

# Understanding The Concept of Competence: Findings from a Pilot Study of Malaysian Women Managers

Tan Sui Hong\*, Norhalimah Idris

*Department of Management, Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 UTM Johor Bahru, Johor Malaysia*

\*Corresponding author: helenfrs\_fhba@yahoo.com.sg

## Abstract

This article reports the exploratory pilot findings on Malaysian women managers' understanding of the concept of competence. This pilot study drew on qualitative in-depth interviews with purposely selected women managers representing three major economy sectors within Malaysian work context namely, the GLCs (government-linked companies), private and public sectors. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the transcribed interviews. The pilot findings suggest two qualitatively distinctive broad themes of managerial competencies namely, in getting things done and in managing others to get things done. The key attributes of competence were drawn from the conception of work and understanding about competence. Despite the small sample size, the exploratory pilot findings could serve as a platform for further inquiry. The findings potentially extend previous research on human competence and women in management, indicating the need to understand competence from the perspective of women managers within the Asian context.

*Keywords:* Competence; women managers; qualitative research; Malaysia

## Abstrak

Artikel ini melaporkan penemuan kajian rintis tentang pemahaman pengurus-pengurus wanita di Malaysia terhadap konsep kompetensi. Kajian rintis ini menggunakan temu bual kualitatif mendalam dengan pengurus wanita terpilih yang mewakili tiga sektor ekonomi utama dalam konteks kerja Malaysia, iaitu GLCs (*government-linked companies*), sektor swasta dan sektor awam. Analisis kandungan kualitatif telah digunakan untuk menganalisis transkrip temu bual. Dapatan kajian rintis mencadangkan dua tema luas kompetensi pengurusan yang secara kualitatif bersifat tersendiri iaitu, pelaksanaan kerja dan pengurusan manusia untuk tujuan pelaksanaan kerja. Ciri-ciri utama kompetensi telah diambil dari konsep kerja dan kefahaman mengenai kompetensi. Walaupun saiz sampel adalah kecil, hasil penemuan kajian rintis ini boleh dijadikan landasan untuk siasatan lanjut. Penemuan berpotensi untuk melanjutkan penyelidikan sebelumnya mengenai kompetensi manusia dan wanita di dalam bidang pengurusan, menunjukkan keperluan untuk memahami kompetensi dari perspektif pengurus wanita dalam konteks Asia.

*Kata kunci:* Kompetensi; pengurus wanita; penyelidikan kualitatif; Malaysia

© 2014 Penerbit UTM Press. All rights reserved

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Women in management is one major area of study that has been considered “outside of itself” (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). There is a growing concern about women’s population in the talent pool being not reflected in their participation in the labour force, particularly in management (Thornton, 2013). In Malaysia, a greater access to education has increased the participation of Malaysian women in the labour force over the years (Ahmad, 2009). The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in Malaysia showed an increase of 1.6 per cent for the period of 2011-2012 from 47.9 to 49.5 per cent (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2012). However, within the same period, the percentage of women in the category of “Managers” dropped from 22.5% to 21.5%.

In response to the alarming trend, Corporate Malaysia policy was put in place in 2011 to increase board representation of women in locally listed companies to 30 per cent by year 2016. The policy introduced the Women Directors’ Program in 2012 to provide training on technical knowledge and soft skills to groom women managers into becoming competent directors (The Edge Malaysia, 2013).

However, the concept of competence is known to be contextually dependent hence, scholars often question the effectiveness of training managers to become competent outside of their work context (Hill, 2004; Mintzberg, 2004; Boyatzis, 2008). The last four decades since McClelland first introduced the concept of competence have shown that the concept remains elusive to researchers and practitioners (Boyatzis, 2009; Winterton, 2009). There has been a lack of consensus on what constitutes competence (Sandberg, 2000; Sandberg and Pinnington, 2009) and this shortcoming has serious implications for understanding managerial competence. Given the fast evolving nature of business and management, managerial identities are in a constant state of fluidity (Andersson, 2010). Therefore, any attempt to define competence should begin from the managers themselves, in particular, how they conceive their work and what do they understand with the word “competence” from their own perspectives within their context (Sandberg, 2000). A study to explore women managers’ understanding of the concept of competence from the Malaysian experiences is, therefore, timely.

The purpose of the paper is to consider the notion of competence in the narratives of women managers from three different economy sectors in Malaysia, namely the GLCs (government-linked companies) and the public and private sectors. The data presented in this paper is a sub-set of a larger study using a qualitative approach to present rich descriptions of managerial competence. The study reports exploratory pilot findings from three selected cases of women managers. This paper begins with the overview of relevant literature on the concept of competence, women in management and previous related research. The research methodology and sampling process are then described. The findings are discussed in relation to different interpretations of competence. The final section deals with potential areas these limited findings had flagged for further inquiry.

## ■ 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of competence was first expounded by David McClelland in 1973 to determine performance differentiators, since testing for intelligence had been proven inadequate in predicting job performance (McClelland, 1973). There are several approaches to understand the concept of competence.

Firstly, the worker-oriented behavioural approach defines competence as “an underlying characteristic of a person” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21) “that is causally related to superior performance” (Spencer and Spencer, 1993, p.9). Further development within the behavioral approach includes the integration of emotional and social intelligence and therefore, has led to the framing of competence as the behavioural approach to emotional intelligence (Boyatzis, 2009). Secondly, the work-oriented functional approach or standards approach stipulates the minimum level of accepted performance or standards in a job (Tate, 1995) and therefore, focuses on the job in order to generate the element of competence. However, both the behavioural and functional approaches have been criticized for failing to consider the role of contextual elements. Thirdly, the situational approach attempts to address the lack of contextual consideration in the previous approaches by focusing on situational factors such as firm size and nationality that may influence managerial performance (Iversen, 2000a). Cheetham and Chivers (1996b) described the various existing approaches as “different facets of the same gemstone”. Therefore finally, the holistic model of professional competence was developed by combining these “facets”, which include four core components, namely, personal or behavioural competence, functional competence, values or ethical competence, knowledge or cognitive competence and finally the overarching meta-competencies (Cheetham and Chivers (2005). The term “competence” (plural, *competences*) and “competency” (plural, *competencies*) are to be used interchangeably in the absence of particular distinctions between both terms (Tate, 1995; Cheetham and Chivers, 2005).

