

## Competency Based Human Resource Management Practices in the Public Enterprises of Ethiopia: The Case of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia

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### Abstract

In accordance with the FDRE Government Employees Proclamation No. 1067/2010 and 1097/2011, the Federal Civil Service Commission has been mandated with formulating and implementing a competency framework across all civil service organizations in the nation. To support this effort, the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) has identified 12 local organizations that have reported formulating and implementing a Competence Framework. However, only two public enterprises (CBE and EAL) have been found to be applying CB-HRM. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to examine and draw on local experience of CB-HRM practices from CBE and extract lessons that could be transferred and benefit the country-wide effort of developing and implementing CB-HRM in Ethiopia. To achieve this purpose, a mixed research approach was employed, and primary data were collected from 307 CBE officers and 47 leader respondents who were selected using a random sampling technique. The samples were taken using Solvin's formula. Data were also collected through questionnaires, FGD, and semi-structured interview methods, and the required analyses were made accordingly. The study found that the key stepping stone to begin the CB-HRM system in CBE was the bank's elastic vision and the recognition of an incompetent HRM system to carry out the vision within the stipulated time frame. As a result, CBE developed and implemented a CB-HRM system in 2011 with the help of an international consultancy firm from Germany. The system was installed in three phases: preparation, development, and implementation, and it took about ten years to finalize the system in CBE. The system is reviewed every two and a half years, and the third round of revision has been concluded. The external consulting firm's role ceased after the second phase, and the system is currently fully owned by CBE's in-house force. Almost all actors of the bank participated in the process of developing and implementing CB-HRM. CBE has developed three types of competency frameworks: core, leadership, and technical, and the system was integrated with the 'Oracle banking system.' Different communication strategies were employed at three different stages of CB-HRM. However, there was a problem in maintaining balance among the three stages, and communication was predominantly held at the implementation stage. The study identified the key success factors and challenges faced during CB-HRM introduction in CBE and its implications for the civil service sector, along with recommendations for the bank.

**Key words:** CB-HRM, Competency Framework, Oracle Banking System

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## 1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that human resources are a decisive factor in the successful operation of any organization, and high-performing organizations are linked with high-performing people (Zuzana, 2016). However, the question that arises is how employees get the opportunity to successfully accomplish their responsibilities in their organization. This is where their skills, knowledge, ability, talent, attitude, and other qualities come into play. These human qualities are collectively called competencies (Zuzana, 2016). According to the British Civil Service competency framework (2012-2017), competencies are defined as the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that lead to successful performance. Competence development has been a key concept of modern management for more than a decade and has been implemented in both private and public institutions. However, to some extent, its meaning and practice have been different in the two sectors (Katrin, 2008). The concept of employee competencies in government institutions has been a focus of attention in public administration for a long time (Lodge and Hood, 2005).

Competency management has been a trend in government since the end of the 1990s, and most OECD and Western countries have implemented competency management for decades (Sophie, 2010). In Africa, although the experience is limited, a few countries have attempted to develop competency management systems. For example, Kenya developed a national competency framework in 2017 after benchmarking international professional organizations. Kenya's Public Service CF serves as a tool to attract, select, and recruit candidates based on clearly defined competencies, identify developmental requirements of individual employees, and entrench a culture of competency-based performance and capacity building for improved service delivery. The framework has been developed to provide guidelines on technical, core, and general competencies (Kenya CF for the Public Service, 2017). Studies in this area have confirmed the effectiveness of competency-based management in defining the abilities and behaviors needed from employees to do their jobs well. Additionally, CB-HRM has been linked with a number of key HRM functions to ensure organizational effectiveness (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Takeuchi et al., 2003; Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Becker & Huselid, 2006; Gangani et al., 2006; Huselid, 1995; Appelbaum et al., 2000; and Kenya Public Service CF, 2017).

In the context of Ethiopia, although the modern administrative system was old, it had not been accompanied by personnel rules and regulations (FCSC, 2019). To address this issue, various reform tools were implemented, including BPR, BSC, citizen charter, and change army, among others. However, the main focus of these reforms was on improving organizational structure (BPR), measuring work performance (BSC), enhancing teamwork (change army), and promising service type, quality, and timeliness to clients (citizen charter) (FCSC, 2021). This indicates that the attention given to HR was not significant.

Despite the lack of attention given to HR in the past, some public organizations in Ethiopia have started working on CB-HRM. For example, the Ministry of Health has implemented health professional certifications, the Ministry of Education has implemented teacher, principal, and supervisor certifications, the Federal Technical and Vocational Training and Educational Agency has implemented vocational graduates exit level assessment, the Ethiopian Kaizen Institute has implemented Kaizen consultant certification, accreditation, and registration system, and the National Educational Examination Agency has implemented university entrance exams. EAL and CBE are among the organizations applying CBM (FCSC, 2020; Solomon et al., 2020; MoE, 2003; Reda, 2015). However, out of these organizations, only EAL and CBE have been found to be developing and applying CB-HRM (FCSC, 2020). Additionally, the Civil Servant's Proclamation No. 1067/2010 orders the Federal Civil Service Commission to develop a

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competency framework for civil service organizations in Ethiopia. Although this is a challenging project with limited national experience, the researchers have the opportunity to formulate the technical framework of the FCSC and take this initiative of learning from CBE by posing a question ‘how CBE developed and communicated and implemented CB-HRM and to transfer the experience to the national project.

### **2. Statement of the Problem**

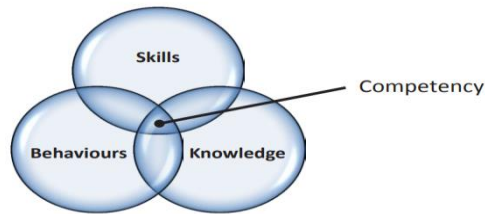
An organization's goal can only be achieved if it has competent HR. The concept of a competency framework was developed to meet this objective. The idea of competency-based human resource management has evolved from a new technique to a common practice since McClelland (1973) first proposed it as a critical differentiator of performance. Today, almost every organization with more than 300 employees uses some form of CBM. Major consulting companies, thousands of small consulting firms, and independent consultants have become worldwide practitioners of competency assessment and development (Boyatzis, 2008).

