

# Constructing A Competency Assessment Tool For Institutional Leaders In Malaysian Universities: The Academics' Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The significance of leadership in organisations, especially universities, has been a subject of ongoing discussion for many years. Recognising the significance of this matter, this study attempts to elucidate the construction of a leadership competence framework to tackle the difficulties linked to identifying capable leaders in Malaysian universities. This study used a qualitative methodology, with a specific emphasis on conducting group discussions with academics affiliated with different public universities. This study shows the presence of five distinct clusters that have to be included in the leadership skills framework. The clusters consist of personal effectiveness, cognition, leading others, impact and influence, and achievement and action. The results of this study contribute to the development of a leadership competence framework for universities in Malaysia. In addition, the results of this study enhance the current body of knowledge on potential alternatives to the currently established leadership competence frameworks in terms of maintaining an organisation's culture of excellence.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Competency framework, universities, Malaysia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of leadership has become increasingly central to universities, especially institutional leadership, as the crucial role of leaders and their importance to the central function within a university have been recognised (Mohamed Jais, Yahaya, & Ghani, 2020; Badillo-Vega, 2022). Leaders in a university is often based on the principle of rotation, i.e., individuals holding key positions such as vice chancellors, deputy vice chancellors, deans, directors, and others. Given the evolving expectations and responsibilities of institutional leaders, it is appropriate to provide guidance and support to those who already have experience to help those who are new to these positions (Abraham, 2023). The approach to improving the stability of leaders as they assume their roles in a university involves sharing perspectives on leadership characteristics, leadership styles, leadership fundamentals, governance matters, and diversity of roles. These characteristics are expected to have a significant impact on universities, as competent leaders have a clear goal in mind when leading universities in shaping a country's national agenda (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2019).

Studies such as Wallin (2009) and Van Schalkwyk (2011) refer to leadership as the process of influencing the views of individuals and groups and fostering the commitment of individuals and organisations to achieve common goals. Leadership can be seen as a relational and transformative phenomenon that involves a process-oriented approach (Bechtel, 2010). It is a skill that can be learned and is aimed at bringing about change. A leader must have the ability to persuade and guide people in order to lead their organisation through a change process. This can be achieved by cultivating interpersonal relationships and challenging existing conventions in order to achieve an organisation's goals.

However, Smith and Wolverton (2010) argue that leadership in a university is unique compared to other forms of leadership, as individuals in a university often work in a constrained environment yet have

significant influence over key institutional decisions. This discrepancy can be attributed to their great influence on these decision-making processes. Therefore, identifying and defining the essential competencies for successful leadership, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and attributes in universities, is beneficial for achieving the desired organisational goals. This is in line with Spears (2010), who stated that the nature of competencies and their relationship to leaders have become more important.

One, however, may pose the following question: What competencies should institutional leaders at universities possess? Examining these competencies is critical because leaders, especially the vice chancellor of a university, must find a harmonious balance between the concerns of faculty and departments and the interests of other stakeholders, including students. The next section provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on this topic. Section 3 outlines the specific research design used in this study. Section 4 presents the findings, and the final section concludes this study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Burns' (1978) definition of leadership is generally regarded as one of the early definitions of the concept. In his definition of leadership, Burns described leaders as those who inspire and motivate their colleagues through intrinsic motivation. He stated, "Leadership is one of the most observed phenomena in the world, but also one of the least understood" (Burns, 1978, p. 2). Since Burns' study, leadership has been the subject of much debate due to its importance within an organisation. It is a factor that is seen as extremely important and increasingly requires change, choice, flexibility, and diversity within an organisation (Wallin, 2009; Bechtel, 2010; Hyde-Clarke, 2023). This suggests that organisational delay and individual empowerment are unnecessary and that the future of both the individual and the organisation does not lie in promotion to ever higher levels of management. Instead, the root of the problem lies in the way a person develops their values as a leader (Chouhan & Srivastava, 2014; Ghani & Mohamed Jais, 2018). In other words, leadership relates to the credibility of a leader and his or her activities (Bechtel, 2010). Furthermore, according to Koen and Bitzer (2010), leadership is a multi-layered connection between individuals based on trust, duty, commitment, accountability, and a common, shared vision of the good.