Sandberg (2000) criticised the prevailing rigid rationalistic research tradition used in the existing approaches which treated competence as an attribute-based phenomenon. In worker-oriented approaches, researchers identify the attributes by making assessment of the individuals’ behaviours. These attributes are then matched to the pre-defined categories such as knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs). Finally, researchers measure their correlation to successful performance in order to generate a list of managerial competencies. In similar fashion, researchers applying work-oriented approaches identify a specific set of attributes but use the job as a point of departure (Fine, 1988). Firstly, they identify a set of activities needed to accomplish the job and then transform these activities into personal attributes. The tendency to pre-define categories of KSAs elicited criticisms that the attributes generated were too generic, abstract, contextually-independent and therefore, of little value to form a basis for competence development (Sandberg, 2000).

In an empirical study at Volvo Car Corporation, Sandberg (2000) initiated an interpretative research on human competence using observation and interviews with twenty engineers responsible for engine optimization in order to determine what constituted competence in their field. Instead of looking for specific attributes, he focused on these engineers’ conceptions of works in their experience of it. He found that the engineers’ conceptions of engine optimization constituted competence in engine optimization and most importantly, the essential attributes of competence acquired their meanings from these conceptions and subsequently formed the structure of competence related to engine optimization. Therefore, he concluded that any attempt to define competence should start from the workers’ conceptions of work and their experiences of work within their perspectives. Managerial competence then, is to be investigated by asking the managers what they conceive of work and how they understand competence within their work setting.

The word “manager” often denotes rank of position one holds in an organisation. The title itself does not *per se* make one a manager, for what makes one a manager is the management functions that he or she performs (Boyatzis, 1982). A manager gets things done through other people (Appley, 1969) by performing the following five basic management functions: planning, organizing, controlling, motivating and coordinating. Echoing the same ideas in his seminal work titled *The Competent Manager*, Boyatzis (1982) wrote that managers help to achieve organizational goals via planning, supervision, coordination and decision-making activities. In performing these management functions, managers assume the interpersonal, instrumental and decision-making roles (Mintzberg, 1973) using the myriad technical, human and conceptual skills (Hill, 2004) at varying degrees depending on the level of management they are representing.

Typically, there are three levels of management: top management which includes CEO and senior management; middle management which comprises managers and executives; and finally, junior management which consists of first line managers or supervisors. For effective performance, conceptual skills, or thinking capabilities, are more important to effective performance at the top management level, whereas technical skills or the ability to apply structured procedures and techniques are more relevant at junior level (Young and Dulewicz, 2009; Boyatzis, 2009). Regardless of management level, all managers need good human relations skills in order to perform management functions and roles effectively (Appley, 1969).

As pointed out earlier on, a study on women managers warrants special discussion. The existing literature suggests that women experience different adult lives from men owing to family commitment which includes pregnancies and childcare (Ismail, 2003; Yukongdi and Benson, 2006; O’Neil *et al.*, 2008; Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008; Rowley and Yukongdi, 2009) as well as eldercare especially within Asian family structures (Ahmad, 2007). Women also face challenges posed by gendered organizational and societal factors (Omar and Davidson, 2004; Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011; Ely *et al.*, 2011; Chen *et al.*, 2012). The glass-ceiling, referring to the invisible barriers women faced in advancing to the top, may have been cracked but still play a vital role in causing imbalance in gender diversity (Catalyst, 2012). In addition, when displaying too much masculine qualities, such as toughness and assertiveness, women managers are not well liked

by their peers (Vanderbroeck, 2010). Yet women who are not displaying the toughness and assertive qualities are perceived as not ready for top jobs. Either way, women find themselves caught in a double bind (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Ely *et al.*, 2011).

The issues facing women managers in the West as well as other parts of Asia are common to those faced by Malaysian women (The Edge, 2013). Despite the international outlook, Malaysian cultural and social traditions continue to emphasize on gendered roles for women (Kennedy, 2002; Abdullah *et al.*, 2008; Rowley and Yukongdi, 2009). The glass-ceiling phenomenon which impedes women's career progression still thrive across disciplines (Ismail and Mohd Rasdi, 2007; Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Zainal Abidin *et al.*, 2009).

Given that women's adult lives are markedly different from that of men, it is not surprising that women understand and do things differently (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011). For instance, women managers exhibit distinctive communal styles of managing and leading (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Women also understand career success not only based on the traditional male objective standards such as salary and promotion; they include also subjective indices such as satisfaction and confidence (O'Neil *et al.*, 2011; Chen *et al.*, 2012; Chen and Doherty, 2013). This observation found support within eastern context (Mohd Rasdi *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, a specific study on women managers' conception of competence at work will add to the body of research in the area of human competence and women in management.

In a survey conducted on a total of 238 Malaysian managers from various organisations in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Hashim (2008) used an open-ended questionnaire to ask the respondents to write down three main job competencies related to their positions as managers. The competencies identified were; communication competency, which includes negotiation, computer, public speaking and report writing; managerial competency, which includes planning, leading, human relation, supervisory and analytical thinking; and job knowledge such as marketing, financial skill, technical knowledge, product knowledge and quality control. One of the problems highlighted by Hashim (2008) in this study was the redundancy of most responses (p. 266). There was no opportunity to clarify their responses such as is usually done in qualitative interviews. Apart from that, it was not highlighted how many male and female managers participated. It would be interesting to find out whether there are gender differences in the description of competence.

Another study conducted by Hopkins and Bilimoria (2008) using a 360-degree instrument found no significant differences between male and female managers in the demonstration of emotional and social intelligence competencies. However, their findings showed that gender moderated the demonstration of competencies and success. It was found that only male managers were deemed more successful when they demonstrated higher level of emotional and social intelligence competencies. Vanderbroeck (2010) questions the validity of 360-degree evaluations in rating managers' performance since the language of gender stereotyping continues to play a significant role when rating women in these feedback exercises (Peters and Kabacoff, 2002). The main concern is whether women are being rated as "leaders or as female leaders" (Vanderbroeck, 2010, p. 766). In sum, an understanding of women managers' conception of competence using qualitative research methods to elicit the data may further our understanding on why and how some women strive in management positions.

### ■ 3.0 METHODOLOGY

Against this background, this study sets out to explore women managers' understanding about the concept of competence. Women managers who participated in this research project were purposely selected according to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) notion of theoretical sampling in terms of theoretical relevance. Therefore, the criteria of selection included maximum variation in the followings: economy sectors, managerial levels and education background. The three selected cases of women managers represented three major economy sectors, namely the GLCs (government-linked companies), and the public and private sectors. In Malaysia, the public sector leads the national developmental goals while the private sector assists in fueling the economic growth. The private sector becomes prominent following an era of privatization. However, the public sector still plays a major role in domestic economies through a myriad of GLCs where government is the majority shareholder and the private sector plays the role of strategic partners. Through personal recommendation and organisations' websites, potential participants were approached for the interviews, first via emails then followed by phone calls to schedule the appointments.