CB-HRM is also practiced in Africa, although it is still in its early stages. USAID (2015) developed a competency framework for 19 East African countries, including Ethiopia, to improve their health service quality. However, the practice of CB-HRM has not been expanded to the expected level. Recognizing the importance of implementing a competency framework in Ethiopia, the Federal government issued Proclamation No. 1067/2010 and 1097/2011, which mandates the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) to formulate and implement a competency framework across all civil service organizations in the nation. Following this, the FCSC established an HR Assessment Center (FCSC, 2020 and FCSC, 2021). Before embarking on the development of the civil service competence framework, the FCSC identified 12 institutions that were said to be implementing a competency framework. The results of the experience survey indicate that, out of the surveyed organizations, only Ethiopian Airlines and the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia were applying it (FCSC, 2020).

According to the FCSC report, there is a plan to implement the framework across the country, but there is a lack of scientific research and experience to benchmark it. As a country, there is no clear roadmap that shows the destination of the application of the framework. In Ethiopia, there has been no study conducted on the practice of CBM application, how the framework was developed and implemented, what types of CF were developed, for whom the framework was applied, and how the CBM was integrated vertically, horizontally, and holistically in organizations. Additionally, there is no information on the problems encountered during framework preparation and implementation, and what benefits CBE gained from the implementation. The experience formulation report (FCSC, 2020) clearly shows where Ethiopia stands in terms of formulating and implementing a competency framework. To address this problem and take advantage of the opportunity of being members of the national technical competency framework development team, we plan to assess and tap into the experience of CBE in respect to competency framework development and implementation. The study aims to: a) To assess the formulation and implementation practices of CBE's competency frameworks; and b) To examine the communication strategies used by CBE to communicate the CB-HRM system to its employees.

### 3. Literature Review

Competency is a term that comes from the Latin word "competent", which means "one that has the right to judge" or "the one who has the right to speak" (Caupin, 2006). McClelland (1973) introduced the idea of "competency" into the human resource literature and described it as the characteristics underlying superior performance. A competency is defined as a capability or ability (Boyatzis, 2008). Different scholars have defined this concept in various ways, but it can be summarized as a person's ability to perform a certain activity, including their quality, skills, and ability to do something competently. Competencies are sometimes referred to as "hard skills" (Woodruffe, 1990 cited in Indiafreenotes, 2020).



**Figure 3.1:** Competency is a combination of skills, knowledge and behaviors (International Meteorological Organization, 2018)

Competency is a combination of both tacit and explicit knowledge, behavior, and skills that provide an individual with the potential for effectiveness in task performance (International Meteorological Organization, 2018; Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006). It encompasses not only technical skills but also soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Competencies are essential for individuals to perform their job effectively and efficiently, and they are critical for organizations to achieve their goals and objectives.

Competency-Based Human Resource Management (CBM) is a new trend in HRM that emphasizes specific competencies required for a given job, allowing for more individualized management and competency development within career paths (Brockmann, Clarke, Méhaut, & Winch, 2008). The competency movement has been in use in business for several decades, with the groundbreaking work of David McClelland (1973), Richard Boyatzis (1982), Spencer and Spencer (1993), and many others in the field (Ozcelik and Ferman, 2006). CBM focuses on identifying and developing the competencies that are essential for job success, rather than relying solely on traditional qualifications such as education and experience. This approach enables organizations to align their HR practices with their strategic goals and objectives, and to ensure that their employees have the necessary skills and abilities to perform their jobs effectively.

Effective communication is crucial during organizational change, as it helps to capture the hearts and minds of employees (John, 2014). Researchers generally agree on the importance of credible and frequent communication during change initiatives (Myers et al., 2012; Allen et al., 2007; Lewis and Siebold, 1998). According to Barrett (2002), organizational communication is the process by which members gather relevant information about their organization and the changes taking place within it.

To manage change effectively, organizations establish their own change communication plan or use an approved change and communication model to guide employees through the change event (Ryerson University, 2011). This plan outlines the communication strategy, including the key messages, channels, and timing of communication, to ensure that employees are informed and engaged throughout the change process. Effective change communication can help to reduce

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resistance to change, increase employee buy-in, and ultimately lead to successful change implementation.

When developing a communication strategy, organizations should establish guidelines that align with the stages of planned change and the relevant information requirements, according to Klein (1996). This ensures that the communication strategy is effective in supporting the change initiative.

Competency frameworks, or models, are structured collections of competencies associated with a job, task, or subject. These frameworks provide a narrative description of the competencies required for a targeted job category, occupational group, division, department, or other unit of analysis (Cooper, 1998). A competency framework should clearly define each competency, including measurable or observable performance indicators or standards, which can be used for individual evaluation (Kubes et al., 2004). There are three major types of competency frameworks: Leadership (Managerial), Core (Values-based), and Technical (Functional) competency frameworks. These frameworks help organizations to identify and develop the competencies required for success in specific roles and to align their HR practices with their strategic goals and objectives.

