

The Institutional Leaders in Universities: A Framework for Improving Competency Assessment

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Abstract

This study describes the process of creating and improving a leadership competency framework within an organisation responsible for identifying potential leaders in universities. Specifically, this study assesses the leadership competency framework created in 2015 and its current relevance. Based on the focus group discussions, this study emphasises the need to refine the existing leadership competencies framework to accurately represent the current state of leadership at universities. The participants unanimously agreed to retain all clusters with minor changes. Specifically, the participants suggested that self-management should replace self-confidence to improve personal effectiveness. The leaders must have the ability to manage stress efficiently and maintain a stable state of mind. This study indicates participants understood diversity and flexibility, and leaders must adapt and use others' skills, especially in certain circumstances. The ability to adjust behaviour and ideas to environmental changes fosters inventiveness, critical thinking, and methodological challenge. In addition, the leaders must have a friendly and highly skilled demeanour. The participants also suggested introducing five additional assessment tools to evaluate the competence of future leaders. The five instruments include the 180-degree assessment, the 360-degree leadership assessment, the psychometric tests for IQ and EQ, the psychometric tests for personality, and the scenario planning analysis. The findings of this study provide an improved structure for identifying a competent leader who is exceptionally well suited to universities' unique demands.

Keywords: *leadership, competency, universities, Malaysia.*

Introduction

Universities often select professors, researchers, and administrators as leaders because they make significant contributions to the development and overall success of the institution (Meng, Tan and Li, 2017; Yue, Ye, Zheng and Yang, 2021). According to Smith and Wolverton (2010), employees of a higher education institution often work in an environment where they have little power but still have a significant influence on important institutional decisions. Therefore, it is crucial for university management to maintain a balance between the interests of departments and faculties and the interests of other stakeholders, such as students and the government (Altbach and de Wit, 2020). Given this factor, fostering institutional leadership among academics is critical to ensuring the sustainable sustainability of educational institutions in today's highly competitive environment (Bowen and Shapiro, 2016).

In education, leadership is characterised by frequent staff changes, and those in charge have remarkable narratives and experiences to share. The complicated nature of higher education institutions is an additional element that must be considered (Buller, 2014). To ensure effective transfer of knowledge and expertise, it is crucial to allow former HE leaders to pass on their experiences to new individuals in similar positions (Altbach and de Wit, 2020). To improve the stability of university leaders in their positions, it is important to widely disseminate information on various facets of leadership. These include leadership characteristics, leadership methods, basic principles of leadership, governance concerns, the spectrum of responsibilities (Amanchukwu, Stanley and Olorube, 2015), and their significant influence on higher education institutions. Ongoing advances in leadership research have focused primarily on formal leadership roles in universities, with an emphasis on leadership competencies (Diggele, Burgess, Roberts and Mellis, 2020). Leadership competencies include the essential information, skills, attitudes, and attributes that are critical to achieving effective leadership (Smith and Wolverton, 2010; Portnova and Peiseniece, 2017).

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Akademi Kepimpinan Pendidikan Tinggi (AKEPT) is a government institution under the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education. Its main objective is to equip universities with the necessary resources and knowledge to cultivate intellectual skills and develop individuals with leadership qualities. Since 2015, AKEPT has been actively involved in managing and promoting leadership potential in Malaysian universities. In 2013, AKEPT created its first framework for leadership in higher education. In 2023, AKEPT made the decision to conduct a thorough review of its framework to ascertain its need for revision and improvement. Therefore, this study examined the process of refining and improving the leadership framework using AKEPT as a case study. This is critical because it improves understanding of leadership capabilities and aids in the implementation of talent management strategies to address the challenges of today's world and create a distinctive leadership atmosphere. The next section, Section 2, provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on this topic. Section 3 provides a detailed description of the specific research methods used in this study. The findings are summarised in Section 4, while Section 5 concludes this study.