This pilot study represents the first stage of a two-part research project and therefore, the sample of three women managers are drawn from the first three participants representing each sector. The first participant, Mrs. A, works in a real estate company in the private sector and is based in Kuala Lumpur. The second participant, Mrs. B works with one of Malaysia's main sea ports under a GLC in the southern region. The third participant, Mrs. C is working in the public sector under the state economic planning unit (EPU) also in the southern region. All of them hold managerial posts at various management levels. The participants have been working between twelve to seventeen years with relevant managerial experiences between two to ten years and are bachelor degree holders. Apart from having bachelor degrees, two possess advanced degrees while the other holds a professional qualification. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic information.

Qualitative in-depth interviews were used to explore the concept of competence based on women's lived experiences. The interviews were scheduled according to the participants' availability but spaced out in order for the researcher to have sufficient time to reflect on each of the interviews conducted. The first and second interviews took place in the participants' offices whilst the third interview was conducted at a local restaurant at the request of the participant. At the beginning of each meeting, the purpose of the interview was explained briefly. The interviews lasted between ninety to one hundred and twenty minutes. Consent forms were signed by both parties before the interview began as part of the ethical exercise to protect participants' condition of anonymity. None of the women objected to being recorded. During the interview, participants were asked to describe their current roles and what they understood by the word "competence" from their own perspectives. Deeper probing was achieved by asking questions such as "Can you elaborate further?", "Can you provide an example?" or "Can you please clarify that point?" The probing continued until the conversation yielded nothing new. Each interview was transcribed verbatim immediately. In all, the transcriptions of the interviews amounted to seventy-two pages of single-spaced text.

The analysis of the interviews was done using qualitative content analysis. The analysis began with the reading and re-reading the transcripts in order to get the overall sense of the meaning and eventually to identify patterns that emerged from these three pilot interviews. Field notes taken during the field work were referred to during the analysis in order to help the reorientation process. The

analysis was carried out by searching for what these women conceived as work. The first starting point was to grasp their conceptions of work throughout the interviews where they described their current roles, duties and responsibilities. The aim was to increase the likelihood of capturing the “knowledge in action” (Sandberg, 2000) rather than mere “espoused theories” (Argyris and Schon, 1978). In qualitative content analysis, the focus of analysis is placed on the entirety of the statements in relation to the interview content and context as a whole where nuances are taken into account to assist in the interpretation of the meaning (Sandberg, 2000; Merriam, 2009). After analyzing each woman’s conception, a simple cross-case analysis was attempted by comparing conceptions of work across sectors. The focus is to understand how women managers categorise what they conceptualise as competence at work. Even though the sample size is very small, comparison across sectors was done after each case analysis. Cross-checking of interpretations was done several times by re-reading the transcripts until the interpretations held. The following section reports on the findings drawn from three pilot in-depth interviews.

**Table 1** The participants’ demographic

Participant (by pseudonym)	Designation/ Sector	Marital Status and/or with Children	Age	Qualification	Managerial Level	Managerial experience
Mrs. A	General Manager/ Private sector	Married with four children	41-45	Bachelor degree in Law Professional qualification	Senior level	10 years
Mrs. B	Deputy Head of Section/ GLC	Married with two Children	36-40	Bachelor degree in Computer Science MBA	Junior level	2.5 years
Mrs. C	Principal Assistant Director/ Public sector	Married with one child	36-40	Bachelor degree in Psychology MBA	Middle level	4 years

#### ■4.0 FINDINGS

During the interview, each participant was asked about their This paper focuses on an exploration of women managers’ conception of their work and their understanding of the word “competence”. The interpretation of their narratives pointed to two qualitatively distinct broad themes, namely, (1) getting things done and (2) managing others to get things done. The key attributes of competence were drawn both from women managers’ conception of work and their understanding of the word “competence”. Table 2 summarizes the pilot findings on the notion of competence from the perspectives of three women managers.

##### Getting Things Done

Drawing from the excerpts of the interview data, the women described attributes which enable them to get things done. The narratives revolved around the description of what they did and what they understood as competence at work. The following are attributes that have helped them in getting things done effectively at the workplace.

##### Having the Knowledge and Skill

In some accounts, the women were quick to highlight knowledge and skill as key elements in managerial competence. In responding to the question “What best describes competence?” Mrs. A, who is a lawyer by training, singled out knowledge and skill as the most important attribute, she said:

*“If we talk about competence in my position at the moment, it is competence in term of knowledge and your skill, right.”* (Mrs. A, General Manager, Private Sector)

Mrs. B shared a similar view as she said the following:

*“To me that [competence] is ability or knowledge to do things successfully ... having the knowledge to do one’s job successfully.”* (Mrs. B, Head of Deputy Section, GLC)

In describing her work, Mrs. B acknowledged the importance of knowledge gained through formal education in giving her the head start in her managerial career but was quick to point out that her knowledge was insufficient. According to Mrs B, work relevant knowledge is acquired continuously at the workplace:

*“My present boss, he actually offered me this job because he knew that I had graduated from IBS, International Business School UTM (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia) and that I have a Master Degree, so he just said that [I am welcomed] if I wanted to join the management.”* Then she added: *“When I took my MBA majoring in Business Strategy, we did not learn more about finance. Yes, we had financial module and accounting but we did not go in-depth. But [here] in this department, we liaise with finance department and we have to learn a lot about [various] financial terms. I try to cope. I ask my senior guys what those terms mean, such as what is ‘credit note’.”* (Mrs. B, Head of Deputy Section, GLC)

Unlike Mrs. A and B, Mrs. C did not explicitly use the words “knowledge” and “skill” to refer to competencies needed in her work. Being the head of a unit which determines and shapes the economy of a state in itself speaks volume, not only about the type of knowledge and skill required, but also the high level of such knowledge and skill to perform such task. She described as follow:

*“This [the department] is very vital because we, more or less, determine how the economy for this state looks like, and we also sort of coordinate the budget for the state and we also as the liaison department with the Federal in terms of budget and other development projects. And we also prepare, I mean, there is another unit that we call research and development. They will prepare, they will compile all the economic activities and prepare the economic reports for the state, which is another unit for research and development.”* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

### ***The Ability to Apply Knowledge and Skill***

Mere possession of knowledge and skill alone is however, not sufficient in getting things done. Based on the narratives about the works these women perform, it is clear that the ability to apply knowledge and skill at the workplace has facilitated effective performances. Mrs. A proved her versatility by performing an array of functions which are not limited to legal scope only. She applied, or rather stretched, her legal skill and knowledge by helming other strategic corporate activities such as the restructuring of the firms. Sharing her perspectives, she said:

*“I’m now the GM, General Manager for the Corporate Services which handle legal, secretarial as well as the admin [referring to administration] portfolio with the admin portfolio I do central purchasing as well as insurance. So legal, of course the area that I do is, basically, I oversee the legal documentations which are more to corporate level. At the corporate side, I handle the Board as well. We have about 53 companies in the stable.”* She added: *“Of course I was involved in the restructuring, whenever there is a restructuring. So since I came in 2002 there was a 2003 and 2004 restructuring. There was another restructuring in 2007, then 2009. So the restructuring ... there were a lot of compliances with listing requirements. So BURSA [referring to KLSE, the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange] comes in, shareholders circular. So those are things that, the specs [referring to job scope] of the kind of work I’m doing.”* (Mrs. A, General Manager, Private Sector)

Mrs. B, on the other hand, earned the trust and recognition from her organisation to manage and lead two important sections within her organisation. Even though she had assumed a new role in a different department, she was requested to remain the leader of the team in the ICT (information and communication technology) department. The following conversation between Mrs. B and the interviewer which developed out of the key question on her job description illustrates this point:

*“My current role in this department is being the Deputy Head of Section where my principal accountability is that I do all the port charges ... I have to go through it, I have to scrutiny the tariff ... we can offer them different rates, we can give them discount. Whatever that is necessary to bring in customers to our port. Also, since I was formerly from ICT, the system in BBT (Bulk and Break Terminal) also required my support, the MPTS (multipurpose terminal system). So, I have two major roles, one is that I have to manage the MPTS and another is being the deputy head of the billing and administration section. This is because of my knowledge in the current system as I was in the original MPTS team.”* She added: *“So when I was transferred they [referring to the management team] wanted me to continue with the MPTS. So I am the deputy head of billing and administration section and leader of MPTS.”* (Mrs. B, Deputy Head of Section, GLC)

### ***The Ability to Innovate and Think Creatively***

Introducing newer and faster ways of performing tasks proved to be an effective approach to increase work efficiency. Mrs. A took to simplifying an otherwise complicated documentation process into a simpler one to expedite the dissemination of corporate information. She explained that it had also increased work efficiency in her division:

*“I know the work so I have managed it such that it will be very easy for my staff to assist me in making sure my minutes are on time and such that, because I have to deal with people from other divisions, they would ask me what the decision [board meeting decision] was. So I even formulated a system where they [her staff] do notes first, then within 24 hours, within 12 hours all these divisions would have brief notes on the decisions. So it [referring to the simplified system] helps our staff to be able to assist me in making sure that even before the meeting, the draft notes and minutes are ready.”* (Mrs. A, General Manager, Private Sector)

An innovative way to solve problems has helped managers like Mrs. C in gaining confidence to come up with various potential solutions for the problem at hand. The ability to innovate also implies the ability to think creatively or to think out of the box. Mrs. C explained how she had developed an innovative problem solving skill by way of envisioning multiple desired outcomes:

*“Sometimes I think of only one way of solving it [the problem] where it is sometimes not enough. I must now, when I come for a meeting, or when I chair the meeting, I must know what the end result is. Because when I first joined this unit, I was quite scared to chair a meeting ... sometimes there are problems that crop up during the meeting, and sometimes I feel like, ‘Oh my God, I can’t solve the problem’. And I find that I felt quite guilty at that time, unable to solve the problem. So now I think what I should do is that, before I come to a meeting, any meeting, or any other meeting, I must think of what do I want to achieve in the end. Yes, I can envision the result not only through one tunnel, maybe two or three tunnels.”* She added: *“Competence” for this work means that you have to be able to think creatively. Creativity does take place because in order for you to solve problems, there are so many ways. So you must be able to think out of the box.”* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

### **The Ability to Self-learn**

Getting things done is easier said than done when one is new to a management role. Self-learning capabilities are required of managers as hardly anyone would be around to show them the way. According to Mrs. B, it was difficult in the beginning as she had to find her own way and therefore, perceived the value of continuous learning. In the following anecdotes, Mrs. B shared her experience with the interviewer (I):

*“I started the new job on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October. I have only four days to learn from her [referring to her predecessor], as she was leaving on the 19<sup>th</sup>. So, only four days for her to hand over her current job to me. So four days she was simply briefing me, like, if you want to find the agreement look for these folders and files, simply transfer those files and folders from her personal computer. Then, whatever else after that, I have to learn by myself. As the job is related to the agreement, so I look for the agreement file and I go from there. So, for some problems related to customers, I have to find the customers’ files and learn from the trailing emails and trailing letters, so I just go on from there.*

I: How do you feel?

She said: *Ah, very difficult. So I need to learn a lot more, it is a continuous learning for me.”* (Mrs. B, Deputy Head of Section, GLC)

Similarly, Mrs. C found that she was very much on her own in the beginning and found the experience was quite overwhelming. From her narratives, she suggested that the ability to self-learn included the ability to adapt quickly by equipping oneself with the required knowledge and skill. When asked what she remembered about her first day as the Principal Assistant Director of the state Economic Planning Unit (EPU), she recalled:

*“I was so ‘blur’ [referring to being uncertain] So when I came in, I was introduced to all of the staff, and I was blur as to what they do, and then after that I was briefed really ‘brief’ on what I should do. I know why because they did not have the time to do that [to guide her] and I just assumed my responsibility. So I started with following my Deputy Director to attend meeting for the privatization meeting and those kind of things ... It’s crazy man!”* She further added: *“I have a degree in psychology and at least my master [degree] is [in] strategic management then suddenly I handle project. I don’t have technical expertise, so you have to adapt quickly.”* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

### **The Ability to Manage Emotion**

The ability to manage emotion is seen as one of the key elements to managerial competence. Mrs. A identified this point when she related her early experience as a manager where female colleagues made negative insinuations about her good working relationship with their CEO. She admitted feeling hurt by those suggestive insinuations but chose to ignore them; she told her story:

*“When I first came in ... one lady that headed one division said, “Ah, okay, new rose came in”. The jealousy, among ladies there are jealousy.*

I: You mean the jealousy where there is a newcomer?