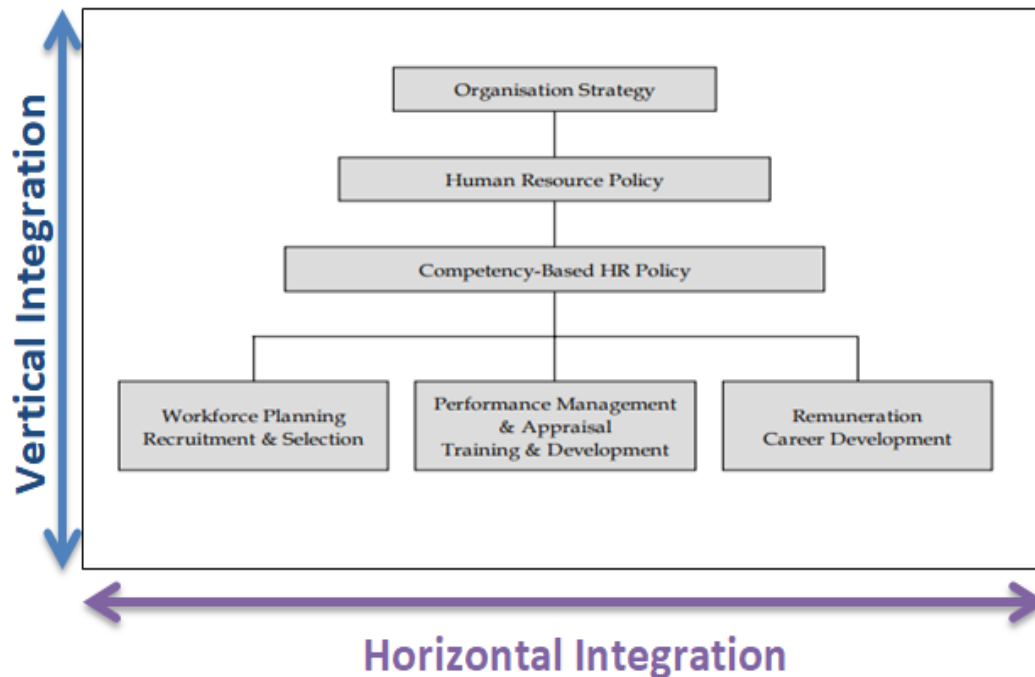
Competency profiles are a valuable tool for competency management in organizations. They are a comprehensive list of all the competencies required from individual employees and are necessary for performing tasks in compliance with the standards adopted by the organization (Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006; Walkowiak, 2007, p. 28). Competency profiles serve as the basis for determining the level of competencies required from one employee compared to another, enabling them to be hierarchically ordered based on competency requirements (Juchnowicz & Sienkiewicz, 2006, p. 188).

By using competency profiles, organizations can identify the competencies required for success in specific roles and develop training and development programs to help employees acquire these competencies. Competency profiles also help to align HRM activities with the strategic goals and objectives of the organization. Overall, competency profiles are a valuable tool for managing and developing the competencies of employees in organizations.

Competency-based management (CBM) systems are considered integrated systems because they enable close and multi-level systemic integration, covering all areas of human capital management into a single, internally coherent system (Juchnowicz, 2007, p. 118). Successful implementation of a consistent and unambiguous CBM system requires three dimensions of integration, according to Zuzana (2016), Ilhaamie (2010), PurushothamNaik, Somasundaram, and Krishna (n.d.):

- 1) Vertical integration: CBM should align individual competencies directly with the organization's strategies and goals (Cooper, Lawrence, Kierstead, Lynch, and Luce, 1998).
- 2) Horizontal integration: Competencies should be the common link among the majority of HR functions, including competency-based recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation management, career development, and succession planning (Byham, 2007).
- 3) Holistic approach: CBM tools should be applied centrally to overall organizational dimensions (Zuzana, 2016; Ilhaamie, 2010; PurushothamNaik, Somasundaram, and Krishna, n.d.; Beirendonck, 2009).

## Competency Framework Integration with Three dimensions of Organization



Source: Van Beirendonck, 2009

By integrating CFs with these three dimensions of organization, organizations can ensure that their CBM system is consistent, aligned with their strategic goals, and integrated across all HR functions. This approach can help organizations to effectively manage and develop the competencies of their employees, leading to improved performance and organizational success.

### Conceptual Framework

The competency framework (CF) serves as the foundation for all HR functions and links individual performance to business results (Yodhia, 2021; Zuzana, 2016). The level of maturity of CBM is associated with the three dimensions of integration. When developing a CF, it is crucial to ensure that the competencies expected of management and staffs align with the institution's vision, mission, and goals (business strategy) (Yodhia, 2021; Juchnowicz, 2007, p. 118). The CF should also incorporate the core competencies expected from HR in alignment with the institution's value statements (vertical integration).

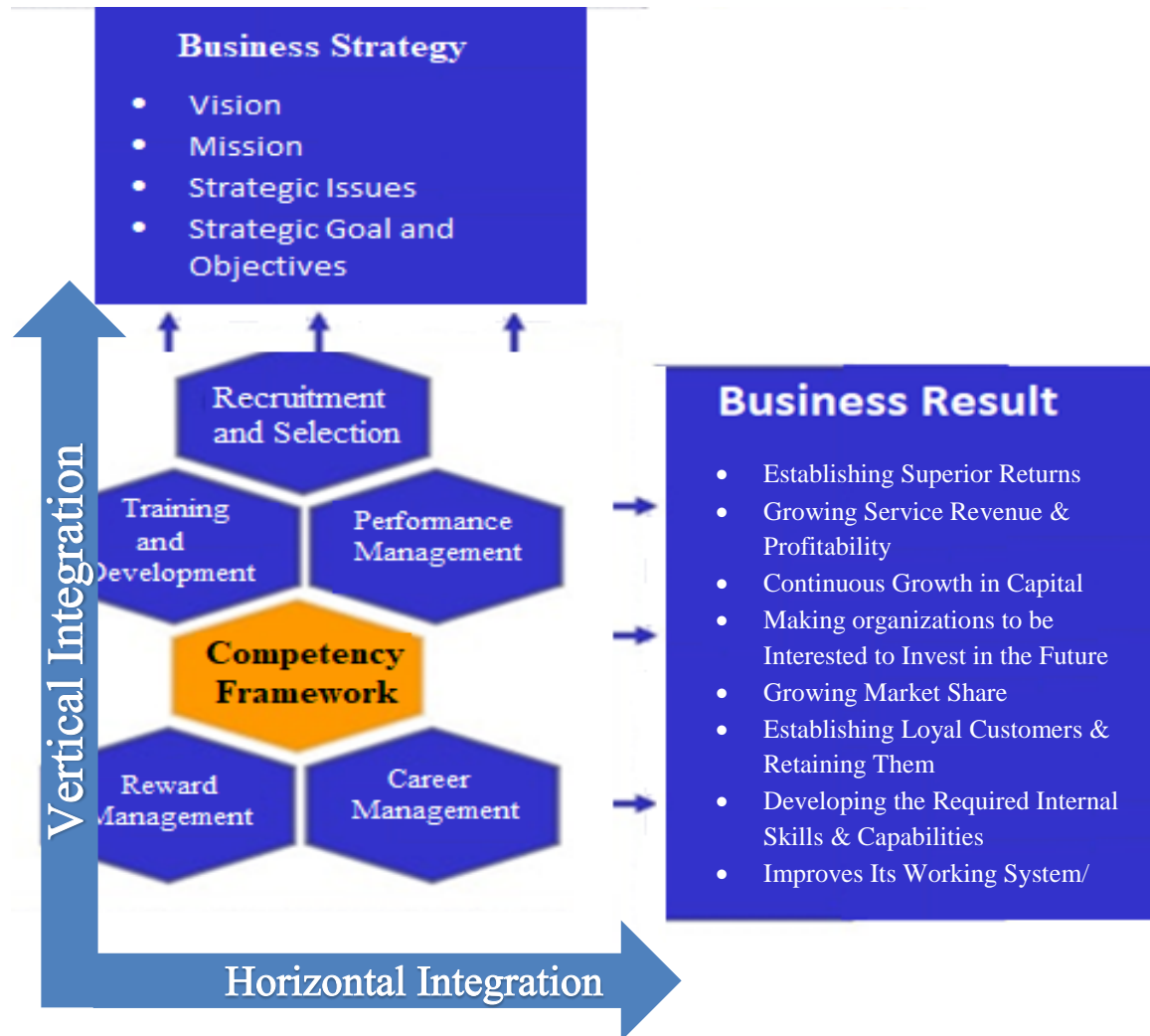
The competencies required for leadership and technical roles should be reflected in the responsibilities assigned to management and staff. The CF should be developed at the institutional level and implemented throughout the organization (holistic approach) (Zuzana, 2016; Ilhaamie, 2010; PurushothamNaik, Somasundaram, and Krishna, n.d.; Beirendonck, 2009).

