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**EXAMINING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE
CO-OPERATIVE LEADERSHIP: INSIGHTS FROM
COMMITMENT, VISION, AND BUSINESS ACUMEN IN
MALAYSIA**

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Abstract:

This paper investigates valuable and relevant factors that will improve co-operative leadership in Malaysia with a focus on a collective drive, social responsibility, and sound business judgment. A qualitative research design was employed, and the data was collected from Malaysian co-operative leaders. The participants are chosen from among co-operative leaders in Malaysia, such as board members and executive officers. The objective of the study is to identify practical strategies that can boost the resiliency of co-operative societies and enhance their community engagements. The concept of a shared vision is understood as a unifying factor, community commitment is important in ensuring that social value is created, while business savvy is seen as critical for competition in the marketplace. It is anticipated that this research will identify the interaction among the three attributes, and how they together are conducive to the achievement of sustainable co-operative leadership, from the viewpoints of the stakeholders who wish to see the development of Malaysian co-operatives' sector.

Keywords:

Co-operative Leaders, Commitment, Business Acumen and Vision.



Introduction

Co-operative can be defined as a voluntary association of individuals united by a common interest to meet their economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. Therefore, co-operatives operate based on the principles of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. The primary purpose of co-operatives is to serve their members and the community, prioritizing mutual benefit over profit maximization (“Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia (SKM),” 2024). Table 1 shows the performance of co-operative by state interim for the year 2023.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Co-Operative by State Interim 2023

No.	State	Number of Co-operatives	Membership	Shares Subscriptions	Asset (RM /Million)	Turnover
1	Headquarter	3	916,573	4,251.32	127,351.09	23,053.5
2	Johor	1,489	478,116	322.30	1,374.62	449.84
3	Kedah	984	283,962	359.59	742.71	223.36
4	Kelantan	967	311,298	433.26	1,859.55	279.39
5	Melaka	475	177,763	106.46	531.50	62.91
6	Negeri Sembilan	772	191,616	123.01	395.86	103.53
7	Pahang	1,170	298,648	440.84	1,503.42	526.11
8	Perak	1,700	353,963	555.72	1,518.45	356.46
9	Perlis	241	63,720	68.23	134.56	27.12
10	Pulau Pinang	816	170,421	256.77	1,040.41	267.78
11	Sabah	1,765	361,126	244.10	868.35	329.65
12	Sarawak	1,161	314,471	225.61	653.94	189.58
13	Selangor	2,050	613,467	724.35	2,076.60	372.25
14	Terengganu	811	243,112	305.61	713.00	431.53
15	Wilayah Persekutuan	1,152	2,478,641	9,048.52	21,194.11	4,321.26
		TOTAL	7,256,897	17,465.69	161,958.19	30,994.29
		15,556				

Source: Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia (SKM)

As of December 31, 2023, the co-operative movement in Malaysia has shown a significant growth and development. There are 15,556 registered co-operatives, with a membership base of 7.25 million individuals. These co-operatives have collectively accumulated RM17.5 billion in share capital and fees. Additionally, the total assets of these co-operatives amount to RM161 billion, reflecting their substantial financial strength. The co-operatives have also generated a remarkable turnover of RM30.9 billion, indicating their active involvement in various economic activities and their contribution to the national economy (“Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia (SKM),” 2024). This impressive growth highlights the importance of co-operatives in Malaysia's economic and social landscape.

However, most co-operatives in Malaysia can be classified as micro and small cooperatives which a turnover of less than RM5 million. Therefore, leadership selection and competency assessment are vital for guiding co-operatives towards performance improvement, given the unique structure where the annual general meeting elects Co-operative Board Members (ALK) to lead the organization. Understanding the distinct characteristics of co-operative leaders is crucial for identifying traits that contribute to effective leadership and organizational success (Lee, Yeh, Yu, & Lin, 2023; Ndalamba, Caldwell, & Anderson, 2018; Yousef Farhan, 2024). The landscape of co-operatives in Malaysia underscores the significance of effective leadership in ensuring organizational success and community development. According to the report, an estimated 35% co-operative are considered either inactive or dormant, indicating a pressing need to address factors contributing to inactivity, such as poor leadership (“Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia (SKM),” 2024, Simkhada & Bhattarai, 2023).