She further explained: *Yes, newcomer, receiving more attention, new rose ... I think I have managed him [the CEO] okay, so I don’t have much issues with him to the extent that they [referring to her female colleagues] will say, “Oh, Mrs. A just giggle her way up”. Sometimes it hurts because it is not true. He is not an easy person to deal with. It is just that, it is how you manage him. I take it in my stride because I know it is not true, so I have to pacify myself, I comfort myself and I know my work So if someone says that statement, I ignore it that I “giggle my way up”. He wouldn’t have trusted me to do a lot of work for him if he doesn’t think that I am competent to do the job.”* (Mrs. A, General Manager, Private Sector)

The above statements suggest that Mrs. A has become somewhat indifferent to slights. Mrs. C echoed the same idea when she said:

*“You know, if you are in this line of work [being a manager in government service], you can’t get upset that easily because it will affect everything, so, you must make people feel comfortable to come to you ...”* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

### **Managing Others to Get Things Done**

From the interview, it is clear that the ability to get things done hinges upon the ability to manage others in getting tasks or assignments accomplished. The following attributes are highlighted by the participants as necessary in managing relationships with others during the course of work.

### ***The Ability to Apply Knowledge and Skill in Managing Others***

The participants perceived the value of being able to manage relationships with the people they are working with to ensure effective performance of the jobs required. According to them, the ability to deal with people implied the ability to understand and connect with others, including those outside the organisation. Mrs. B illustrated this point as she perceived the benefit of having a good relationship with vendors in a competitive business environment. In return, she anticipated the receipt of good support from her vendors. She said:

*“You have to liaise with people too. So the ability to deal with people, how to build relationship with vendors ... because vendors also have many customers. So when you have good rapport with them they definitely will give you priority and good cooperation.”* (Mrs. B, Head of Deputy Section, GLC)

Mrs. A took the view that effective relationship management included the manager being firm and able to deliver constructive criticisms to the intended individual without jeopardizing the existing relationship. Good human communication and interpersonal skills are components of this aspect of managerial competence. According to her:

*“Of course sometimes you cannot be nice all the time. If you have to give it [referring to constructive criticism] to them [colleagues and subordinates], you have to give it to them.”* She further added: *“If you are not able to deal with the people that you are communicating with, that you have to deal with, interpersonal skills not there, employee management as well as board management [are going to be difficult]. Those are parts of the competence that you need. It’s difficult.”* (Mrs. A, General Manager, Private Sector)

On the contrary, Mrs. C found that her constructive comments were not well received by her subordinates. She observed that they took her comment personally and used softer approach to communicate her comments to them, she explained:

*“The thing with our people, they can’t accept that [referring to constructive criticisms]. If you talk to them openly, they can’t accept that ... No, to tell you the truth I am actually a very open person, I mean whenever I don’t like it, I’d like to talk to people in front of their face but they can’t take it ... they tend to take it personal. For me it is professional. She provides an example: It happened twice already [laughed]. But it is with a lady staff, I did not scold her, I just told her “please don’t do this because I don’t like it”, she started crying. Then I said, “Why are you crying? I am not scolding you” Oh, it is not that easy but I think I better tell them [referring to her staff] the other way around.”* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

### ***The Ability to Innovate Together with Others***

An innovative way of finding solutions to complex issues or complicated problems is to get a few heads instead of one to do the thinking together. Mrs. C believed that creative problem solving would require a few alternative solutions or options to be made available. Her strategy was to assemble her team for brainstorming sessions in her bid to search for best solutions:

*“As much as I can I will try to call for a meeting for my unit so that we will exchange ideas or talk about any big problems to be solved and how to improve our unit. So, I try also to coordinate a meeting among my unit.”* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

### ***The Ability to Influence Others***

The ability to influence others in getting things done is well illustrated by Mrs. A. She highlighted the value of a manager’s ability to influence the decision making process in order to move the organisation forward. In the following anecdotes, she elaborated:

*“So sometimes in my area I have to manage the Management as well as the Board [referring to the Board of Directors]. So, the Board, whatever the Board decides or you know, may not be in line with what the Management thinks ... I help to guide as well as to assist the management putting forth, or putting forward whatever decision or whatever we would like to have, to do for the Group. We can’t abort the management. That’s when a lot of companies do not move forward because they’re quarrelling in the board room.”* She added: *“These people are management. It is how you manage people such that you get your way. You don’t get it all the time. But you get it for the management to move forward.”* (Mrs. A, General Manager, Private Sector)

### ***The Ability to Self-Learn About Self and Others***

Mrs. A acknowledged that she encountered problems in dealing with people, particularly her subordinates, during the early stage of her career. She took it upon herself to find out the reason by conducting a survey. She learnt about her weaknesses and took steps to rectify them. Her experience underlined the value of a manager’s ability to self-learn various management skills such as people skill and relationship management. She reflected on her learning experience as follows:

*“I remember I think first year I have so much difficulty with the staff. I actually told myself “Okay, I’m going to do a survey” ... Then I realised I was ‘kuku besi lah’ [referring to iron fist style of dealing with others]. I thought maybe ‘kuku besi’ is the best way to do it [to be a good manager]. Maybe that’s how you want to be a boss, you see. So that*

was how. Then I realised how important it is to be able to relate to people and to have the 'buys-in' [referring to getting the support from others]. To have the 'buys-in' and that's when you know people will work for you with love, with pleasure." (Mrs. A, General Manager, Private Sector)

In a self-deprecating manner, Mrs. C revealed that she was a hot-tempered person and interestingly, she attributed her temper to her gender. She learnt about herself by studying her superiors who possessed the qualities of being calm which she admired. According to her:

*"Actually I have to add one more thing [followed by laughter]. As a lady, I should highlight, I should tell you that I am quite hot-tempered. I can get mad quite easily. But when I joined this unit, my former director and two deputy directors, these three people, they had their own strengths ... you won't see them get mad that easily."* She added: *"I learn that a lot from them, whenever I get angry I cool myself down. I must learn from them. They are very calm people."* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

In the above anecdotes, Mrs. C shared how she had learnt to deal with her temper by emulating the positive behaviors of her superiors.