By developing a CF that is aligned with the organization's strategic goals, values, and competencies, organizations can ensure that their HR functions are integrated and consistent. This approach can help organizations to effectively manage and develop the competencies of their employees, leading to improved performance and organizational success.

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The developed CFs should be integrated with all HR functions, including recruitment, placement, career development, performance evaluation, capacity building programs, coaching, and reward systems, as well as all HR strategic processes (horizontal integration) (Yodhia, 2021). By applying the CFs accordingly, the CBM system can be integrated with the three dimensions of the organization for the success of organizational strategies. Therefore, this study was assessed according to this conceptual framework.

**Conceptual Framework: HR Management Framework based on Competency**



**Figure 2.3: HR Management Framework based on Competency**

Source: Yodhia (2021) modified by Authors

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## **4. Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Research Approach**

Based on the purpose of the study and the nature of the problem under investigation, a mixed research approach was employed. The qualitative research approach was used to understand some aspects of social life, and its methods generated words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis (Quinn and Cochran, 2002; Creswell, 2000).

On the other hand, the quantitative research approach involved generating data in a quantitative form that could be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion (Kothari, 2004). By using a mixed research approach, the study was able to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the problem under investigation. This approach allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the data, leading to more robust and reliable findings.

### **4.2 Research Design**

A descriptive research design was used to describe the practice of CBE CBHRM. As Kothari (2004) articulates, the major purpose of descriptive research is to describe the state of affairs as it exists at present.

### **4.3 Sources of Data**

The primary data was collected from CBE leaders and officers, area experts through interviews, focus group discussions (FDG), and surveys. Secondary data was secured from documents, official plans, reports of CBE, works of various authors, and other published and unpublished documents.

### **4.4 Sampling Techniques**

A multi-stage purposive and random sampling technique was employed to select samples and collect all the necessary primary data. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the practice of CBE CBHRM, as it involved gathering data from a diverse range of sources and perspectives. By using a mixed sampling technique, the study was able to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a more robust and reliable analysis of the data. The population identified for study in this investigation consisted of leaders and officers and CB-HRM System area senior experts, according to a list of participants obtained from CBE.

Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. CBE was selected purposively since it has developed CFs and CB-HRM system according to FCSC (2020) report. Additionally, two leaders and five senior experts were selected from the HR division to participate in an interview and FGD, respectively, because their experience and responsibility were directly related to the purpose of the study.

Probability sampling, specifically stratified sampling technique was used to determine samples from the population from different work units (Kothari, 2004). This approach allowed for a more representative sample of the population, ensuring that the findings of the study could be generalized to the larger population. By using both non-probability and probability sampling techniques, the study was able to gather a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the practice of CBE CB-HRM.



**4.5 Sample Size**

The sample size was determined using Solvin's formula, which helps to determine samples when the population is defined and when nothing is known about the behavior of a population (Yamane, 1967; Stephanie, 2020). The proportion was suspected to be close to 0.5 (Jeffrey and Joyce, 2012). Using a 95% confidence level and an error tolerance of 0.05, this means 95% confidence level.

Table 1 List of Population (CBE Headquarter Staff)

No	CBE Work Units	Job Grade	Population		Total
			Leaders	Officers	
1	Information System	5-18	80	489	569
2	Human Resource	3-17	27	488	515
3	Facilities Management	5-18	38	458	496
4	Resource and Credit Management	5-18	57	391	448
5	Internal Audit	8-18	62	140	202
6	International Banking	5-18	16	185	201
7	Finance	5-18	16	116	132
8	Strategy and Business Development	5-18	18	100	118
9	Quality Management and Control	9-18	17	96	113
10	Credit Appraisal and Portfolio Management	10-18	23	70	93
11	Risk and Compliance	8-18	13	61	74
12	President Office	5-20	30	18	48
13	Legal and Loan Recovery	3-18	6	39	45
14	CBE Noor	10-18	6	36	42
15	CBE Djibouti Subsidiary Company	17	1	-	1
16	CBE South Sudan Limited	17	1		1
			414	2692	3106

**Source: CBE (2021)**

The table shows the CBE work units, job grades, and the number of leaders and officers in each unit. The total population is 3106, consisting of 414 leaders and 2692 officers. The job grades range from 3-20, with the majority falling between jobs grades 5-18. The largest work unit is Information System, with a total of 569 employees, while the smallest are CBE Djibouti Subsidiary Company and CBE South Sudan Limited, each with only one employee.