A body of leadership literature has asserted that the type of leadership found in higher education institutions, referred to as institutional leadership, is different from other types of leadership (Smith & Wolverson, 2010). This is due to the fact that these institutions face specific issues that are not as common in other types of organisations. In 1957, Selznick, who is considered to be one of the pioneering experts in the field of institutional leadership, suggested that institutional leadership consists of the following:

... is far more than the capacity to mobilise personal support; it is more than the maintenance of equilibrium through the routine solution of everyday problems; it is the function of the leader-statesman—whether of a nation or a private association—to define the ends of group existence, to design an enterprise distinctively adapted to these ends, and to see that the design becomes a living reality. These tasks are not routine; they call for continuous self-appraisal on the part of the leaders, and they may require only a few critical decisions over a long period of time (Selznick, p. 37).

According to Filan and Seagren (2003), there are two main categories of leadership found in universities. The first category is academic leadership. Academic leaders are experts and influential individuals who are actively engaged in their respective fields. They are committed to acquiring knowledge and conducting a study with a high degree of integrity, whether by extending theory and developing new ideas, advancing methodological or pedagogical innovations, or leading extensive community engagement. A successful academic leader can serve as a role model for other academics by applying novel and inventive approaches to teaching and learning, conducting extensive study, and helping others achieve academic greatness. They also lead with the highest degree of integrity, whether in terms of methodological or didactic innovation or through their strong commitment to society (Radwan, Razak, & Ghavifekr, 2020).

The second category is institutional leadership. Leal Filho et al. (2020) refer to institutional leadership as the senior and middle management of a university that is responsible for carrying out management tasks and stimulating the realisation of the university's vision and purpose. Academics who demonstrate their management skills by being adaptable, flexible, strategic, and highly successful are the professionals who hold leadership positions in institutions. Institutional leadership involves building and protecting the institutional values and character of the institution, orienting it more towards self-preservation and less towards the future or change (Washington, Sutton, & Feild, 2006). This orientation encourages the institution to preserve its own identity and values. They demonstrate their management talent by being flexible, adaptable, strategic, and, above all, successful. In this way, they demonstrate their skills and could inspire others by developing, supporting, and maintaining conditions conducive to skill development and by being academics themselves. Through a combination of optimism and pragmatism, they are able to strike a balance between idealism and reality, demonstrating both vision and foresight. To promote the well-being of students, staff, community members, the country, and humanity as a whole, institutional leaders combine their strategic and entrepreneurial skills with holistic human values (Syed Mohamad, Muhammad, Mohd

Hussin, & Habidin, 2017). Institutional leadership positions are traditionally understood as temporary appointments for a specific period of time in the context of the institution in which they are held.

A group of studies have identified competencies that leaders need to possess in order to achieve the goals they have set for their organisations (Mohamad & Abdullah, 2017; Karneli, 2023; Masoud & Basahal, 2023). Mohamad and Abdullah (2017, p. 1) define leadership competencies as "the skills of a leader that contribute to superior performance as a result of their leadership." Leadership competencies refer to the unique knowledge, skills, and talents that enable people to successfully lead and guide others in a variety of situations. These qualities are essential to achieving organisational goals, creating innovation, and maintaining a healthy work culture (Smith & Wolverson, 2010). By cultivating leadership competencies, organisations are better able to identify and cultivate the next generation of leaders within their framework (Wallin, 2009; Yukl, 2002), despite the fact that certain organisations and leadership positions favour certain talents over others.

Leaders' competencies have often been studied in terms of their traits, behaviours, transactions, power, influence, circumstances, and opportunities for change (Bass, 1998; Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989; Yukl, 2002). McClelland (1973) suggests that intelligence and aptitude are not sufficient predictors of successful performance when assessing competencies. Instead, it is necessary to consider clusters of life outcomes, particularly career outcomes and social outcomes such as leadership and interpersonal skills. Katsinas and Kempner (2005) have analysed leadership competence from two different perspectives. The first perspective is the organisational perspective, which refers to the personal and professional development that enables individuals to maintain, grow, and change organisations. The second perspective is the individual perspective, which includes activities and experiences that improve job-related skills and knowledge.