Notably, co-operative leaders demonstrate a commitment to community welfare, as evidenced by their dedication to community development initiatives and social welfare programs (Bourdieu, 1986; Chung, Shim, & Park, 2024). This commitment fosters stronger bonds with members, enhancing trust and solidarity within the co-operative. Moreover, visionary leadership plays a pivotal role in driving innovation and growth within Malaysian co-operatives. Visionary leaders who can envision future opportunities and inspire others towards a shared vision propel their co-operatives towards sustainable growth and relevance in a dynamic business environment (Bencke, Dorion, Prodanov, & Olea, 2020; Briscoe, 2022; Mohd Adnan & Valliappan, 2019; White, Fuhrmann, & Crichton, 2023; Yousef Farhan, 2024). Therefore, exploring the qualities and traits exhibited by co-operative leaders in Malaysia reveals the importance of community commitment, shared vision and business acumen. By cultivating and nurturing leaders who embody these traits, co-operatives can navigate challenges, drive organizational success, and foster community development effectively.

The co-operative leaders play an important role in spearheading business success and ensuring democratic control and member participation, reflecting the core principles of co-operatives globally. At the highest level, the Annual General Meeting (AGM) holds the supreme authority. During the AGM, co-operative members elect the Co-operative Board Members (Ahli Lembaga Koperasi or ALK), who are responsible for setting policies and making key decisions. The ALK typically includes a Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and other board members who oversee various aspects of the co-operative's operations (“Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia (SKM),” 2024). Below the ALK, there may be various committees tasked with specific functions such as audit, education, and finance, ensuring that all aspects of the co-operative are managed effectively. The day-to-day operations are managed by the General Manager or CEO, along with hired staff who implement the policies and directives set by the ALK. This structure aims to balance professional management with member control and input.

Hence, identifying effective co-operative leaders' characteristics is crucial for understanding the attributes that contribute to organizational effectiveness. One significant trait of co-operative leaders is their dedication to community welfare. Recent studies emphasize the commitment of these leaders to community development initiatives and social welfare programs (Simkhada & Bhattarai, 2023). Leaders who focus on community engagement and social responsibility build stronger relationships with members, enhancing trust and solidarity within the co-operative (Bourdieu, 1986; Chung, Shim, & Park, 2024). This trust is fundamental in creating a cohesive and supportive co-operative environment.

Visionary leadership is a critical factor in fostering innovation and growth within Malaysian co-operatives. Leaders who can foresee future opportunities, craft strategic directions, and inspire others with a shared vision are essential for driving the co-operative's success (Bencke, Dorion, Prodanov, & Olea, 2020; Briscoe, 2022; Mohd Adnan & Valliappan, 2019; White, Fuhrmann, & Crichton, 2023; Yousef Farhan, 2024). Visionary leaders encourage a culture of innovation and forward-thinking, which is crucial for the co-operative's sustainable growth and relevance in a rapidly changing business environment.

Examining the characteristics of co-operative leaders in Malaysia highlights the diverse qualities and traits necessary for effective leadership. Understanding the importance of community commitment, visionary leadership, business acumen can help co-operatives cultivate leaders who drive organizational success and community development. By focusing on these key attributes, co-operatives can enhance their leadership practices and achieve greater performance and impact.

Problem Statement

Despite a well-defined co-operative structure, several issues challenge the effectiveness of co-operative leaders in Malaysia. Firstly, while the democratic election process ensures that members can participate, it sometimes leads to the election of leaders who may not have the needed skills and experience (Melo, Silva, & Parreira, 2014). This can lead to ineffective management and poor strategic decision-making process. Secondly, the reliance on volunteer board members can result in a lack of accountability and commitment, as these individuals often juggle their co-operative responsibilities with other professional or personal obligations (Simkhada & Bhattarai, 2023). Additionally, there is often a gap in professional management practices and knowledge among co-operative leaders, which can hinder the co-operative's growth and financial performance. Furthermore, fostering a shared vision and maintaining high levels of member engagement and trust can be difficult, especially in larger co-operatives with diverse membership bases.