### ***The Ability to Manage Emotion in Managing Others***

Subordinate disobedience was highlighted by Mrs. C as she recounted an incident involving a personal assistant who ignored her instructions. Instead of reprimanding her staff, Mrs. C chose to remain calm and ignore the incident in order to maintain harmony in the working relationship. She said:

*"Last week, I had meeting in JB [referring to being in town and away from the office] while there is a very urgent letter to be prepared, so I called my assistant, she did not pick up, I sent message via 'sms' (short messaging system) she did not reply, I called her asking her to call me back, she didn't do that. Even though she did not do that, she knew what I wanted; she did email me what I wanted. So, instead of scolding her because she is my assistant, which means, I depend on her for my daily work ... I calmed myself down and I read whatever she emailed to me ... I replied her, telling her that actually I was looking for her because of this, this and this but since she has done it, it's okay, I said, let me read it [referring to the urgent letter] and let me amend it myself. Much later, I think she realized, and then she said sorry."* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

### ***The Ability to Collaborate with Others***

The participants expressed the benefit of collaborating with others in different ways. By bringing everyone to the discussion table and keeping an open mind to different opinions, Mrs. C fostered collaborative effort among her team members in seeking the best solutions for problems at hand. According to her:

*"There are times when people do not agree with my opinion, but normally I take it with an open mind, so I look at both sides, so I weigh it [and choose] the best solution."* (Mrs. C, Principal Assistant Director, Public Sector)

Along similar lines, Mrs. B found that she earned her subordinates' support and respect when she chose to lean on her experienced staff for support in work-related issues. She consulted them on difficult issues and they reciprocated by giving her their full support.

*"My subordinates, they actually respect me because I have this qualification, I have a Master [degree] yet I am willing to learn from them, so actually they respect me for that. ... I am learning a lot from them and they are very supportive."* (Mrs. B, Head of Deputy Section, GLC)

These women described several attributes of managerial competence from their conceptions of works and their understanding with the word "competence" from their perspectives. Top among the attributes is the possession of relevant knowledge and skill. Other attributes consisted of a stream of abilities such as the abilities to apply knowledge and skill, innovate, influence others, self-learn, manage emotion and collaborate with others. Together these attributes form a structure of managerial competence that enables these women to get things done, which includes managing others.



**Table 2** The participants' notion of managerial competence through conception of work and understanding of competence

Conception	Main Attributes of Competence						
	Knowledge and skill	Ability to apply knowledge and skill	Ability to innovate and think creatively	Ability to influence	Ability to self-learn	Ability to manage emotion	Ability to collaborate with others
Getting things done	Knowledge and skills related to work; basic knowledge in legal, computing, business administration	Perform multiple functions and responsibilities; assume several roles; perform strategic management activities	Formulate system to simplify tasks or enhance job routines  Creative problem solving by envisioning multiple desired outcomes		Self-learning on corporate skills and practices in the absence of guidance or lack of mentoring	Become indifferent to slights  Being approachable	
Managing others to get things done	Understand and connect with relevant people in the organisation and people relevant to the organisation; human communication skill	Manage relationship with others	Conduct brainstorming session with peers in search for solutions to complicated issues	Mediate between individuals and/or group of individuals to achieve consensus or mutual decision	Self-learning about self and others in relation to management practices (on people skill and relationship management)	Remain calm and composed in dealing with difficult situations and/or people	Gain support and respect from employees  Being open minded and accept different opinions

## 5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This paper reports on the exploratory pilot findings of the concept of competence involving three selected cases of women managers within the Malaysian work context. This study adopted an interpretive approach, well within the qualitative research tradition in order to provide in-depth understanding on what constitutes managerial competence (Sandberg, 2000).

Even though the participants come from different economy sectors, namely the GLC, and private and public sectors, the pilot findings showed more similarities than differences in terms of attributes which suggested competence at work. The attributes described were mainly comprised of knowledge and skills; and also a stream of abilities that had enabled these women to get their works done such as the ability to apply knowledge and skill, the ability to innovate, ability to influence others, self-learning capabilities, ability to manage emotion and also the ability to collaborate with others.

The possession of knowledge itself does not make one a competent manager *per se*. Despite possessing advanced degrees and professional qualification, the participants emphasized the importance of being able to apply appropriate knowledge and skill that suits the situation at hand. Formal education was highlighted as important in providing the basic discipline needed for work but not sufficient for managers when dealing with the realities of the working world thus, they implied the need to learn and develop competence continuously within the work setting. All the women involved in this pilot study agreed that managers need self-learning capabilities in order to perform at demanding workplaces. This finding also agrees with other studies that managers are being self-directed learners (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996b, 2005; Sandberg, 2000; Hashim, 2008).

The participants also demonstrated the ability to perform multiple roles and functions beyond the confines of basic disciplines defined by scientific knowledge such as legal, computing, information technology and business administration. According to Gardner (2008), the ability to perform beyond one's basic discipline suggests something of a higher quality, that is, a disciplinary sophistication marked by "the mastery of the craft, and the capacity to renew that craft" (*ibid.*, p. 43)

Another important attribute that emerged from this study is managing emotion. Mrs. A admitted that she was hurt by the negative insinuations her colleagues had thrown at her but managed to downplay the impact of their comments. Instead, she channeled her frustration into work with confidence as she knew her superior would not have trusted her if she was not competent. Mrs. C shared experiences about putting patience into practice in dealing with disobedient staff. In this respect, these particular findings conform to Boyatzis's (2008, 2009) notion of emotional intelligence competence, in which he describes it as the ability to recognize, understand and use emotional information about oneself that will lead to superior performance.

Interestingly, the notion of emotional intelligence competence in this pilot study is derived from the participants' experiences in dealing with real conflict situations at work and not from what they perceive as emotional competence. Emmerling and Boyatzis (2012) drew attention to a subtle distinction between being in possession of the ability and being motivated to apply it in real life. According to them, a person can perceive and demonstrate expertise on emotional competence but may not be motivated to apply it in a conflict situation (*ibid.*, p. 8). These pilot findings, albeit presented by a small sample and exploratory in nature, are important as they support previous findings in the study of emotional intelligence competence within various contexts such as, within the European context, Boyatzis and Ratti (2009) on Italian middle level managers, Ramo *et al.* (2009) on Spanish executives, Ryan *et al.* (2009) on European executives, Young and Dulewicz, (2009) on British Royal Navy officers; within the American context, Hopkins and Bilimoria (2008) on top level executives; Williams (2008) on school principals; Koman and Wolff (2008) on military officers comprised of team leaders and managers; Dreyfus (2008) on scientists and engineers working as first level managers; Boyatzis and Saatcioglu (2008) on multiple cohorts of MBA students; and, within the Asian context, Hashim (2008) on Malaysian managers; Chen *et al.* (2012) on Taiwanese managers and Chen and Doherty (2013) on Chinese managers.

The participants also shared experiences about managing relationships with subordinates when discussing the importance of collaborating with others. While acknowledging the importance of softening up her approach in employee management, Mrs. A believed that effective relationship management required her to take a firm stand and reprimand staff or colleagues should the need arise. On the contrary, Mrs. C, who works with the public sector, found that it was of paramount importance to preserve harmony and therefore, chose to tolerate disobedient staff. Even though it is premature to infer differences between sectors by these findings due to its limited sample size, it is interesting to compare these pilot results to Chong's (2008) findings on managerial competencies of managers from different nationalities and sectors. His study showed that there were significant differences between competencies of managers in the public and private sectors relating to time management and prioritizing, solving problems and thinking analytically.