Literature Review

Both academics and professionals have long studied leadership in depth. Hunt and Fedynich (2019) note that the notion of research has evolved from the study of specific individuals, including changing dimensions, definitions, and both quantitative and qualitative frameworks. The aim is to gain insight into the traits and characteristics of successful leaders (Bolden and Gosling, 2006) that can enable them to successfully manage and drive an organisation forward (Page and Wong, 2000). Several studies, such as Fairholm (2004), and, Miska and Mendenhall (2018), have demonstrated the need for leadership qualities. In addition, several studies have expanded the current understanding of leadership using different situations and frameworks (Smith and Wolverton, 2010; Mohamed Jais, Yahya and Ghani, 2020). Despite the widespread perception of leadership, understanding of its underlying dynamic mechanisms remains limited (Ghani and Jais, 2018; Mohamed Jais et al., 2020), even though, it is one of the most commonly observed phenomena (Burns, 1978). Academics, as potential leaders, have a significant impact on the decision-making process in educational institutions due to the unique environment in which they work (Smith and Wolverton, 2010; Schneider and Jones, 2017; Mohamed Jais, Yahya and Ghani, 2021).

Studies have shown that leadership in education has certain characteristics that distinguish it from leadership in other types of organisations. This could be due to the unique environment of educational institutions that sets them apart from other places (Mohamed Jais et al., 2020). Therefore, universities are highly dependent on the exceptional skills of their leaders, who motivate their subordinates to achieve the organisation's goals (Burns, 1978). This is due to the fact that universities place a high value on their leaders' skills. Smith and Wolverton (2010) assert that despite their significant influence over important institutional matters, faculty members receive little control. To achieve a state of equilibrium, leaders must skilfully manage the conflicting interests of faculty members and various other stakeholders, such as students, trustees, donors, government officials, and citizens (Mohamed Jais et al., 2021). These different interests often come into conflict, and it is the duty of leaders to achieve a healthy balance between them. From this perspective, it is advisable for a leader to competently oversee the conflicting interests of many departments and faculties while also considering the concerns of other stakeholders, such as students and the government (Whitley Jr. and Keith-Spiegel, 2001).

A body of leadership literature has thoroughly addressed the subject of leadership in education, with a particular emphasis on contemporary times. In Malaysia, several studies have conducted research initiatives on leadership in education. For example: Ghasemy, Hussin, Megat Daud, Md. Nor, Ghavifekr, and Kenayathulla (2018) conducted a study on leadership in the education sector. They conducted a survey of academic leaders from 25 Malaysian universities, focusing on key academic initiatives, organisational change and leadership, administration, interpersonal relationships, and professional ethics. Karia and Asaari (2019) conducted a study to examine the impact of leadership development on the work attitudes of staff in higher education institutions. However, these studies did not focus specifically on leadership skills.

In the context of leadership, competencies refer to the skills and behaviours that contribute to achieving successful outcomes (Rooke and Torbert, 2005; Ghani and Mohamed Jais, 2018). Leadership competencies include essential information, skills, behaviours, and personal attributes that are fundamental to effective leadership (Smith and Wolverton, 2010; Portnova and Peiseniece, 2017). According to Mohamad Rohana and Abdullah (2017), leadership competencies are specific skills that a leader possesses that enhance their overall performance and effectiveness. Organisations can improve their ability to identify and cultivate potential future leaders by fostering the growth of leadership skills and talent (Hind, Wilson and Lenssen, 2009). Research on leadership capabilities has often focused on the analysis of many factors, including qualities, behaviours, transactions, power dynamics, influence, situational variables, and transformational capabilities (Birnbaum, Bensimon and Neumann, 1989; Yukl, 2002). These studies often argue that leadership characteristics are essential for success in different roles within an organisation.