Another body of leadership literature has introduced several competency frameworks for leadership (Frankovelgia & Riddle, 2010; Ruben, De Lisi, & Gigliotti, 2017; Ruben, 2019). These frameworks have been documented in the literature. For example, Wolverson and Gmelch (2002), in creating their framework, state that a leadership competency framework in higher education should consist of five competencies. The first competency is analytical, which stands for creativity and strategic thinking; the second competency is communication, which refers to oral and written skills; the third competency is student affairs, which stands for student needs and legal considerations; the fourth competency is behavioural, which refers to behaviour that is not egocentric and focuses heavily on actual behaviour; and the final competency is external relations, which refers to time spent on issues related to the outside world.

The framework that McDaniel (2002) created is one of the most widely used in higher education institutions. Her participants, senior administrators at universities, were asked to describe the basic qualities of a leader in higher education institutions. She conducted her study using a qualitative methodology. Her subsequent work consisted of developing a paradigm she called Higher Education Leadership Competencies (HELIC). This model categorises skills into four different areas, namely context, content, process, and communication. While content refers to a leader's understanding of strategic planning and its linkage to the organisation's vision and goals (Brown, 2000), context refers to a leader's ability to negotiate in a highly observed environment (Filan & Seagren, 2003). Context includes the ability to navigate an environment that is highly publicised. On the other hand, process is a term that describes the knowledge and understanding of leadership that a leader possesses. This includes characteristics such as creativity and adaptability (Fisher & Koch, 2004).

Smith and Wolverson (2010) conducted a study using a quantitative methodology on three administrative groups to expand the scope of McDaniel's research. Smith and Wolverson found that five distinct skill groups emerged: analytical, communicative, student affairs, behavioural, and external relationship. According to Smith and Wolverson (2010), analytical refers to creative thinking, strategic thinking, and action to make decisions that are systematic, process-oriented, and action-oriented to achieve organisational success. On the other hand, communication refers to leaders who are proficient in oral and written communication and who are able to incorporate multiple perspectives in decision-making (McLaughlin, 2004). The term student affairs refer to student needs, trends, and legal considerations (Smith & Wolverson, 2010). The term behavioural, on the other hand, refers to actions that are not motivated by self-interest and have a clear focus on the real people who work in and contribute to the success of the organisation (Wolverson & Gmelch, 2002). Finally, the term external relationship refers to the time managers spend dealing with problems that are external in context and arise from the interests of multiple stakeholders.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 3.1 The Participants

The participants in this study are academics from various public universities. They include the deputy vice chancellors and academics at the universities. The academics selected for this study have extensive

experience in leadership and were therefore deemed suitable for this study. The purpose of the focus group was to gain a broader picture of the leadership competency framework from the committee's perspective. Eighty academics were invited to participate in this study, and the participants were divided into 8 tables of 10 participants each.

### 3.2 The Instrument

The focus group discussion was used to determine the instrument for assessing the competence levels of future managers in higher education institutions. By using the focus group discussion, the researchers would gain a more accurate understanding of the leadership competency framework. Behavioural Event

Instruments (BEI) (McClelland, 1973) and Management Grid Theory (Blake & Mouton, 1964) were used as the basis for constructing the questions, which were then adapted to the AKEPT framework. McClelland (1973) developed the BEI as an instrument to assess managers' leadership competencies. Black and Mouton, on the other hand, created a framework to determine a manager's behavioural style by recognising their concern for people as opposed to their concern for task performance. These two frameworks were adapted to form the basis for the questions developed. During the focus group that took place within the committee, a number of topics were discussed. These topics included the type of clusters to be included in the leadership competency framework, the appropriate competency topics, the placement of the competency topics within the clusters, and whether or not the competency topics were appropriate for identifying potential leaders in the highest educational institutions.