Another interesting twist in this pilot study is the jealousy and hostility among fellow women managers in the case of Mrs. A who is working in the private sector. This finding is contrary to the prevalent evidence that men are the ones who hold negative views about women advancing to the top (Koshal *et al.*, 1998; Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Lewis and Simpson, 2011; LaPierre and Zimmerman, 2012). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the presence of "Queen Bees", a term coined by Kanter (1977) in her seminal work *Men and Women of the Corporation*, in reference to women in senior positions who tend to "close ranks" (p. 68) towards other women. The Queen Bees strive to preserve their unique privilege by being unhelpful towards their female colleagues and generally reluctant to promote them (Duguid, 2011; Lewis and Simpson, 2011).

## ■6.0 LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

This is a pilot study and therefore, exploratory in nature. The results from this pilot study should not be taken as the representative of all women managers from the GLCs and public and private sectors due to the limitation of small sample size. However, there are significant findings presented in this paper to encourage debates on the conceptualization of competence from individual perspective within an Asian context.

Firstly, this pilot work offers a window into the concept of competence as understood by Malaysian women managers from their own perspectives and personal experiences of work. An additional study at a larger scale is required to extend the pilot findings. The larger study shall consider a more probing and open-ended line of questionings during future interviews instead of relying on a structured format in order to elicit richer personal stories.

Secondly, women managers in this pilot study appeared to possess excellent self-learning capabilities. Hence, there is a promising area for exploration with regards to competence acquisition at the workplace. Further inquiry into this area may help to shed lights into the relatively unknown realm of management practice concerning how competence is actually acquired and reinforced at the workplace.

Thirdly, this work also provides an interesting glimpse into the existence of the "Queen Bee" phenomenon within a Malaysian context. Only Mrs. A, who works with the private sector, mentioned the hostility from her fellow women managers. There is a need for further exploration of women's role in supporting or hindering other women's progress across sectors.

## ■7.0 CONCLUSION

This pilot study attempts to highlight the need to investigate women managers' understanding of the concept of competence. The study of women in management has long been regarded as an area outside itself and continues to attract debates around the world. Lately, there are growing concerns surrounding women's lack of participation in management despite them forming a huge talent pool. On the other hand, research in the area of human competence has established that "competence" contributes to efficient work performance. However, the most enduring and persistent problems in management research is defining what constitutes competence (Boyatzis, 2008; Winterton, 2009; Sandberg and Pinnington, 2009).

Future research in the area of human competence should shift the focus from validating lists of managerial competencies to understanding the concept of competence from the participants' conceptions and experiences of work. The pilot study has also flagged potential area for research in the acquisition of managerial competencies via informal learning. In addition, the findings also suggest that further investigation into the "Queen Bee" phenomenon within Asian work context would make a valuable contribution into the study of women in management.

**Acknowledgement.** We are grateful for the UTM Zamalah scholarship to Tan Sui Hong. This research has also been supported by the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Research Management Centre under grant Vot No. QJ130000.7129.04J28.

## References

- Abdullah, K., Noor, N.M. and Wok, S. (2008). The Perceptions of Women's Roles and Progress: A Study of Malay Women. *Soc Indic Res*, 89, 439–455.
- Ahmad, A. (2007). Work-family Conflict, Life-cycle Stage, Social Support, and Coping Strategies Among Women Employees. *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*, 3(1), 70–79.
- Ahmad, A. (2009). Gender Differences and Trends in the Participation of Malaysians in Education: Implications on Employment Outcomes. *Journal of International Management Studies*, 4(2), 65–74.
- Andersson, T. (2010). Struggles of Managerial Being and Becoming: Experiences from Managers' Personal Development Training. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(2), 167–176.
- Appley, L. A. A. (1969). *Management Concept*. New York: American Management Associations.
- Argyris, C. and Schon, D. (1978). *Organizational Learning*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Boyatzis, R. E. and Ratti, F. (2009). Emotional, Social and Cognitive Intelligence Competencies Distinguishing Effective Italian Managers and Leaders in a Private Company and Cooperatives. *Journal of Management Development*, 28(9), 821–838.