According to McClelland (1973), it is insufficient to rely solely on aptitude and intelligence in assessing ability and predicting effective performance. In addition, it is important to include groups of life outcomes, such as career achievements, and social outcomes, such as leadership roles and interpersonal skills. There are two different perspectives on leadership development that must be considered when evaluating a leader's abilities. The first perspective is that of the individual, which emphasises the activities and experiences that can enhance job-related skills and knowledge (Chouhan and Srivastava, 2014). Chouhan and Srivastava (2014) note that this method offers people the opportunity to adapt and change their position within the organisation. The second viewpoint is the organisational viewpoint, which concerns the improvement of individual and professional development as well as the ability to maintain, expand, and adapt organisations (Malik, Nadeem and Ahmed, 2022). Some studies also claim that it is possible to gradually cultivate and strengthen these two perspectives to foster the development of capable leaders.

Several studies in the leadership literature have shown that profiling is able to effectively identify individuals who possess the qualities required for a leadership position. According to Muller and Turner (2010), profiling refers to the study of the different combinations of behavioural, temperamental, emotional, and mental characteristics of a leader in order to identify their particular leadership style. Profiling is often used to establish a correlation between the characteristics that contribute to success or failure in a person's leadership position. It is also used to select or develop leaders by comparing the characteristics of successful leaders with those of potential candidates for leadership positions (Simonton, 2006). However, profiling is a complex endeavour. The lack of an appropriate leadership assessment framework can sometimes hinder such assessments, as it may be essential to develop an instrument to assess the competency of potential leaders to be profiled (Steinberg, 2005; Kowske and Anthony, 2007). There is a need to use a competency-based approach to leadership that will allow organisations to better identify and develop their future group of leaders. Leaders must possess virtue, i.e., the innate quality of being morally upright.

The leadership literature has developed various frameworks for leadership qualities (Frankovelgia and Riddle, 2010; Ruben and Gigliotti, 2017). Wolverton and Gmelch (2002) listed a total of five skills in their framework for leadership in higher education. The first skill is analytical, which encompasses both creativity and strategic thinking. The second skill is communication, which includes both verbal and written skills. The third skill is related to student affairs, which focuses on understanding student needs and legal implications. The fourth competency relates to behaviour, with particular emphasis on the need for impartiality and a strong focus on genuine behaviour. The final competency relates to external affairs, which refers to the time spent on external matters. Mohamed Jais et al. (2020) provided a comprehensive understanding of leadership. They identified five basic components of skills that must be used to assess a leader. The five components are personal effectiveness, cognition, leadership, impact and influence, and performance and action.

Research Design

The Participants

The study comprises academics from several universities. The academics were selected for this study because of their extensive knowledge of leadership positions, which makes them well suited for the study conducted. These academics have made significant contributions to the advancement of education in their respective fields, which qualifies them to take on administrative roles. Administrators of educational institutions, especially universities, are tasked with overseeing courses, conducting evaluations, and using their expertise in course design. These academics are also independent researchers in their own field of academia. Therefore, they have already achieved a high level of recognition in the academic world and are considered ready to take on a leadership position within their university. A total of eighty scientists were invited to take part in this research project. The participants were divided into eight tables, with each table consisting of 10 people. Invitations to participate in the focus group discussions conducted at AKEPT were sent to individuals.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

This study relies on focus group discussions. The aim of the focus group discussion was to determine the suitability of the proposed extended competency themes and clusters as a framework for leadership competencies in universities in order to identify potential future talent. The focus group discussion was intended to allow the researchers to gain a more thorough understanding of the leadership competency framework. During the discussion, a wide range of topics were discussed in great detail. The discussion covered various aspects, such as selecting cluster types for the leadership competencies framework, determining the most appropriate competency themes for identifying future leaders in universities, strategically organising these competency themes within the clusters, and deciding on their placement.

The academics received email invitations to participate in the focus group discussions. In order to create a framework for leadership competencies, the participants were given the task of analysing their views on the most important aspects of leadership competencies to be included in the framework. The aim of this endeavour is to provide universities with a comprehensive range of leadership competencies to manage their staff effectively.

Findings

Leadership Competency Framework

AKEPT created its first framework for leadership competencies in universities between 2015 and 2016. The leadership competencies framework covered five key areas: personal effectiveness, cognition, leading others, impact and influence, and performance and actions. The framework ran for two years. Thereafter, it was to be reassessed to take account of any advances and needs of the universities. The leadership competency framework assessment project aims to improve talent management by implementing a strategic leadership development plan in a more efficient and effective way.