In addition, some of the co-operative leaders in Malaysia exhibit certain undesirable traits that impede the progress and effectiveness of co-operatives. These poor characteristics encompass issues such as ineffective decision-making, lack of accountability, limited communication skills, and self-serving tendencies (Dubey, Pathak, & Sahu, 2023; Watt, 2009). Despite their positions of authority, some leaders demonstrate a reluctance to make timely and informed decisions, leading to inefficiencies and stagnation within the co-operative. Moreover, a lack of transparency and accountability in governance processes further exacerbates challenges, eroding trust and confidence among members.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to enhance the leadership capabilities and ethical conduct of co-operative leaders. Strengthening decision-making processes is essential to ensure timely and effective responses to organizational needs and challenges. Implementing transparent governance practices and accountability measures can help restore trust and credibility within the co-operative sector. Additionally, investing in leadership development programs and communication training can equip leaders with the necessary skills to foster open dialogue and collaboration among members, promoting inclusivity and collective decision-making (Lin, Zhang, Ng, & Zhong, 2022; Zhou, Zhang, Zhao, Namasivayam, & Zheng, 2024).

This study has identified several research gaps that, when addressed, can significantly contribute to the body of knowledge in the context of co-operative leadership in Malaysia. These gaps are centered around four key areas: identifying effective leadership traits, community commitment and trust building, the role of visionary leadership, and developing comprehensive leadership models.

There is a notable lack of detailed research on the specific traits and competencies that characterize effective leaders in Malaysian co-operatives. While existing literature acknowledges the importance of leadership in enhancing co-operative performance, it does not provide a clear understanding of the qualities that contribute to leadership effectiveness in this unique context (Simkhada & Bhattarai, 2023; Lee, Yeh, Yu, & Lin, 2023). Addressing this gap will help in designing targeted leadership development programs that are tailored to the needs of co-operatives.

Co-operative leaders often demonstrate a strong commitment to community welfare, which in turn helps to build trust and solidarity among members (Bourdieu, 1986; Chung, Shim, & Park, 2024). However, more research is needed to explore the direct impact of this commitment on organizational performance and member loyalty. Quantifying how community-focused initiatives influence trust and cooperation within the organization can provide valuable insights for improving leadership practices and fostering a more cohesive co-operative environment.

Visionary leadership is essential for driving innovation and growth within co-operatives. Leaders who can anticipate future opportunities and inspire their members towards a shared vision are crucial for the sustainable development of co-operatives (Bencke, Dorion, Prodanov, & Olea, 2020; Briscoe, 2022; Mohd Adnan & Valliappan, 2019; White, Fuhrmann, & Crichton, 2023; Yousef Farhan, 2024). However, there is a gap in understanding how these visionary leaders operationalize their visions and the strategies they employ to engage and mobilize members effectively. Further research in this area can provide practical guidelines for cultivating visionary leadership within co-operatives.

Existing studies often examine individual aspects of leadership in isolation, such as community commitment, visionary capabilities, or business acumen. There is a need for integrated leadership models that combine these elements to address the multifaceted challenges faced by co-operatives (Lee, Yeh, Yu, & Lin, 2023; Yousef Farhan, 2024). Developing such comprehensive frameworks can equip co-operative leaders with a holistic set of skills and strategies to effectively navigate complex environments and drive both organizational success and community development.

By addressing these research gaps, future studies can enhance our understanding of effective leadership in Malaysian co-operatives, ultimately contributing to their performance and positive impact on community development.