The sample size was calculated as follows:

$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$	$n = \frac{3106}{1 + 3106(0.05)^2}$	$n = \frac{3106}{8.765}$	$n = 354$
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Sample size was calculated as:

$$n = 2692 / (1 + 2692(0.05)^2) = 370$$

A sample size of 370 was determined for the study. This sample size was deemed sufficient to provide a representative sample of the population and ensure that the findings of the study could be generalized to the larger population.

To ensure that the sample is representative of the population, a proportionate stratified random sampling technique will be used to select respondents from the CBE work units. The sample size for officers was determined to be 354, which was obtained by dividing the number of officers in the population (2692) by the total population (3106) and multiplying by the desired sample size (410).

Table 2:- Sampling Frame and sample size

No		Leaders (Operational-Senior level)	Officers	Total
1	Sample Units	414	2692	3106
2	Sample Size	47	307	354

Table 2 shows the number of respondents to be selected from each work unit based on the proportion of officers in the population. The stratified random sampling technique will ensure that each work unit is represented in the sample proportionate to its size in the population. This will help to ensure that the findings of the study are generalizable to the larger population of CBE officers.

Table 3: Proportional Division of Respondents from Work Units

No	CBE Work Units	Population			Sample Size		
		Leaders	Officers	Total	Leaders	Officers	Total
1	Information System	80	489	569	14	76	91
2	Human Resource	27	488	515	5	76	81
3	Facilities Management	38	458	496	7	72	78
4	Resource and Credit Management	57	391	448	10	61	71
5	Internal Audit	62	140	202	11	22	33
		264	1966	2230	47	307	354

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#### **4.6 Data Collection Tools**

For this study, two methods were used to collect data on the CB-HRM system in CBE. The first method was a personal interview with CBE senior leaders. This involved the presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and replies in terms of oral-verbal responses. If possible, telephone interviews were also conducted (Kothari, 2004).

The second method was a focus group discussion (FGD) with five CB-HRM system senior experts who were selected purposively. FGD is frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues. The method aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population. An article review conducted on 170 articles which applied FGD method (published between 1996 and April 2017) indicate that the number of participants per FGD (where reported) ranged from 3 to 21 participants (Tobias, 2018).

The five CB-HRM system senior experts who participated in the FGD were responsible for developing CBE CFs, communicating and introducing competencies to staff, implementing CFs, developing competency-based training curriculum and training materials, and delivering competency-based trainings. The FGD provided an opportunity to gather insights and perspectives from these experts on the CB-HRM system in CBE.

A questionnaire is a set of questions printed or typed in a definite order on a set of forms, which is considered the heart of a survey operation. It can either be structured or unstructured (Kothari, 2004). For this study, data was collected using a set of close-ended and open-ended questionnaires from 354 respondents, consisting of 47 leaders and 307 officers.

The questionnaire was designed to gather information on the CB-HRM system in CBE, including the implementation of competency frameworks, the effectiveness of training programs, and the overall impact of the system on employee performance. The close-ended questions provided quantitative data, while the open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide more detailed and nuanced responses.

The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure that the sample was representative of the population. The data collected from the questionnaire provided valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of CBE officers and leaders regarding the CB-HRM system.

#### **4.7 Method of Data Presentation**

The results of the study were presented in tables. Frequency tables and percentages were used to summarize the demographic information of respondents. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, reliability analysis, and correlation were used to assess all the dimensions.

#### **4.8 Methods of Data Analysis**

Before analyzing the data, the reliability of the survey was tested. Reliability is defined as the degree of consistency with which an instrument measures whatever it is measuring (Ary & Jacob, 1985). According to Sax (1974), one of the empirical procedures to estimate reliability is based on the correlation among the items on a single test. This correlation coefficient has been called a measure of internal consistency (homogeneity).

In this research, internal consistency was calculated using the alpha coefficient of reliability. According to Nunnally (1982), an alpha greater than 0.65 is the minimum recommended for research purposes, while the standard presented by Nunnally (1978) indicated that the result of internal reliability above 0.7 is well above the standard. If the alpha is greater than 0.7, it

indicates that it has high reliability, and if alpha is smaller than 0.3, then it entails that it has low reliability. Ary (1985) concluded that the degree of reliability needed in a measure depends to a great extent on the use that is to be made of the results.

After the data was collected, coded, and edited, data entry was done using CSPro 7.6. Analysis was conducted using SPSS IBM software version 25. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the quantitative personal and demographic characteristics of the respondents.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The study distributed 354 questionnaires randomly to CBE officers (252) and leaders (46) to gather the required data. Out of which, 298 or 84 percent (46 leaders and 252 officers) of the total was returned and found usable for the study. Table 4 below shows the distribution of respondents as per their sex, age, educational level, and experience.

In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with two CBE leaders who had direct participation and leading roles in developing and implementing the CB-HRM system in CBE. FGD was also conducted with five area experts from CBE headquarters, leaders, and officers, and relevant secondary data were reviewed.

**Table 4: Background of the Respondents**

S/N	Item Statements	Variables	F	%
1	Sex	Female	88	29.5
		Male	210	70.5
2	Age		34.94	
3	Educational Level	Diploma	5	1.7
		First Degree	174	68.6
		Master Degree & Above	118	39.7
4	Experience	In CBE	10.7	
		In Current Position at CBE	4.23	

The results showed that 70.5% of respondents were male, while the remaining 29.5% were female. The mean age of respondents was 35 years, and more than half (59%) of the sampled respondents held first-degree qualifications, while the remaining 40% held post-graduate degree qualifications. Therefore, most of the CBE core staff members have an educational preparation of BA degree and above qualifications.

The study also revealed that the mean years of experience of sampled respondents were 10.7 years and 4.23 years in CBE in general and in their current position in CBE in particular, respectively. The overall experience of respondents in CBE ranges from 4 to 11 years.