During the development of the framework, two instruments were modified to create leadership capabilities in universities. The two instruments were modified to serve as the basis for the questions created. McClelland created the Behavioural Event Interview (BEI), which is the first instrument. McClelland developed the BEI as a method for assessing the leadership qualities of managers. This instrument is an approach that can be traced back to Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique. The Critical Incident Technique focuses on a specific incident or event, while the BEI tool focuses on the person responsible for it. The main objective of the BEI tool is to collect highly accurate descriptions of behaviour related to the performance of a person's job duties. The interviewer's main task is to elicit detailed descriptions from the interviewee, including the interviewee's specific behaviours, ideas, and actions in real-life scenarios. This instrument requires the development of a series of behavioural events that involve a participant as part of the testing method. Throughout the interview, the video is scrutinised to identify signs that the person has the required skills and talents. Documenting the interview, creating transcripts, and analysing these transcripts can take up to six hours for each individual interview. The documentation of behaviour is a crucial step in the BEI interview. Typically, the interviewee is required to provide a comprehensive account

of the five or six most notable incidents they have experienced during their time in a particular role. The scenarios must include at least two or three significant successes and two or three notable challenges.

Black and Mouton's (1970) instrument was used as a secondary instrument for the development of the present framework for leadership competences in AKEPT. Black and Mouton developed a model for assessing a leader's behavioural style by considering their level of empathy towards individuals and their emphasis on work performance. The leadership style assessment is a cognitive framework and visual representation that helps leaders recognise their own leadership approach and that of their subordinates. The representation simply measures the extent to which a leader shows empathy for others and prioritises production. It also classifies five overarching leadership styles that result from different combinations of the two types of prioritisation assessed. The techniques mentioned are known as country club management, impoverished management, middle management, produce or perish management, and team management.

Table 1: Existing competency framework

Cluster	Competency
Personal Effectiveness	Integrity, Values and Ethics
	Organisational Commitment
	Self Confidence
Cognition	Visioning and Strategic Thinking
	Conceptual/ Creative Thinking
	Business Acumen
Leading Others	Teamwork and Team Leadership
	Leveraging Diversity
	Change Leadership
Impact and Influence	Impact and Influence
	Networking/ Relationship Building
	Tact and Courtesy
Achievement and Action	Achievement Orientation
	Initiative Behaviour
	Stakeholder Focus

The second cluster relates to cognition and comprises three competencies. The three competencies are visioning and strategic direction, conceptual or creative thinking, and business acumen. AKEPT describes vision and strategic direction as fostering a strong commitment to a goal of success while promoting and ensuring alignment with the university's purpose and values. The second skill, conceptual or creative thinking, involves challenging conventional approaches, exploring alternative possibilities, and developing inventive solutions or services through intuition, experimentation, and new ways of seeing. The third competency, business acumen, involves understanding the business implications of opportunities and decisions and implementing successful strategies to improve the organisation's operations. Understanding problems, methods, and outcomes is critical, as they impact the strategic direction of the organisation and its stakeholders.

The third cluster concerns the aspect of leadership and management of subordinates, especially in relation to leading others. This cluster includes three competencies. The first competency involves the ability to work effectively in a team and take on leadership responsibilities. Collaboration is about working in a team, working with others, and taking on the role of team leader. It is about working together effectively with shared goals and principles, cultivating a collaborative environment, and aligning teams towards a common goal. The second competency is leveraging diversity, i.e., fostering an inclusive work environment where different perspectives and individual differences are valued and utilised to achieve the organisation's goals. The third competency is change leadership, i.e., overseeing, leading, and facilitating change and transition processes and supporting others in managing their consequences.