Literature Review

Effective Co-operative Leaders

Effective leadership can be characterized by a leader's motivation to lead, their leadership behaviors, and their capacity for reflection and learning (integrator). (Vilkinas, Murray, & Chua, 2020). Effective leaders should have a strong motivation to lead, which drives leaders to take initiative and guide their teams towards achieving common goals. Secondly, it includes

specific leadership behaviors that inspire and influence others, such as clear communication, empathy, decisiveness, and the ability to delegate effectively. Lastly, effective leaders possess a capacity for reflection and continuous learning. This means effective leaders regularly assess their own performance, seek feedback, and adapt their strategies based on new insights and experiences. Together, these elements form a comprehensive approach to leadership that fosters growth, innovation, and success within an organization.

Effective leadership in Malaysian co-operatives is crucial for their success and sustainability. The unique nature of co-operatives, where the emphasis is on collective ownership and democratic governance, demands a distinct leadership style that differs significantly from conventional business leadership. Understanding the characteristics that define effective co-operative leaders is vital for enhancing the performance and impact of these organizations (Dubey et al., 2023).

One of the most critical traits of effective co-operative leaders is their strong commitment to community welfare (Jahan et al., 2024). Leaders who prioritize the needs and development of their community build trust and loyalty among co-operative members. This commitment is reflected in the leaders' active participation in community development initiatives and social welfare programs. According to recent studies, co-operative leaders who focus on community engagement foster stronger bonds and solidarity within the co-operative, enhancing its overall resilience and sustainability (Beckham et al., 2023; Dobbin & Smith, 2021; Nomm, Albrecht, & Lovelock, 2020).

Effective co-operative leaders must also exhibit strong strategic decision-making abilities (Alade & Windapo, 2020). The unique structure of co-operatives, where decisions are often made democratically, requires leaders who can navigate complex governance processes while ensuring that strategic goals are met. Research indicates that leaders with a solid grasp of strategic planning and execution can position their co-operatives for long-term success. Effective co-operative leaders are able to balance the diverse interests of members while steering the co-operative towards achieving its objectives.

Shared Vision

A shared vision among co-operative leaders is the alignment of goals and objectives among members (Ndalamba et al., 2018). Recent reports highlight the importance of leaders in articulating a common vision that resonates with the aspirations of co-operative members. Leaders who can effectively communicate and instill a shared vision inspire unity and collaboration among members, fostering a sense of purpose and direction within the co-operative.

Visionary leadership is another essential quality for effective co-operative leaders in Malaysia. Leaders who can envision future opportunities and set strategic directions are instrumental in driving the growth and innovation of co-operatives (Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2001). Effective leaders inspire others towards a shared vision, which is crucial for maintaining a cohesive and motivated membership base. By fostering a culture of forward-thinking and innovation, visionary leaders help co-operatives adapt to changing market conditions and remain relevant in a dynamic business environment.

Inclusive decision-making processes emerge as a crucial component of shared vision among co-operative leaders in Malaysia. Kaluzny & O'Brien (2020) underscores the significance of leaders involving members in decision-making processes to ensure the representation of diverse perspectives and interests. Leaders who facilitate inclusive dialogue and participation empower members to contribute to the shaping of the co-operative's vision, fostering ownership and commitment to collective goals.

Furthermore, transparency and accountability are essential attributes of shared vision among co-operative leaders. Dobbin & Smith (2021) emphasizes the importance of leaders in fostering transparency and accountability in governance processes to build trust and credibility among members. Leaders who uphold principles of transparency and accountability in decision-making inspire confidence and cohesion, thereby strengthening the shared vision and unity within the co-operative.

Lastly, fostering a culture of collaboration and teamwork is pivotal for realizing shared vision among co-operative leaders. Visionary leaders who promote collaboration and teamwork among members create an environment conducive to achieving common goals. By fostering a culture of collaboration, leaders can harness the collective talents and strengths of members, driving co-operative towards shared success and prosperity.

