in Category B Water District in Bicol Region, Subject Matter Experts (SME)-Top Management (Head of Office), Division Chief, Human Resource Management Practitioner (HRMP), Accountant, Budget Officer, Procurement Officer, Cashier, Planning Officer, Legal Officer, Information Technology Officer, and the General Administrative Services Staff.

2.3 Research Instrument

The instrument used in the study was a Survey Questionnaire Guide. It made use of the Generic Competency Dictionary for Government Sectors in the Philippines. It also utilized field observations, document review and the prescribed position description form (DBM-CSC Form No. 1 - Revised Version No. 1, s. 2017). Additionally, a Four-point Likert's scale was applied on the Survey Questionnaire Guide to determine the level of competencies of the key informants. The mode was used to determine which behavioural indicators shall be used for the competency catalogue, competency-based job description and the competency dictionary.

2.4 Data Gathering and Analysis

Direct observation with the key informants was conducted to validate whether the indicated behaviour is basically observed during service delivery; Survey questionnaire using the standard question in the Generic Competency Dictionary for the Public Sector of the Philippines Government was distributed to the key informants to determine their proficiency level; and document reviews confirmed that the results of the study - the Competency Catalogue, was a reliable document which can be recommended for adoption by the Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region

3. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the key-findings from the assessment of staffing patterns and competency levels in Category B Water Utility Services in Bicol Region. The study aimed to evaluate alignment with the Revised Local Water District Manual (LWD-MaCRO, 2011), measure the proficiency of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and provide a foundation for developing a Competency Catalogue and Merit Selection Plan.

3.1 Existing Staffing Patterns

Based on the gathered data, the researcher found that all Category B Water Districts that were reviewed, Tabaco City, Legazpi City, and Camarines Norte generally complied with the LWD-MaCRO 2011 guidelines. Although all Water Districts follow the required departments-Administrative and Human Resource, Finance, Commercial Services, and Engineering and Operations it can be noted that LCWD has a more balanced structure as the gathered data reflects a significant proportion of staff in the Clerical/General category (42%) and Professional/Supervisory roles (41%), suggesting a more traditional organizational hierarchy that may rely heavily on administrative and support functions to complement its professional workforce. While CNWD has a workforce heavily concentrated in the Professional/Supervisory category (59%), with smaller proportions in Middle Management (22%) and Senior Management (11%), and only 8% in Clerical/General Staff. This pattern suggests a technically skilled and professionally driven organization where operational roles are prioritized over administrative support.

Table 1 Staffing Patterns of Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region

DISTRICT	Senior Management %	Middle Management %	Professional/Supervisory %	Clerical/General Staff %	Total
CNWD	11%	22%	59%	8%	100%
LCWD	7%	10%	41%	42%	100%
TCWD	10%	8%	31%	51%	100%

TCWD, however, reflects the most clerically dominated workforce, with 51% of its staff in the Clerical/General category and only 31% in the Professional/Supervisory group. This distribution may point to a service model that is heavily administrative in nature or one that has not fully transitioned to a more professionalized structure. The relatively low representation in Middle (8%) and Senior Management (10%) roles in TCWD further suggests limited leadership tiers, which could impact decision-making processes and strategic direction.

The existing staffing pattern of the three Category B Water Utility Service providers in Bicol Region provide insights on their operational priorities and organizational maturity. These results provides concept that CNWD is professionally and technically oriented, while LCWD was able to balance both clerical and professional realms of operation, whereas, TCWD is has an administrative and hierarchal orientation. These disparities provides a significant understanding that differing workforce strategies that reflect each district's mission, scale, and service delivery model. Martineau et.al (2023) stated that tailored approaches underscores a critical need for workforce to be contextually sensitive to provide positive performance, motivation and service outcomes.