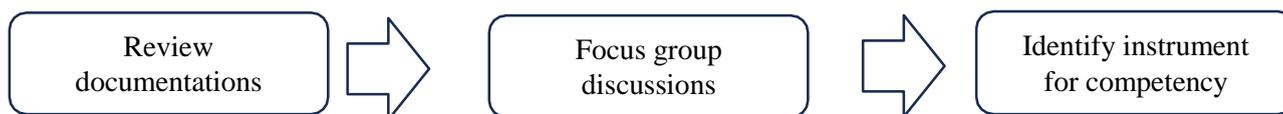
### 3.3 Data Collection

Email invitations to participate in the focus group discussions went out to the academics and deputy rectors. The focus group discussions took place at the Akademi Kepimpinan Pendidikan Tinggi, often referred to as AKEPT, which is a department within the Ministry of Higher Education. The establishment of this department in 2008 had the specific aim of cultivating and enhancing the leadership qualities of individuals who possess the necessary qualities and enjoy a high reputation. The aim is to have a significant impact on local higher education institutions and improve their international reputation. AKEPT has been actively involved in managing leadership talent for higher education institutions in Malaysia since 2015. The aim of the focus group discussion was to determine the suitability of the proposed competency themes and clusters for identifying future talents as a framework for leadership skills in educational institutions. Participants were asked to explore their thoughts on the most effective leadership competency themes to include in the development of a leadership competency framework. This was done during the focus group discussions that took place.

### 3.4 The Model

Figure 1 illustrates the model used to conduct the analysis of the instrument for institutions in Malaysia. To further enhance the validity of the instrument used, documents were examined as part of the data collection for this study (Tellis, 1997). Resources include a review of literature related to the instrument to measure the leadership competencies of those aspiring to leadership positions, the Soft System Methodology (Checkland, 1981), and the leadership competencies framework developed by AKEPT for higher education.

**Figure 1:** Study Model



## 4. FINDINGS

The aim of this study is to present the results of the focus group discussions in order to determine the required competency attributes that a leader should possess. Participants in the focus group discussions were asked at the beginning of the sessions about the concept of leadership in universities. This led to the need for an assessment mechanism for a leader. Participants were also asked about a tool that would allow them to recognise and assess the skills and abilities of those who have the potential to take on a leadership role. Following this, the competency framework was finally created after it had been discussed and developed. There are five levels that need to be assessed to determine how successful this framework is. These levels include management of whole organisations, integration of different activities, management of functions, supervision of day-to-day tasks, and the individual employee.

This study shows that participants in the focus group discussion felt that the leadership competency framework to be created should consist of five primary clusters. These clusters would reflect the general criteria used to identify future talent. Personal effectiveness, perception, leading others, impact and influence, achievement, and action are the five clusters that make up the whole. Individuals and focus group

participants were then asked to identify potential problems in each component. The responses were then reviewed, coded, and categorised according to the results.

#### **4.1 Cluster 1: Personal Effectiveness**

One of the most important qualities of a leader is personal effectiveness, which can often be observed in the most successful individuals and professionals in any profession. When we talk about personal effectiveness, we mean the ability to make the most of one's skills and resources to achieve maximum success in all circumstances. Goal setting, time management, stress management, and the development of interpersonal skills are all part of this process. According to Murdoch and Scutt (2003), it is about the ability to take control of our lives, nurture relationships that are meaningful to us, and formulate a sense of purpose and fulfilment for ourselves. Being proactive, taking initiative, and taking financial responsibility for our own success and enjoyment are all essential components of personal effectiveness. Personality traits such as self-confidence, honesty, and assertiveness fall into this category (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007). Based on the focus group discussion, they identified three themes: integrity, values and ethics, organisational commitment, and self-management.