Lastly, fostering partnerships and collaboration with external stakeholders is pivotal for realizing commitment to communities among co-operative leaders. Visionary leaders who promote collaboration and partnership-building initiatives create opportunities for synergistic efforts towards community development. By leveraging external resources and expertise through partnerships, leaders can enhance the impact of community development initiatives and promote holistic development within the community

Commitment to Community

Commitment to communities among co-operative leaders is their active involvement in community-based initiatives and social welfare programs. Recent reports highlight the efforts made by leaders to address community needs and promote social cohesion (Chung et al., 2024). Leaders who prioritize community engagement and welfare initiatives cultivate stronger bonds and trust among members, thereby enhancing the co-operative's resilience and sustainability.

Secondly, the promotion of inclusive and participatory decision-making processes emerges as a crucial component of commitment to communities among co-operative leaders in Malaysia. Beckham et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of leaders involving community members in decision-making processes to ensure the representation of diverse perspectives and interests. Leaders who facilitate inclusive dialogue and participation empower community members to contribute to decision-making processes, fostering ownership and commitment to community development initiatives.

Furthermore, transparency and accountability play a vital role in demonstrating commitment to communities among co-operative leaders. Cisneros, Deschamps, Chirita, & Geindre (2022) underlines the significance of leaders in fostering transparency and accountability in governance processes to build trust and credibility within the community. Leaders who uphold principles of transparency and accountability in their interactions with community members inspire confidence and cohesion, thereby strengthening community bonds and fostering sustainable development.

Therefore, exploring the characteristics of commitment to communities among co-operative leaders in Malaysia provides insights into the collaborative efforts and community-focused initiatives within the co-operative sector. By understanding the importance of community engagement, inclusive decision-making, transparency, accountability, and partnerships, co-operative leaders can effectively contribute to community welfare and sustainable development.

Business Acumen

Business acumen among co-operative leaders is their understanding of market dynamics and industry trends. Recent reports highlight the importance of leaders staying abreast of market changes and emerging opportunities (Prince, 2008). Leaders who possess a deep understanding of market dynamics can make informed decisions, identify growth opportunities, and navigate challenges effectively, thereby driving the co-operative towards sustainable growth and competitiveness.

Financial literacy emerges as a crucial component of business acumen among co-operative leaders in Malaysia. Raftery, Sassenberg, & Bamford-Wade (2021) stresses the importance of leaders having a solid grasp of financial management principles, including budgeting, financial analysis, and risk management. Leaders who demonstrate sound financial acumen can effectively manage resources, optimize financial performance, and mitigate risks, thus ensuring the financial health and stability of the co-operative.

Furthermore, strategic thinking and planning skills are essential attributes of co-operative leaders with strong business acumen. Yousef Farhan (2024) highlights the significance of leaders developing strategic plans aligned with the co-operative's goals and objectives. Leaders who can formulate and execute strategic plans effectively can position their co-operatives for long-term success, capitalize on opportunities, and overcome competitive threats in the marketplace.

Lastly, innovation and entrepreneurial mindset play a pivotal role in driving business acumen among co-operative leaders. Visionary leaders who embrace innovation and encourage entrepreneurial initiatives foster a culture of creativity and adaptability within their co-operatives (Raftery et al., 2021). By promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, co-operative leaders can identify new revenue streams, differentiate their offerings, and sustain the competitive advantage of their co-operatives in the marketplace.

Therefore, exploring the characteristics of shared vision, commitment to community and business acumen among co-operative leaders in Malaysia provides insights into the collaborative dynamics and collective aspirations within the co-operative sector. By understanding the importance of alignment of goals, inclusive decision-making, transparency, accountability, and collaboration, co-operatives can cultivate leaders who inspire unity and drive towards a shared vision of sustainable growth and community development.

Theoretical Background

Pierre Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory provides a framework for understanding the resources that individuals and groups gain from their social connections and relationships. Bourdieu defines social capital as the sum of the actual or potential resources available through a network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). Essentially, social capital refers to the advantages one gains from their social networks, such

as trust, reciprocity, and cooperation among members (Jahan, Hoque, Hossain, Hoon, & Pipul, 2024). Bourdieu's view of social capital highlights the significance of social structures and the power dynamics within them. Social capital is not evenly distributed; rather, it tends to be concentrated within certain groups (e.g. co-operatives).

Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory emphasizes a network of relationships whereby capital arises from both formal and informal social networks that provide members with access to resources and support (Bourdieu, 1986). Commitment to community can be viewed as a form of social capital where co-operative leaders focus on building strong relationships with community members. Leaders who emphasize community welfare initiatives are enhancing their social networks within the community. This leads to increased trust and reciprocity, which are crucial for the co-operative's sustainability (van den Boom-Muilenburg, Poortman, Schildkamp, de Vries, & van Veen, 2023; Younas et al., 2023). For example, co-operative leaders involved in community development programs can mobilize community resources and support, thereby enhancing the co-operative's social capital and ensuring long-term success.

Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory highlights mutual acquaintance and recognition whereby effective social capital requires mutual recognition and trust among network members (Bourdieu, 1986). A shared vision among co-operative leaders and members aligns with Bourdieu's concept of mutual recognition and institutionalized relationships. Leaders who effectively communicate and foster a shared vision create a sense of unity and common purpose. This alignment strengthens the network of relationships within the co-operative, making it more resilient and cohesive (Alade & Windapo, 2020; Ren & Shen, 2024). Thus, a shared vision becomes a source of social capital that facilitates collective action and organizational success/

Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory also accentuates institutionalized relationships whereby social capital is often embedded in institutional structures, which help formalize and stabilize networks (eg co-operative) (Bourdieu, 1986). Business acumen, typically associated with financial and strategic skills, also has a social capital aspect. Leaders with strong business acumen often cultivate extensive professional networks and have a deep understanding of market dynamics (Barrios, Prowse, & Vargas, 2020; Chung et al., 2024). These networks provide access to valuable information and resources, enabling leaders to make informed decisions and drive the co-operative towards growth and competitiveness. Strategic partnerships and collaborations further enhance the co-operative's social capital, contributing to its overall success.

In conclusion, Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory offers a valuable perspective for analyzing the traits of effective co-operative leaders in Malaysia. By focusing on the importance of social networks, mutual recognition, and institutionalized relationships, this theory highlights the crucial role of community commitment, shared vision, and business acumen in building and sustaining effective leadership within co-operatives. These elements not only enhance the co-operative's social capital but also drive organizational success and community development.

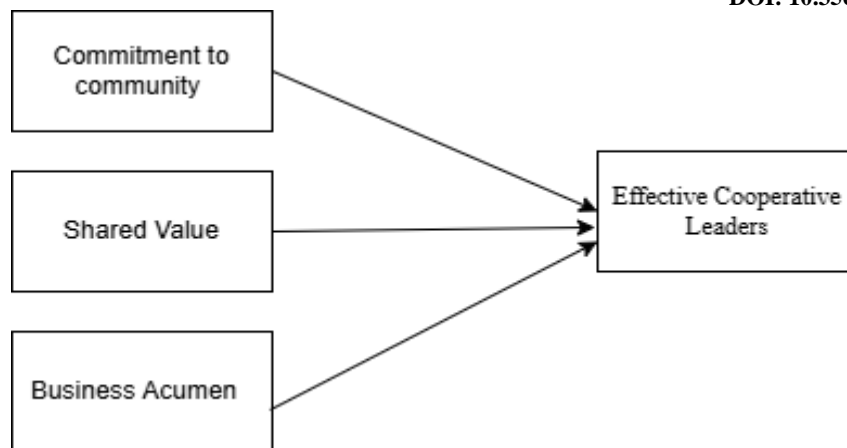


Figure 1: Research Framework

Research Question

- 1) What is the impact of commitment to community towards becoming effective co-operative leaders in Malaysia?
- 2) What is the impact of shared vision toward becoming effective co-operative leaders in Malaysia?
- 3) What is the impact of business acumen towards becoming effective co-operative leaders in Malaysia?