### **Research Question 1: How did CBE formulate and implement its competency framework?**

This specific question was analyzed under six thematic areas, including the methods used to build CB-HRM and the time CBE began formulating it, the rationale behind developing the system, the steps or procedures followed during the CB-HRM development process, the ways of identifying competency and the models used, as well as the application of technology in the

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process of developing and implementing CB-HRM in CBE. The discussion and results of the above-mentioned themes are presented below.

### **1.1 When was the CB-HRM system introduced in CBE?**

The bank started to introduce the CB-HRM and CB-HRD system in combination in 2011. To this end, CBE hired an international consulting firm called the Frankfurt School of Finance and Management (FSFM) from Germany. The firm was contracted to consult CBE on the development and implementation of the CB-HRM. Thus, from 2011 to 2016/17, the consulting firm developed the CB-HRM and related policies, guidelines, and tools for CBE. The introduction, development, and implementation of CB-HRM in CBE can be viewed through three sequential phases or stages. The first phase began in 2011, while the second and third phases covered the time from 2012 to 2013 and 2014 onwards, respectively.

The first phase was a preparation phase, while the second and third phases were the development and implementation phases. In 2012, during the second phase, the required competencies were identified, and the pilot competency gap assessment was conducted manually. The third phase was an implementation stage that began in 2014. At this stage, CBE fully integrated the competency framework with its HRM functions. In congruence with this, in 2014, a competency-based Performance Management System (PMS), learning and development, and succession planning were launched. After one year, in 2015, competency-based recruitment and selection mechanisms were also introduced in CBE. However, before that, the competency-based interview catalog was developed, and line managers of CBE were trained on it.

In the meantime, the CB-HRM system of CBE faced two outstanding setbacks: the consulting firm FSFM completed its contractual agreement, and CBE made frequent leadership changes. However, the Bank's management and experts have been able to sustain the project by designing a mechanism for transferring knowledge from the international consulting firm to local CBE experts. Nonetheless, doing so was not an easy task.

Meanwhile, based on the dynamic nature of the system, the CB-HRM of CBE was reviewed every two and a half years. At the beginning, the international consulting firm (FSFM) was responsible for conducting revisions on the framework. Therefore, the first two sequential revisions were conducted in 2017/2018 and 2019/20, respectively, with the help of FSFM. Specifically, the second phase revision was conducted through the extensive participation of CBE management and experts, while the third phase revision, which took place in 2020/2021, was accomplished by CBE experts under the support and supervision of CBE management.

During the third review, CBE experts took full control of the revision. From that time onwards, the task of making revisions and incorporating new job positions in the CB-HRM became the full responsibility of CBE experts. Therefore, CBE started to run the newly installed CB-HRM system with its own workforce beginning in 2020/2021.

### **1.2 Why Did CBE Initiate the CB-HRM System?**

Before the introduction of the CB-HRM system, CBE's management system was found to be highly traditional and backward. When the bank developed a new vision of "becoming a world-class commercial bank by the year 2025," the then-management of CBE recognized the impossibility of achieving the bank's new vision with such a traditional HRM system and decided to implement Business Process Reengineering (BPR) before formulating its vision. However, in the process, CBE recognized that BPR basically focuses on the arrangement of the

system rather than human resources and began to give special attention to changing its HR strategy. After recognizing the importance of focusing on HR for the success of the vision, the bank was committed to breaking away from traditional HRM systems and decided to become a world-class international bank by developing the CB-HRM system.

The procedures and steps CBE followed during the development and implementation of its CB-HRM system included the following seven steps: change initiation system, employing an international consultant and establishing an internal team, conducting problem analysis, identifying competencies and formulating CFs, integrating competencies into various HR functions, communicating about the change initiative, implementation, and revising the CB-HRM system on a regular basis.

### **1.2 How Were Competencies Identified and Who Was Responsible for Identifying Competencies in CBE?**

In CBE, the responsibility of identifying competencies was given to unit managers, directors, and senior experts, while the Vice Presidents worked to verify and approve them. These participants undertook a series of group discussions to identify competencies based on the job role of each task unit. The involvement of staff in the competency identification process was also facilitated and created conducive conditions to implement the CB-HRM system, which was taken as a key factor in the design of the competency framework.

### **1.3 What Types of Competency Frameworks Were Developed in CBE?**

To facilitate the development of the CB-HRM system, CBE developed a competency guide, competency model/framework, and competency matrix, which all have distinct and coordinated effects in the process of developing the CB-HRM system. Based on the above documents, CBE has developed three types of competency frameworks: Leadership, Core, and Technical Competency frameworks.

### **1.4 CB-HRM System and Technology Utilization**

During the pilot test, the competency assessment and performance appraisal of CBE were conducted based on paperwork, which made the exercise futile and tedious. Thus, CBE established a technology-assisted CB-HRM system called Oracle Banking system in 2017. This system is integrated into all the bank's activities. Therefore, at the time of this study, the bank had implemented a competency-based system for recruitment and selection, performance appraisal and feedback, training and development, leadership, and employee competency assessments. Despite facing challenges such as system breakdowns, the bank remained committed to using technology and did not revert to paper-based processes. These challenges were a source of complaint, but the bank's management decided to continue using technology despite the challenges it posed. This approach has enabled CBE to apply HRM activities in a coordinated, efficient, and transparent manner. To integrate the CB-HRM with all HRM functions and to apply the system smoothly and uniformly, the competency matrix, the definition of terms, proficiency level dictionary, and identified competencies are uploaded to the system.

**Research Question 2: What Communication Strategies Did CBE Use to Communicate the CB-HRM System to Its Staff?**

This research question was analyzed under three thematic areas: CBE's communication strategy, the type or method of communication employed, and the frequency of communication. The discussion and results of the above themes are presented below.