3.2 Core Competency Levels of SMEs

The table 2 below, provides insights on the Core Competency Levels of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) on three Category B Water Utility Service Providers in Bicol Region. The gathered results put forth that provides valuable insight into the behavioral and ethical dimensions of workforce performance within the health and service delivery sectors. The overall mean competency score of 2.55, which falls within the Advanced level, the districts exhibit a robust foundation in critical core areas, especially in demonstrating professionalism, integrity, and commitment to service. The highest individual score, 2.69, for "Demonstrating Personal Effectiveness – Professionalism" signifies a strong adherence to ethical standards, accountability, and personal responsibility among the staff, which is crucial in maintaining trust and upholding service standards. Similarly, high ratings in "Exemplifying Integrity – Integrity" (2.66) and "Delivering Service Excellence – Commitment to Service" (2.57) reflect a work culture grounded in moral conduct and a genuine dedication to public service, reinforcing the districts' operational credibility.

Noticeably, lower score in Collaborating and Networking - Pro-Poor (2.29) which gathered a textual competency level of Intermediate serves as a critical area of concern. This indicates a generally strong ethical and professional foundation, though the lower rating in collaboration signals a need for targeted teamwork and stakeholder engagement initiatives.

Table 2 Core Competency Levels of SMEs of Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region

Core Competency	Mean Score	Competency Level
Demonstrating Personal Effectiveness - Professionalism	2.69	Advanced
Exemplifying Integrity - Integrity	2.66	Advanced
Delivering Service Excellence - Commitment to Service	2.57	Advanced
Collaborating and Networking - Pro-Poor	2.29	Intermediate
Total	2.55	Advanced

In an academic context, this gap reflects potential limitations in cross-sectoral coordination, interdepartmental synergy, and inclusive service planning—elements increasingly recognized as essential in decentralized public service systems. While individual competencies are well-developed across water utility services, institutional or structural barriers may exist within companies which limits the collective action and collaborative innovations especially in pro-poor programming. More so, this suggests that despite strong personal values and work ethic, staff may lack the training, frameworks, or institutional incentives to engage effectively with external partners, communities, or co-workers.

Strong leadership, openness to innovation, and meaningful community engagement are vital for bridging gaps between districts (Johnson et. al, 2023). When SMEs lack core competencies—particularly in collaboration, cultural responsiveness, and effective communication—their ability to lead, innovate, and engage meaningfully with diverse communities becomes significantly

compromised. As a result, equity-focused initiatives risk becoming performative or misaligned with actual community needs, thereby perpetuating systemic barriers in education rather than dismantling them through transformative, community-informed strategies.

2.3 Leadership and Management Competencies

The leadership and management competency profile for CNWD, LCWD, and TCWD, as illustrated by the table, reveals an overall mean score of **2.29**, placing all assessed domains at the **Intermediate** competency level. This suggests that while there is a foundational understanding of leadership principles, the current capacity across districts does not yet reflect the higher-order strategic and transformative competencies expected of effective public sector leaders. Notably, the highest-rated area—**Thinking Strategically and Creatively (2.44)**—indicates a moderate ability to engage in forward-thinking and innovation, yet the score falls short of the "Advanced" threshold, reflecting missed opportunities in strategic foresight and proactive problem-solving.

Similarly, competencies such as **Leading Change (2.28)** and **Managing Performance and Coaching Results (2.29)** show only moderate capabilities, pointing to limitations in change management, adaptability, and performance-driven leadership. These are critical functions, especially in dynamic health and service delivery environments where responsiveness and accountability are paramount.

However, concerns on the Building Collaborative, Inclusive Working Relationships manifests due to its relatively low results (2.16). This suggests a systemic challenge in fostering teamwork, inclusion, and stakeholder engagement. This aligns with earlier findings in the core competency assessment, where collaboration also emerged as a deficit. Such gaps pose significant barriers to cross-district coordination, community partnership development, and the integration of diverse perspectives into policy and program planning.