##### **Integrity, Values and Ethics**

The findings of this study indicate that the participants offered a definition of this competency, meaning that they defined it as promoting and supporting the principles and values of the institution and the public service as a whole. The concept of leadership refers to a multi-layered connection between individuals based on trust, duty, commitment, responsibility, and a shared understanding of what constitutes greatness (Neubert, Carlson, Kacmar, Roberts, & Chonko 2009). The ethics and values of leadership reflect these intricacies and present great difficulties to those interested in "doing the right thing." A good leader is someone who is aware of the things that are important to them and understands the importance of ethical behaviour. AKEPT is able to determine whether or not the leader exemplifies ethics and values for the members of their workforce. In order to build trust, the leader must be able to recognise and communicate their own personal values. The expression "walk the talk" refers to the leader's actions that illustrate why the workforce can trust them.

The participants believed that values and ethics are characteristics of complex relationships based on trust, duty, commitment, responsibility, and a shared vision of success. These are the foundations on which values and ethics are built. Right behaviour through personal action and interpersonal interactions through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making is the specific definition of ethical leadership. It is the values and ethics of leadership that reflect these subtleties and cause great difficulty for people who want to act ethically. This is consistent with Othman and Abdul Rahman's (2014) assertion that to be an effective leader, one must be aware of one's values and recognise the importance of ethical behaviour. Consequently, AKEPT must determine whether or not a leader demonstrates values and ethical behaviour. A person in a leadership position should be able to recognise and communicate their core beliefs and build trust by delivering on their commitments and not making empty promises.

##### **Organisational Commitment**

Another competence emerged from the focus group discussion is organisational commitment. During the debate in the focus group, organisational commitment was explicitly mentioned as the second competence. When it comes to employees, organisational commitment is often associated with the desire to feel part of an organisation and the willingness to do more work for the good of the organisation. The authors Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974, p. 604) consider the concept of organisational commitment to be one-dimensional as "an attachment to the organisation characterised by an intention to remain in the organisation, an identification with the values and goals of the organisation, and a willingness to make extra effort on behalf of the organisation." Meyer and Allen (1984) viewed organisational commitment as a two-dimensional concept.

According to the participants in this study, the concept of organisational commitment is the ability and desire of individuals to align their personal behaviour with the needs, priorities, and goals of the organisation and the ability of individuals to behave in a way that either promotes the organisation's goals or meets the organisation's requirements. You may give the impression that you prioritise the organisation's goals over your personal preferences or the goals of your job. The factors that the AKEPT must assess to determine the level of the leader's organisational commitment to their HEI include the level of the leader's attachment to their organisation, the leader's willingness to commit to the organisation, and the likelihood that the leader will remain with their university.

##### **Managing Self**

Another important competence of a leader is the ability to manage oneself. This trait, which often refers to the leader's ability to be confident in their abilities and skills, is often an expression of a positive self-image. It has been suggested that self-management could serve as a substitute for leadership in organisations. This concept involves the development of strategies to change behaviour (Manz & Sims, 1980). Through self-management,

individuals learn to assess problems, set specific, hard goals related to those problems, monitor the ways in which the environment helps or hinders goal attainment, and recognise and apply reinforcers for working towards goal attainment and punishers for failing to work towards goal attainment (Williams, 1997). In addition, it is associated with the development of skills related to self-awareness, which involves using one's appraisal of one's feelings to positively guide behaviour, i.e., to act rationally and avoid letting one's feelings take control of one's actions (Kumar, Adhish, & Chauhan, 2014).

Based on the focus group discussions, participants emphasised that the AKEPT should assess this trait by looking at the way the leader deals with their own self-doubt, how they free themselves from negative triggers, and how they recover from mistakes. A person's belief in their own ability to manage a task is what is meant by the term "self-management," as emerged in the focus group discussion. Here, the person needs to show that they have confidence in their ability to deal with increasingly difficult situations, in their ability to make judgements or develop opinions, and in their ability to deal constructively with mistakes. This is in line with the findings of Manz and Sims (1980), who showed that by actively participating in team initiatives, you can cultivate a work ethic and professionalism in an atmosphere that encourages collaboration through work.