The fourth competency is impact and influence, which refers to the ability to make a significant impact and exert influence. AKEPT has categorised three competencies in this cluster, namely impact and influence, building networks or relationships, and diplomacy and courtesy. Impact and influence involve offering support and persuading others to advocate for the institution's goals, while network or relationship building involves building and actively maintaining professional connections and contacts to advance the university's goals. On the other hand, tact and courtesy encompass the qualities of diplomacy, consideration, and empathy for others. This refers to the ability to accurately recognise and understand the underlying, partially expressed thoughts, feelings, and concerns of another. This ability includes the ability to effectively manage and control one's emotions and not engage in harmful behaviour.

The last cluster relates to accomplishments and actions. This cluster encompasses three competencies. The first competency is achievement-orientation, which involves guiding personal efforts towards achieving results that are in line with the institution's goals. The second competency is the ability to demonstrate initiative, which is being proactive and persistent in finding and resolving difficulties, seizing opportunities as they arise, and proactively addressing predicted problems or threats. The last competency is stakeholder orientation, which involves recognising and attending to the current and future needs of stakeholders while providing great service to both internal and external stakeholders.

The findings of this study indicate that the targets set by the Malaysian government for higher education institutions have a significant impact on individuals' perceptions and understandings of leadership. During the focus group discussions, participants examined the materials on the current AKEPT framework for leadership competencies. Participants discussed the importance of the clusters and their capabilities and considered whether these clusters should be maintained, improved, or abolished. To achieve this goal, participants explored alternative approaches to the BEI and Black and Mouton's tools for assessing a leader's capabilities. They concluded that a comprehensive framework should encompass five different levels: supervision of the entire organisation, integration of different functions, management of processes, supervision of daily tasks, and supervision of individual employees. After deliberations, the participants concluded that further assessment tools are needed to evaluate the competence of managers in universities.

Participants in the focus group discussions acknowledged the need for reevaluating and adjusting the five clusters specified in the existing framework. Moreover, they stressed the need to expand the assessment instruments to include other assessment instruments. Based on the focus group discussion, this study concludes that the participants reached a unanimous agreement that all existing clusters may be maintained with some adjustments. Initially, the participants expressed their belief that, in terms of personal efficacy, the skill of self-confidence should be substituted with self-management. This is because, in order to attain leadership, an individual must possess the capacity to manage their mental well-being and effectively cope with stress. Moreover, it is crucial for the leader to have the capacity to maintain their personal appearance and exhibit themselves as a proficient leader.

Furthermore, this study shows that participants recognised the need to support the talent to leverage diversity with the ability to adapt and change. Therefore, the participants decided to include adaptability along with the ability to influence others in the study, as they believed that a leader should have the ability to adapt, especially in circumstances that require quick adjustments. Adaptability refers to a person's ability to effectively change their behaviour and mindset in response to changes in their environment. The leader's capacity for adaptability directly affects their career aspirations. Adaptability can also be defined as the extent to which a person can respond effectively to change. Adaptability fosters a mindset of cognitive openness, promotes a thorough examination of existing norms, and cultivates a willingness to challenge conventional approaches. Adaptable people are courageous when it comes to change because they consciously develop appropriate strategies to manage it effectively.

Table 2: Comparison between existing and refined competency framework

Existing Competency Framework		Refined Competency Framework	
Cluster	Competency	Cluster	Competency
	Integrity, Values and Ethics		Integrity, Values and Ethics

Personal Effectiveness	Organisational Commitment	Personal Effectiveness	Organisational Commitment
	Self Confidence		Managing Self
Cognition	Visioning and Strategic Thinking	Cognition	Visioning and Strategic Thinking
	Conceptual/ Creative Thinking		Conceptual/ Creative Thinking
	Business Acumen		Strategic Business Acumen
Leading Others	Teamwork and Team Leadership	Leading Others	Teamwork and Team Leadership
	Leveraging Diversity		Adaptable and Leveraging Diversity
	Change Leadership		Change Leadership
Impact and Influence	Impact and Influence	Impact and Influence	Impact and Influence
	Networking/ Relationship Building		Networking Building and Sustaining Relationships
	Tact and Courtesy		Authoritative-Persuasive Balance
Achievement and Action	Achievement Orientation	Achievement and Action	Personal Drive and Achievement Orientation
	Initiative Behaviour		Gaps and Proactive Approaches
	Stakeholder Focus		Withdrawn