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach would be the most appropriate research methodology in addressing the research questions on the attributes of effective co-operative leaders in Malaysia. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the factors that contribute to leadership, commitment to community, shared vision, and business acumen. The interviews with the leaders of the co-operatives and other relevant stakeholders are semi-structured; in this way, rich and detailed insight can be obtained concerning their experiences and insights. The study will span six months, targeting co-operatives in both urban and rural areas of Malaysia. Locations such as Selangor, Johor, and Penang will represent urban co-operatives, while rural co-operatives from other regions will also be included to ensure diverse representation. Flexibility in this approach allows the researcher to probe for more information and even change his interview strategy according to the response he gets from the participants, thereby ensuring full-proof data collection.

The target population will include present and past co-operative leaders, members, and other relevant stakeholders in the Malaysian co-operative sector. In selecting the participants, a purposive sampling method will be used, having broad experiences and involvement with co-operatives to ensure that they can provide meaningful insights into topics of interest in this research. Sample size shall depend on the principle of saturation, where interviews go up to a point at which no new themes or insights emerge. This makes sure that all diverse perspectives are captured while the study is still focused on core themes.

Thematic analysis shall identify, analyze, and report the patterns-themes-within qualitative data. It shall include familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, and searching for themes relating to the three key areas of study, namely commitment to community, shared

vision, and business acumen. This will ensure that the findings emerge from the participants' narratives hence meaningful conclusion about effective leadership in co-operatives.

Several steps would be laid down to ensure that the study is reliable and valid. Using triangulation, where findings from different participants are compared and cross-referenced with existing literature on co-operative leadership, would help validate the findings. In addition, member checking will be performed, where participants are invited to check the data and the correctness of its interpretations. Other ethical considerations involve informed consent and the confidentiality of participants' identities when conducting research. The research methodology ensures that the procedures to be met are not only robust but also ethical in answering the research questions.

Challenges

Managing data for this study may pose several challenges. Ensuring a sufficiently diverse sample size while keeping it manageable is critical. A target sample of 20–30 participants is proposed, determined by data saturation. Representing both urban and rural co-operative leaders, as well as various co-operative sectors, could be logistically complex. Data collection might face issues such as scheduling interviews and securing participant availability, especially in rural areas. Additionally, managing the large volume of qualitative data from interviews could complicate the thematic analysis process. Proper coding frameworks and software like NVivo will be essential to streamline data management and interpretation.

To address these challenges, purposive and snowball sampling will help identify suitable participants efficiently. Collaborating with SKM can facilitate participant recruitment. For participants in remote areas, virtual interviews will be used to minimize logistical barriers. A robust data management plan, including clear coding protocols and double-checking interpretations, will ensure the accuracy and reliability of findings. These measures will help overcome potential obstacles and contribute to the study's success.

Implication

This research has a direct impact on National Co-operative Policy 2030 (DAKOM) which is a strategic direction for the development of co-operatives in improving economic performance and social well-being of its members with a vision to make this sector the main catalyst of socio-economic growth in Malaysia. DAKOM outlined 4 core thrust areas where core 2 emphasizes increasing understanding and appreciation of co-operative principles. This can be achieved by developing a new generation of co-operative leaders. Firstly, it encourages cooperation between co-operatives by taking advantage of existing programs such as Profile 100 Best Co-operatives. This include knowledge-sharing session best practices periodically in the program and targeting the youth group in the session knowledge-sharing through collaboration with the organization of various programs co-operative Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and professional bodies. Secondly, it also will Increase knowledge about the industry through collaboration with the private sector and experts' industry to develop programs leadership that is in line with trends and latest industry practices. (Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Co-operatives, 2023)

Conclusion

This research highlights that an effective co-operative leader in Malaysia benefits significantly from embodying a shared vision, a deep commitment to the community, and strong business acumen. Leaders who establish a cohesive vision that aligns with co-operative principles can

motivate and unify members, fostering an environment of collective responsibility. A dedication to community welfare ensures that co-operatives pursue social benefits alongside financial success, enhancing trust and member loyalty. Additionally, leaders with sound business skills are better equipped to make strategic decisions that promote sustainable growth. Together, these elements create a blueprint for future leaders, guiding them toward fostering resilient and impactful co-operatives in a community-centered landscape.

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