- Boyatzis, R. E. and Saatioglu, A. (2008). A 20-Year View of Trying to Develop Emotional, Social and Cognitive Intelligence Competencies in Graduate Management Education. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 92–108.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1982). *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (2008). Competencies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 5–12.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (2009). Competencies as a Behavioral Approach to Emotional Intelligence. *Journal of Management Development*, 28(9), 749–770.
- Broadbridge, A. and Hearn, J. (2008). Gender and Management: New Directions in Research and Continuing Patterns in Practice. *British Journal of Management*, 19, S39–S49.
- Broadbridge, A. and Simpson, R. (2011). 25 Years on: Reflecting on the Past and Looking to the Future in Gender and Management Research. *British Journal of Management*, 22(3), 470–483.
- Catalyst. (2012). *Why Diversity Matters*. Catalyst, USA.
- Cheetham, G. and Chivers, G. (1996b). Towards a Holistic Model of Professional Competence. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 20(5), 20–30.
- Cheetham, G. and Chivers, G. (2005). *Professions, Competence and Informal Learning*. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Chen, A. and Doherty, N. (2013). The Perceptions of an EMBA Experience in China: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of Management Development*, 32(7), 780–795.
- Chen, A., Doherty, N. and Vinnicombe, S. (2012). The Perceived Value of Networking through an EMBA: A Study of Taiwanese Women. *Career Development International*, 17(7), 646–662.
- Chong, E. (2008). Managerial Competency Appraisal: A Cross-cultural study of American and East Asian Managers. *Journal of Business Research*, 61, 191–200.
- Department of Statistics, Malaysia. (2012). *Labour Force Survey Report, Malaysia, 2012*. Putrajaya: Department of Statistics, Malaysia.
- Dreyfus, C. (2008). Identifying Competencies that Predict Effectiveness of R&D Managers. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 76–91.
- Dreyfus, C. (2008). Identifying Competencies that Predict Effectiveness of R&D Managers. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 76–91.
- Duguid, M. (2011). Female Tokens in high-prestige Work Groups: Catalysts or Inhibitors of Group Diversification? *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision Process*, 116, 104–115.
- Eagly, A. H. and Carli, L. C. (2007). *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H. and Kolb, D. (2011). Taking Gender Into Account: Theory and Design for Women's Leadership Development Programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 474–493.
- Emmerling, R. J. and Boyatzis, R. E. (2012). Emotional and Social Intelligence Competencies: Cross Cultural Implications. *Cross Cultural Management*, 19(1), 4–18.
- Fine, S. A. (1988). Functional Job Analysis. In S. Gael (Ed.), *The Job Analysis Handbook for Business, Industry and Government*, 1 & 2, 79–103. New York: Wiley.
- Gardner, H. (2008). *Five Minds for the Future*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Grant Thornton International Business Report (2013). *Women in Business*. Grant Thornton IBR. [online] Available at: [http://www.granthornton.ie/Publications/International-Business-Report-\(IBR\)/International-Business-Report-\(IBR\)-2013/Grant-Thorntons-International-business-report-2013-Women-in-business](http://www.granthornton.ie/Publications/International-Business-Report-(IBR)/International-Business-Report-(IBR)-2013/Grant-Thorntons-International-business-report-2013-Women-in-business) [Accessed 09 January 2014].
- Hashim, J. (2008). Competencies Acquisition Through Self-directed Learning Among Malaysian Managers. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 20(4), 259–271.
- Hill, L. A. (2004). New Manager Development for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 18(3), 121–126.
- Hopkins, M. and Bilimoria, D. (2008). Social and Emotional Competencies Predicting Success for Female and Male Executives. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 13–35.
- Ismail, M. and Ibrahim, M., 2008. Barriers to Career Progression Faced by Women: Evidence from a Malaysian Multinational Oil Company. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 23(1), 51–66.
- Ismail, M. and Mohd Rasdi, R. (2007). Impact of Networking on Career Development: Experience of High-flying Women Academics in Malaysia. *Human Resource Development International*, 10(2), 153–68.
- Ismail, M. (2003). Men and Women Engineers in a Large Industrial Organisation: Interpretation of Career Progression Based on Subjective-career Experience. *Women in Management Review*, 18(1/2), 60–67.
- Iversen, O. I. (2000a). *Managing People Towards a Multicultural Workforce- An Investigation Into the Importance of Managerial Competencies Across National Borders in Europe: Differences and Similarity (Part A)*, 8th World Congress on Human Resource Management, May, Paris: Norwegian Institute for Human Resource Management (NIPA).
- Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kennedy, J. (2002). Leadership in Malaysia: Traditional values, International Outlook. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 16(3), 15–26.
- Koman, E. S. and Wolff, S. B. (2008). Emotional Intelligence Competencies in the Team and Team Leader: A Multi-Level Examination of the Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Team Performance. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 55–75.
- Koshal, M., Gupta, A. K. and Koshal, R. (1998). Women in Management: Malaysian perspective. *Women in Management Review*, 13(1), 11–18.
- LaPierre, T. A. and Zimmerman, M. K. (2012). Career Advancement and Gender Equity in Healthcare Management. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 27(2).
- Lewis, P. and Simpson, R. (2011). Kanter Revisited: Gender, Power and (In) Visibility. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00327.x.
- McClelland, D. C. (1973). Testing for Competence Rather than for 'Intelligence'. *American Psychologist*, 28(1), 1–14.
- McGregor, J. (2010). Who Needs Gender Research and What is its Role in the Twenty-First Century? A Personal Reflection. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(4), 269–274.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design And Implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The Nature of Managerial Work*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Mintzberg, H. (2004). *Managers Not MBAs: A Hard Look at the Soft Practice of Managing and Management Development*. Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco.
- Mohd Rasdi, R., Ismail, M. and Garavan, T. (2011). Predicting Malaysian Managers' Objective and Subjective Career Success. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(17), 3528–49.
- O'Neil, D., Hopkins, M. and Sullivan, S. (2011). Do women's Network Help Advance Women's Careers? Differences in Perceptions of Female Workers and Top Leaders. *Career Development International*, 16(7), 733–54.
- O'Neill, D. A., Hopkins, M.M., and Bilimoria, D. (2008). Women's Careers at the Start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Patterns and Paradoxes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 80(4), 727–743.
- Omar, A. and Davidson, M. J. (2004). Women in Management in Malaysia, in Davidson, M.J. and Burke, R. J. (eds). *Women in Management Worldwide: Facts, Figures and Analysis – An Overview*. UK: Ashgate.
- Peters, H. and Kabacoff, R. (2002). *A New Look at the Glass Ceiling: The Perspective from the Top*. Research Report. Management Research Group, Portland: ME.
- Ramo, L. G., Saris, W. E. and Boyatzis, R. E. (2009). The Impact of Social and Emotional Competencies on Effectiveness of Spanish Executives. *Journal of Management Development*, 28(9), 771–793.
- Rowley, C. and Yukongdi, V., eds. (2009). *The Changing Face of Women Managers in Asia*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Ryan, G., Emmerling, R. J. and Spencer, L. M. (2009). Distinguishing High-performing European Executives: The Role of Emotional, Social and Cognitive Competencies. *Journal of Management Development*, 28(9), 859–875.
- Sandberg, J. and Pinnington, A. H. (2009). Professional Competence as Ways of Being: An Existential Ontological Perspective. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(7), 1138–1170.
- Sandberg, J. (2000). Understanding Human Competence At Work: An interpretative approach. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(1), 9–25.
- Spencer, L. and Spencer, S. (1993). *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tate, W. (1995). *Developing Managerial Competence: A Critical Guide to Methods and Materials*. Gower, Hampshire.
- The Edge Malaysia. (2013). *Special Focus: Empowering Women*, April 22, S2–S19.

- Vanderbroeck, P. (2010). The Traps that Keep Women from Reaching the Top and How to Avoid Them. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(9), 764–770.
- Williams, H. W. (2008). Characteristics that Distinguish Outstanding Urban Principals: Emotional Intelligence, Social Intelligence and Environmental Adaptation. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 36–54.
- Winterton, J. (2009). Competence Across Europe: Highest Common Factor or Lowest Common Denominator? *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 33(8/9), 681–700.
- Young, M and Dulewicz, V. (2009). A Study Into Leadership and Management Competencies Predicting Superior Performance in the British Royal Navy. *Journal of Management Development*, 28(9), 794–820.
- Yukongdi, V. and Benson, J., 2006. *Women in Asian Management*. London: Routledge.
- Zainal Abidin, Z., Abdul Rashid, A. and Jusoff, K. (2009). The ‘Glass Ceiling’ Phenomenon for Malaysian Women Accountants. *Asian Culture and History*, 1(1), 38–46.