In addition, cluster five in the current structure includes a competency that emphasises the importance of stakeholders in terms of performance and action. Based on the focus group discussion, participants believe that this competency is not considered necessary for a leader. Universities often have a duty to fulfil the requirements set by both the government and students. Therefore, the participants felt that this competency needed to be withdrawn. The refined framework for leadership competencies derived from the focus group discussion is shown in Table 2. The participants agreed that the current framework for leadership competencies can be maintained with three adjustments to the competencies, namely, self-management, and adaptability, and leveraging diversity. On the other hand, stakeholder focus is withdrawn.

Leadership Competency Instruments

Table 3 presents the assessment instruments recognised by the participants for assessing leadership qualities. The first instrument used is the 180-degree assessment. This type of performance appraisal takes into account two assessment points: the supervisor's assessment and the employee's self-assessment. The goal of the instrument was to get input from the superiors' direct reports and subordinates. In this approach, feedback is obtained from those who frequently and closely interact with the leader on a daily basis. The focus is on assessing the superiors' influence on their direct reports and the extent to which their behaviour is in line with the company's objectives. 180-degree surveys provide targeted feedback from those who directly experience the leaders' decisions and behaviour, providing valuable insights into team dynamics and the leaders' influence. By getting direct feedback from subordinates, leaders can identify specific areas they need to work on and gain a better understanding of how their leadership style is impacting team dynamics.

The participants also stated that the assessment should involve a wider range of stakeholders rather than relying only on the direct judgement of the manager and the employee. Consequently, they argue that the assessment should also include the 360 Leadership Assessment. This assessment instrument evaluates employee competencies by gathering information from multiple people within the organisation. The instrument examines a leader's aptitude, behaviour, and skills gathering sensitive feedback on the leader from those who have the closest professional connection to him. These people may include subordinates, colleagues, customers, suppliers, and superiors. This method assesses the leader's current performance by comparing it with feedback from others, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation. The comparison provides

a comprehensive understanding of the leader's performance by highlighting their strengths, mistakes, and areas of limited knowledge. The 360 Leadership Assessment effectively captures the holistic view of a group rather than relying on a limited number of perspectives. Different types of feedback increase precision in identifying areas where an individual can improve. As a result, participants were convinced that this instrument is a highly effective means of developing leaders at universities.

Based on the discussion in the focus group, the participants suggested including the psychometrics of intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional quotient (EQ) as an additional instrument. IQ is a measure of a person's cognitive abilities, which assess a person's ability to use information and reasoning to answer questions or make predictions. IQ tests begin the assessment process by evaluating both short-term and long-term memory. In addition, a person's cognitive abilities are assessed in areas such as problem solving, auditory memory, and processing speed. EQ, on the other hand, refers to the ability to understand, utilise, and positively manage one's emotions to reduce stress, enable successful communication, show empathy towards others, overcome challenges, and resolve disputes. EQ is critical to understanding and managing emotions, while IQ encompasses cognitive and problem-solving skills. Participants felt that instruments were able to diagnose mental and emotional disorders or assess a person's intellectual and emotional abilities.

In addition, this study found that participants suggested the use of a psychometric personality test as a substitute instrument. Psychometric personality tests assess different aspects of the human psyche. Psychometric personality tests assess different facets of a person's character, including character traits, actions, beliefs, perspectives, motivations, and values. Psychometric personality tests are used in various fields, including healthcare, education, criminology, and organisations. Psychometric assessment of personality is a reliable approach to predicting people's reactions and behaviour in different situations. Participants felt that this research can help AKEPT assess personality traits such as temperament, preferences, principles, and perspectives to find the most suitable candidate for a leadership position within a university.