#### **4.2 Cluster 2: Cognition Visioning and Strategic Direction**

The participants have also identified visioning and direction as one of the competencies that a leader should have. When selecting a leader, the ability to have vision and strategic direction is another important quality to look for in a candidate. One definition of vision is that it is a reality or perception that is not disorganised. According to Kakabadse, Kakabadse, and Lee-Davies (2005), it is a pattern of collaborative potential that others imagine or see, and it is possible for others to be attracted to it, provided the leader driving this vision has the necessary zeal and energy. It is uncertain whether a vision is a type of comprehensive leadership in and of itself or just one of the critical tasks that leaders must fulfil to demonstrate their competence. However, vision is critical to leadership, strategy implementation, and transformation (Larwood, Falbe, Kriger, & Miesing, 1995). Considering that the purpose of leadership is to bring about change, defining the path that change will take is an essential part of leadership. Determining the path is by no means synonymous with planning or even long-term preparation. Organising is the activity of arranging tasks or resources for optimal use, but planning is the deliberate process of selecting and developing the best course of action to achieve clearly defined goals (Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Planning is the process of selecting and developing the best course of action to achieve specific goals.

Participants in this study emphasised the importance of cultivating and motivating commitment to a vision of success, supporting, promoting, and ensuring alignment with the university's vision and values, and advocating for the relevance of these things. In evaluating a leader's skills, AKEPT must consider the strategies used to achieve both short-term and long-term goals. The ability to accurately define projects and obtain the resources required for them, as well as the ability to successfully manage time and resources while prioritising in line with organisational goals, are all essential qualities for a leader to possess (Grol & Wensing, 2013). In addition, AKEPT must determine whether a leader has contingency plans in place, i.e., whether they prepare in advance for unforeseen scenarios. Furthermore, AKEPT is able to assess the leader's vision and mission, as well as the way in which the leader is able to construct, explain, and disseminate the organisation's vision and purpose. It is important that the leader has a strategic direction that motivates and encourages employees to commit to the organisation's vision and purpose. This includes programmes that help to achieve the vision and purpose of educational institutions (Kotter, 2017).

#### **Conceptual or Creative Thinking**

Another competency that has been raised by the participants in the focus group discussion is conceptual or creative thinking. The ability to think conceptually is a talent that a leader must possess to ensure that the organisation's goals are achieved. For many leaders, this is a competence that must be developed through discipline and practice. The conventional leader is preoccupied with the pursuit of short-term operational goals, which consumes their attention. The leader needs to broaden their perspective to develop broader conceptual thinking (Spears, 2010). Leaders are those whose creative endeavours elicit an emotional response from those who are able to experience or participate in them. According to Stoll and Temperley (2009), creative leadership is characterised by an inventive and thoughtful response to opportunities and difficult problems that impede learning at all levels of the organisation. To increase the life chances of all students, one must be able to perceive things differently, think differently, and act differently. Leaders who are creative also take responsibility for creating circumstances, environments, and opportunities that encourage people to be creative. When it comes to creativity, it is very unlikely that you can capture or assess it with checklists or boxes. It is assessed in different ways by different people, depending on the environment in which it is found (Harris, 2009).

The participants in this study talked about creative leadership in the focus group discussions. They explained that a leader needs to be able to take a step back, look at the bigger picture, and consider hypothetical scenarios or ideas in order to gain insight. This requires questioning existing methods, exploring alternative

techniques, and responding to problems by developing creative solutions or services. This can be achieved through the use of intuition, experimentation, and new perspectives. The AKEPT is able to assess the leader to determine whether they can form an informed judgement about the reasons for a particular action or event. In addition, the AKEPT is responsible for ensuring that the selected leader is able to apply conceptual thinking processes. The ability to imagine big visions is a goal that leaders strive for. When someone is able to look at a problem or organisation from a conceptual point of view, it shows that they are able to think beyond the reality they encounter on a daily basis. This aligns with the thinking of Mainemelis, Kark, and Epitropaki (2015), who explored the role of the leader in integrating their creative ideas with the various creative ideas of other professionals in the work environment.