**2.1 Does CBE Have a Communication Strategy/Procedure?**

As depicted by document analysis and FGD results, CBE has its own communication strategy, which sets out what information the bank will provide, to whom, and who provides the information on behalf of the bank. The procedure also contains the communication method (channel) in which information is made accessible to the recipient. Therefore, CBE has a communication strategy used to provide information to internal as well as external customers. To this effect, CBE uses multiple mechanisms, such as its own website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, LED displays, radio and TV, and different publications.

**2.2 How Often Did CBE Communicate the CB-HRM System to Employees?**

Table 5 below shows the frequency of communication made to CBE employees on CB-HRM across the three stages of competency framework development (inception, development, and implementation stage). The intention of this question was to determine whether CB-HRM, as one management reform tool, was adequately communicated at each stage of development or not. The study also sought to determine at which stage better communication was done.

CBE communicated its competency framework to employees at all three competency framework development stages. According to the cut point proposed in the study, the communication made at all stages was below the average mean of 3, indicating that it was low. However, the good thing is that the change process was communicated at all stages, with relatively more frequent communication at the implementation stage to both leaders and officers' respondents.

**Table 5: How often do CBE Have Communicated CB–HRM System to employees?**

Leaders rated the least communication at the development stage, whereas officers rated the least communication at the inception stage. However, due attention was provided for communication that took place at the implementation stage.

How often do CBE have communicated CB–HRM system to employees	Position					
	Leader		Officer		Total	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Frequently communicated at the inception stage.	2.95	1.03	2.81	1.19	2.83	1.17
Frequently communicated at the development stage.	2.90	1.03	2.98	1.17	2.97	1.15
Frequently communicated at the implementation stage.	3.20	.94	3.48	1.15	3.43	1.12

As Husain (2013) noted, organizational communication may occur during the 'unfreezing', 'move', and 'refreezing' stages, which is comparable to the 'inception', 'development', and 'implementation' stages. Change communication that takes place at each stage has different specific objectives with the cumulative purpose of achieving the newly designed change; nonetheless, all stages are equally important.

In connection to the above, change communication made at earlier stages definitely supports and interfaces with communication made at the upcoming stages. For instance, as noted by Husain (2013), communication at the inception stage has a primary objective of preparing employees and the organization for the change, and if it is accomplished effectively, resistance to change decreases. On the other hand, communication at the 'development' or 'move' stage helps organizations to provide detailed and accurate information and to dismiss all the misinformation that is circulating through the organization, among other objectives.

Communication at the 'implementation' stage mainly centered on answering employees' questions regarding efficiency, rewards, and the like; most importantly, in this stage, the responsibility of carrying out the communication with employees changed from the top management to supervisory management. This highlights the value of making communication at each stage of reform.

However, as Green (2007) noted, engaging or communicating with stakeholders only or largely at the implementation stage would be very wrong. Therefore, although communication should take place evenly at all three stages of competency development, the experience of CBE indicates an unfair distribution of communication among stages, with a focus given to communication that takes place at the implementation stage. This may play a de-facilitating role in the implementation of CB-HRM in CBE, and attention should be given to balancing change communication across all stages of competency framework development.

However, the FGD discussants and interviewees provided slightly different information from the questionnaire results. According to their observations, from the very beginning, the work of formulating and implementing CB-HRM was focused on communication. Frequent communications at different stages were conducted. Interviewed leaders and FGD participants reported that consistent communication had made their work easier. In particular, FSFM consultants frequently communicated about each step-by-step change. Selected staff members who participated in the process of identifying competencies were communicated with every 15 days. During these times, a report was presented, evaluated, and feedback was given for each assignment. They confirmed the presence of communication at the inception, formulation, and implementation stages, which allowed them to understand the importance of communication. This may indicate that although there was communication across the three stages, the depth and breadth of communication may have been limited to managerial level employees rather than officers.

### **2.3 Communication Channels Used to Communicate CB-HRM System**

Respondents were asked to rate the methods or channels of communication used to install the reform (Table 6). They were provided with nine alternative modalities of communication to select from. The three most frequently used modalities of communication were found to be similar for both leaders and officers: Intranet & Internal Electronic mail (3.57 & 3.68), formal written documents (3.27 & 3.37), and electronic database (3.25 & 3.24). This finding is consistent with the responses from interview and FGD participants. Similarly, the following three modalities of internal communication were rated as least employed by both leaders and



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officers: video conferencing (2.43 & 2.45), audio conferencing (2.50 & 2.35), and chats and messaging (2.65 & 2.46), respectively.

As the above data revealed, all channels of communication except Intranet & Internal Electronic mail were categorized as 'low'. This means that respondents favored Intranet & Internal Electronic mail with a moderate rating, while all the other alternatives were rated as 'low'.

Reviewed literature in the area (Op cit., 2013) applauds the contribution of innovative technologies in making internal communication smooth and effective, citing electronic mail, intranet, and video conferences as a few examples. The results of this study also support the reviewed literature, although traditional communication methods (such as formal written documents) have also played the second most important role in internal communication, despite being rated at a 'low' level. Therefore, in the case of CBE, blended methods (both traditional and modern) seem to have been employed to communicate CB-HRM to employees. As CBE is a pioneer bank with branches all over the country, it is recommended to use both modern and traditional means of communication according to the context. However, no alternative channel of communication was rated as 'high', except for 'Intranet & Internal Electronic Mail'.

**Table 6: Communication Channels/Methods Used to Communicate CB-HRM System**

Method/channel/ of communication used	Position					
	Leader		Officer		Total	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Face-to-face conversations.	2.85	1.0	2.82	1.28	2.83	1.24
Formal written documents.	3.27	.96	3.37	1.22	3.36	1.18
Intranet and internal electronic mail.	3.57	1.0	3.68	1.16	3.67	1.14
Electronic databases.	3.25	1.29	3.24	1.29	3.24	1.29
Seminars /conferences/ meetings.	3.00	1.24	2.73	1.33	2.78	1.32
Company newsletter & memos.	3.17	.87	3.23	1.27	3.22	1.22
Chats and messaging.	2.65	1.39	2.46	1.33	2.49	1.34
Video conferencing	2.43	1.08	2.45	1.26	2.45	1.23
Audio conferencing.	2.50	1.18	2.35	1.28	2.37	1.26

**6. Conclusions**

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions can be made. The current employees and leaders in CBE are relatively young, male-dominated, better-qualified, and junior in their service in CBE, especially in their current positions. CBE began installing CB-HRM together with CB-HRD in 2011, by hiring an external consulting firm called FSFM from Germany. The key stepping stone to begin the CB-HRM system in CBE was the bank's elastic vision and the incompetent HRM system to carry out the vision within the stipulated time frame. Almost all actors of the bank participated in the process of developing and implementing CB-HRM, and approval was given by respective vice presidents. CBE developed three types of competency frameworks: core, leadership, and technical. The system was also integrated with the timely technology named "Oracle banking system" since 2017. The Oracle system is used for all banking activities. Prior to this, during the pilot stage of CB-HRM system introduction, all bank activities were paper-based.