The participants suggested that the assessment should include an analysis of scenario planning. Scenario planning is a strategy method that analyses and evaluates multiple possible outcomes or alternative futures that could result from current conditions and associated uncertainties. This instrument is used to identify the fundamental reasons that lead to change, the key uncertainties, and the potential consequences that may result from different combinations of these aspects. Scenario planning enables assumptions to be analysed, broadens perspectives, and allows potential opportunities and threats to be predicted. This approach can be used to assess the capabilities and resources of potential leaders when dealing with a particular situation. Generally, six scenarios are used to assess potential leaders. The six scenarios include evaluating an employee's proposal, responding to team requests, managing ambiguity, working with people of different personalities and cultures, actively taking on tasks, and advocating for the progress of team members.

Table 3: Proposed instruments

Proposed Instruments	Usage	Type
180 Degree Evaluation	Two points of evaluation come from the employee being reviewed (in the form of a self-appraisal) and the employee's direct manager or supervisor. Feedback is usually based on a set of competencies or behavioural statements and requires the individual to also complete a self-assessment.	Self-assessment
360 Leadership Assessment	Measuring talent performance based on feedback from multiple people across organisation / institution.	Multiple assessment

IQ & EQ Psychometrics	Help diagnose intellectual and emotional disabilities or measure someone's intellectual and emotional potential. EQ also measures self awareness, self regulation, motivation, social awareness, and social regulation.	Self-assessment
Personality Psychometrics Test	Set of questions used by psychologists to identify the strengths and weaknesses of an individual.	Self-assessment
Scenario Planning Analysis	A technique that is used to assess the candidates experience and resources to handle certain situation.	Interview

Conclusion

This study describes the methodology to improve an already established framework for the assessment of future leaders in Malaysian institutions, focusing on the development of their leadership qualities. The Higher Education Leadership Skills Framework by AKEPT was used to create a set of leadership competencies centred on five distinct skills. The concept includes five clusters, namely, personal effectiveness, cognition, leading others, impact and influence, and achievements and action. Based on the study's findings, the five clusters were retained, with some modifications to the competencies. During the focus group discussions, participants suggested assessing and adapting the five clusters included in the framework. They emphasised the need to refine the competencies for the skills assessment tool. After this exploration, the panellists unanimously decided to keep all clusters with minimal changes. Firstly, participants felt that self-management should replace self-confidence in order to improve personal effectiveness. Leaders need to be able to handle stress efficiently and maintain an ideal state of mental well-being. Managers also need to convey an impression of approachability and competence.

Furthermore, this study revealed that participants have a broad understanding of diversity and flexibility. Therefore, participants emphasised the need to integrate adaptability and leverage the skills of others and recognised that a leader must have the ability to adapt, especially in emergencies. Adaptability refers to the ability to adjust one's behaviour and thinking in response to changes in the environment. Leaders must demonstrate adaptability in order to be successful in their careers. Adaptability is the measure of a person's ability to effectively adapt to and manage change. Adaptability fosters a mindset that is open to new ideas, critically questions existing norms, and challenges existing methods. People who are willing to adapt show courage as they actively promote and create solutions. In the end, the participants decided to refuse the attention of stakeholders, as they felt that it was not necessary for university authorities to fulfil the needs of stakeholders, either current or future.

The participants suggested the inclusion of five additional assessment tools to evaluate future leaders. The five instruments include a 180-degree assessment, a 360-degree leadership assessment, psychometric IQ and EQ tests, psychometric personality tests, and a scenario planning analysis. The participants believe that AKEPT is able to assess temperament, interests, values, and attitudes in order to select the most appropriate university leader. This study provides an exploration of possible alternatives to current leadership assessment models in order to maintain a quality organisational culture. AKEPT has successfully developed a leadership competency framework tailored exclusively for higher education institutions. This framework serves as a tool to recognise a competent leader who is best suited to the unique circumstances of higher education. The purpose of this paper is to explore possible replacements for the existing leadership competency framework in order to maintain an excellent organisational culture. The findings of the study will also help higher education institutions develop methods to achieve their organisational goals.

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