### **Business Acumen**

Another competency that was raised in the focus group discussions is a leader's ability to make sound business decisions. "Business acumen" refers to a person's ability to understand and respond appropriately to various business scenarios. It is the accumulation of information, both general and specific, that explains how and why things are done. According to Longenecker and Fink (2017), it is an essential skill for leadership and is evident in the decisions a person makes and the questions they ask. The ability to gather pertinent information, recognise patterns, observe, and evaluate facts. The term "decision-making" refers to the cognitive process that occurs as a result of selecting beliefs or courses of action from a range of different possibilities (Lucena, De, & Popadiuk, 2019).

The participants in this study agreed that a leader must be able to build decision-making processes, communicate how decisions are made in the short and long term, select who should be involved, and ensure that decisions are made by those best qualified for the work at hand. In addition, AKEPT must appreciate the sense of urgency a leader possesses when it comes to making timely decisions, using intuition alongside facts when faced with uncertainty, and then taking the following steps to support decisions. In addition, they must be willing to make unpopular decisions that are beneficial to their institution and stick to those decisions. Understanding the concepts of optimisation and comparative analysis are all necessary skills to make decisions based on a variety of circumstances and available alternatives. Experimenting with new hypotheses, incorporating new findings, and developing new theories. An awareness of the impact that opportunities and decisions have on the business and the implementation of effective business plans that improve the functioning of the organisation are also essential. This requires an understanding of the issues, processes, and outcomes that impact the strategic direction of the organisation and its stakeholders.

### **4.3 Cluster 3: Leading Others Teamwork and Team Leadership**

Teamwork refers to the ability to work constructively with others to achieve the organisation's goals (Hunziker et al., 2011). Teamwork is the interaction of teamwork and working in a type of group that is generally dedicated to producing or solving problems. This brings us to the task. Our earlier example of problem solving can help us here. Each team member has skills, talents, experience, and training. Everyone must participate. The work is the activity, and even if it is fun or stimulating, it requires work and commitment because there is a schedule for output with individual and group tasks. Each member must fulfil their individual tasks for the team to be successful, but the team, like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest member. In this context, we do not evaluate strength or weakness in the gym, but in relation to production. Team leadership, on the other hand, refers to the effective management and leadership of a team of employees. Team leaders are usually responsible for projects or processes within an organisation and achieving the associated goals. Their role involves assigning tasks to team members and overseeing the development of projects (Hobson, Strupeck, Gryphon, Szostek, & Rominger, 2014).

The participants in this study opined that the AKEPT should determine whether or not a leader is able to delegate responsibilities to the right people or group and then proceed to foster cooperation among the members of the team, as well as urge others to collaborate and coordinate their efforts. It is also important for a leader to have the ability to inspire people to take initiative in finding solutions to challenges. It is also important for AKEPT to determine whether or not a leader is capable of managing disputes by establishing models and encouraging others to resolve conflict in an open and productive manner. This is consistent with Rosen and Callaly (2005), who posited that a leader should be able to conduct team meetings and place a priority on the morale and productivity of the team. It is important for a leader to rejoice with their team members whenever they achieve anything. The person in charge of the team has to be able to effectively assign responsibilities to the right persons or groups and then proceed to foster cooperation among the members of the team, as well as urge others to collaborate and coordinate their efforts. AKEPT is able to determine whether or not the leader is capable of managing disputes by establishing models and encouraging others to resolve disagreements in an open and constructive manner. A leader is also able to manage team meetings, prioritise the morale of the team, and prioritise production. Whenever there was a positive outcome, the team leader would celebrate with the members. working together with other people, being a member of a team, and taking on the position of a team leader; working successfully with interdependent

objectives and similar values and norms in order to cultivate an atmosphere that is conducive to collaboration and to steer teams in the same direction.

### **Leveraging Diversity**

One competency that has also been highlighted by the participants is leveraging diversity. According to Dotson and Nuru-Jeter (2012), the term leveraging diversity refers to management practices that serve to help an organisation become culturally competent. These practices are often described in terms of wise management, judgement, and knowledge. The individual is responsible for leading and managing an inclusive workplace that makes the best use of each individual's skills to achieve the organisation's vision and purpose. He or she adapts his or her way of communicating and acting with awareness of the differences between others. The ability to recruit people from diverse backgrounds is an essential skill for any leader. This is because diversity fosters competition and successfully builds a diversified customer base, which ultimately leads to an increase in market share and unleashes creativity, innovation, and improved problem solving within the group (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004). As many healthcare organisations look to their leaders for support in ushering in a new era of culturally competent, patient-centred care that minimises health and healthcare disparities, it is a financial imperative for these organisations to leverage diversity to positively impact business operations.