The full implementation of the system, including three rounds of revision, took around 10 years and was accomplished gradually through three phases: preparation, development, and implementation. The actual implementation of CB-HRM began in 2014. Recognizing the dynamic nature of the system, CBE has decided to conduct periodic revisions every 30 months (2 years and 6 months). To date, CBE has conducted three rounds of revision, with the first two being done by the consulting firm and the third phase being done by CBE itself. Currently, CBE's CB-HRM system is fully run by its own experts.

The decisions made by CBE management to gradually transfer knowledge and skills of CB-HRM from the external consultancy firm to CBE experts, and their strong belief in their own human resources, as well as their belief in the dynamism of CB-HRM and planning for continual revision every two and a half years, have also contributed to the development and implementation of CB-HRM in CBE. The whole process aligns with the saying of Barbara Holland that "True ownership of anything requires time."

CBE developed a comprehensive written communication strategy to effectively communicate the newly developed CB-HRM system to its staff. Communication was made across the three stages of CB-HRM, but more communication was made during the implementation stage. However, there was a lack of fairly and evenly distributed communication across each stage of competency development in CBE.

However, the journey of initiating, developing, and implementing the CB-HRM system was not a simple and straightforward task for CBE. The bank faced challenges such as frequent management changes, attitudinal problems, the nobility of the system to Ethiopia in general and the banking industry in particular, and poor change communication efforts. During the second phase of CB-HRM, CBE provided more attention to knowledge transfer. Nevertheless, before reaching this level, CBE officials had to overcome many obstacles.

The key success factors that facilitated the accomplishment of CB-HRM in CBE were management commitment, stakeholder involvement in the process, the presence of a vibrant monitoring, evaluation, and feedback system, and the implementation of a digital CB-HRM system. However, challenges were also faced during the development and implementation of the CB-HRM system. These challenges included the newness of the system, lack of national experience on CB-HRM, skill gaps, resistance to change, frequent leadership changes, and internet and electric power blackouts (interruptions), as well as COVID-19-related problems.

## **7. Recommendations**

- Installing a CB-HRM system is a challenging task that requires resources, effort, management commitment, serious monitoring and evaluation, and technological support. Additionally, as a country and civil service sector, Ethiopia lacks adequate experience in formulating and implementing CB-HRM. Therefore, before introducing CB-HRM in the public service, we must fulfill the required inputs that have been proven successful by CBE's experience.
- CBE's experience shows that developing and implementing CB-HRM takes around 10 years to fully own the system's capacity. Moreover, the system was installed in CBE, a public enterprise that operates in the dynamic finance sector and has a relatively better position in allocating resources to introduce the system. The business nature of CBE has contributed significantly to the realization of CB-HRM, which may not be the case in the public service sector.

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- CBE should continue to invest in the development and implementation of CB-HRM to ensure that the system is fully owned and utilized to its maximum potential. Moreover, CBE should also share its experience and best practices with other public service organizations to facilitate the introduction of CB-HRM in the public sector. In this turn, CBE should collaborate with the government and other stakeholders to develop a comprehensive plan for introducing CB-HRM in the public service sector, taking into account the unique challenges and opportunities of the sector.
- Based on the experience of CBE, installing a competency framework in any organization requires resources, time, and high-level top management commitment. Moreover, implementing this tool at its full scale takes much longer than expected. Additionally, the fundamental elements required to be included in the competency framework are determined by the business type of the organization. Therefore, when it comes to the civil service sector, the story is different. The sector serves multiple disciplinary areas and faces numerous problems. Therefore, it is important to learn from the experience of CBE and contextualize it to the public service situation. For example, the types of competency frameworks intended to be developed by FFCSC are two: core and technical competence. However, CBE formulates three types of competency: core, leadership, and technical. We should learn from the experience of CBE and ask why we exempt leadership competency? Without competent leaders who have passed through the leadership competency framework, envisioning a full-fledged CB-HRM is impossible.
- CBE attempted to make an all-rounded change communication, although it had a problem maintaining balance. Therefore, we should learn to communicate this new management tool at each phase of the CB-HRM development and engage stakeholders in the development process.
- Additionally, supporting CB-HRM with technology is another remarkable achievement of CBE that the civil service sector should learn from. Technology can significantly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of CB-HRM, and it is essential to invest in the necessary technological infrastructure to support the implementation of this tool.
- CBE should be encouraged for all its achievements in practicing CB-HRM and becoming one of the pioneer organizations in Ethiopia. Therefore, since this reform tool is timely and proven effective, CBE should take the initiative to support the countrywide movement of introducing CB-HRM by being an advisory body and a consulting agency.
- Though CBE is doing well, it is also important to focus on the unfinished task of CB-HRM. Therefore, arranging a platform for experience sharing with the public service and other private sectors is commendable. Additionally, opening the system to research by the bank's own staff and others may pave the way to adopt the system in other sectors.
- CBE is achieving remarkable results in terms of developing and implementing CB-HRM in Ethiopia, it has only a handful of experts in the area. Therefore, retaining them and working to increase their number is essential. Moreover, since they are national resources, efforts should be made to expose them to more experience and education.
- A comprehensive, large-scale study on the experience of CBE in introducing, developing, implementing, and evaluating the CB-HRM system should be conducted, and the lessons learned should be applied to other sectors.

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