Table 3 Leadership Competency Area of Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region

Leadership Competency Area	Mean Score	Competency Level
Thinking Strategically and Creatively	2.44	Intermediate
Leading Change	2.28	Intermediate
Building Collaborative, Inclusive Working Relationships	2.16	Intermediate
Managing Performance and Coaching Results	2.29	Intermediate
Creating and Nurturing a High Performing Organization	2.29	Intermediate
Total	2.29	Intermediate

Without robust investment in leadership development, particularly in relational and adaptive competencies, CNWD, LCWD, and TCWD risk stagnation in organizational learning and reform efforts. A lack of collaborative, inclusive working relationships undermines motivation, growth, communication, and overall performance, emphasizing the critical need for inclusive and supportive workplace interactions (Bourke, 2025). To advance toward a high-performing public service, strategic leadership development programs, mentorship structures, and systems of accountability must be embedded within institutional culture—ensuring that leadership capacity evolves to meet the complexity of modern governance and service demands.

2.4 Functional Competency Trends by Job Families

The functional competency trends across job families within the districts reflect a varied landscape of skills development, capability levels, and potential gaps that could significantly impact service delivery and operational efficiency. Competencies such as Communication (Mean = 2.40), IT, and General Administration were consistently rated at the Intermediate level, indicating baseline proficiency but a lack of advanced specialization that is increasingly necessary in complex bureaucratic and service environments. More notably, Public Financial Management (PFM)—a cornerstone of accountability and resource optimization—revealed a particularly troubling trend, with an overall Intermediate rating (1.97) and specific areas like Cash Management falling into the Basic competency range. This trend was especially evident among cashiers and financial roles, highlighting a critical vulnerability in financial stewardship that, if unaddressed, could lead to inefficiencies or mismanagement of public funds.

Table 4 Functional Competency Trends by Job Families of Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region

Job Family	Mean Score	Competency Level
Communication	2.4	Intermediate
Public Financial Management (PFM)	1.97	Intermediate
Cash Management	1.55	Basic

Accounting	2.12–3.33	Intermediate–Superior
Budgeting	2.67–3.00	Advanced
Human Resource Management	2.86	Advanced
Information Technology (IT)	2.3	Intermediate
General Administrative	2.05	Intermediate
Planning	3.26	Superior
Legal	3.09	Advanced

In contrast, job families related to Human Resource Management (HRM) and Budgeting showed higher levels of proficiency, reaching Advanced levels (HRM = 2.86, Budgeting up to 3.00). This suggests that strategic support functions in personnel and fiscal planning are relatively well-developed, which can contribute positively to institutional structure and planning frameworks. Even more encouraging, Planning roles demonstrated a Superior competency level (Mean = 3.26), indicating the presence of high-level analytical and forecasting capacity, a key asset for long-term development and policy implementation. However, the stark contrast between high-performing job families and lower-scoring roles such as cashiers underscores a persistent equity and training gap within the workforce. Wahyuli et al (2024) believed that inclusivity, targeted training and continual professional development on workforce competencies are vital. Doing so, the highlighted trends found by the study calls for a targeted, job-family-specific approach to capacity building—particularly through structured training programs, technical workshops, and continuous professional development—to ensure that every functional area, especially those with fiduciary responsibilities, can operate at a standard that supports institutional integrity, efficiency, and public trust.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn: Among the three districts examined, Legazpi City Water District (LCWD) demonstrates the most optimal existing staffing pattern, characterized by clearly defined units organized according to functional roles. This structural clarity contributes to enhanced service delivery and increased customer satisfaction among its concessionaires. Furthermore, the assessed competency levels provide a validated framework that can serve as a reference for all Category B Water Utility Services in the Bicol Region in developing their own competency catalogs. Despite the lack of formal documentation, the behavioral indicators and task execution observed across employees are aligned with the standards outlined in the Generic Competency Dictionary for the Philippine Public Sector.

Finally, the developed Job/Position Competency Profile presents a robust foundation for establishing a competency-based job description system, in line with the requirements of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC). It is therefore recommended that this profile be adopted to institutionalize competency-based human resource practices across similar organizations.

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