During the focus group discussion, participants expressed the opinion that the AKEPT needs to analyse the way it assesses levels of diversity, not only in terms of knowledge and competence but also in terms of skin colour, gender, and culture. This would be done to determine whether a leader is able to leverage diversity to achieve the organisation's vision and goals and create an inclusive work environment where diversity and individual differences are valued and used to achieve these goals.

### **Change Leadership**

Change leadership is the process of leading a company through significant upheavals, transitions, or other organisational changes. This process is also known as change management. Unlike change management, which is mainly concerned with operationalizing your change process, change leadership focuses on the people you have. With adaptability in leadership, leaders are able to change and experiment in order to adapt to changing situations (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Adaptability is a trait that is essential for effective leadership. Adaptability in leadership refers to the ability to think in a variety of different ways. A strong character at all times, openness to change, a sense of directness and assertiveness that reflects the values of the organisation, and a sense of honesty are all essential traits for an effective leader to possess. By harnessing the power of vision, change leadership offers organisations support in managing transitional situations. This is done by transferring a mission from the realm of paper to the activities that the organisation carries out on a daily basis. When managers have the potential to take on specialised tasks during the change process, they often fail to take advantage of this opportunity.

The participants in this study felt that AKEPT should determine whether or not a leader is able to anticipate and capitalise on new opportunities that align with strategic objectives when training leaders for change. This is consistent with Calarco and Gurvis (2006). A leader must be able to manage change effectively and overcome resistance to change by being aware of the consequences that change has for the organisation and key stakeholders. The ability to manage, lead, and facilitate the process of change and transition while supporting others to deal with the impact of these changes. Those responsible for change should therefore be able to raise the grievances of individuals or groups, often leading to pre-emptive change in the organisation. In addition, leaders act as disruptors by recognising the difficulties that exist and committing to take action to change, which ultimately leads to solutions. To address these problems, leaders must also develop solutions that can be implemented. To facilitate the implementation of the recommended solution on a larger scale, leaders should be able to organise and coordinate processes across many groups, organisations, and industries.

### **4.4 Cluster 4: Impact and Influence**

#### **Impact and Influence**

One of the most important competencies of a great leader is the individual's ability to influence other people. According to Sarros, Grey, and Densten (2002), the terms impact and influence refer to the ability to influence, persuade, or convince others to take a certain course of action. The use of persuasion strategies, presentation skills, or negotiation skills is required to achieve the desired objectives. Leaders prepare for meetings by considering the needs of the audience and shaping their presentation to meet those needs. In addition, they would consider special circumstances, places where resistance may show up, and identifying tactics that would lead to the intended conclusion. They recruit a variety of people, including professionals from the outside world, to lay the groundwork for acceptance of their views.

In relation to this, participants felt that the AKEPT must take into account the leader's capabilities in terms of impact and influence. More specifically, the AKEPT needs to assess the leader's adaptive style, i.e., the ability to modify personal leadership principles or strategies that can be used to influence others. In addition, the AKEPT should determine whether the leader is able to present an argument based on evidence and concrete

examples that appeals to both reason and emotion. In addition, the manager must be able to present their arguments convincingly to support their point of view. Furthermore, the leader must be able to anticipate the emotions of their employees and address their concerns to ensure that they are convinced that they can achieve a goal. In addition, AKEPT must determine whether the manager is able to motivate their employees to take action and achieve goals, even if there is no direct connection between the two parties. Last but not least, the manager must be able to form alliances with other people. The process of gaining support by aligning one's views with the needs and goals of others is known as "coalition building." One must gain the support of others and convince them to support the university's efforts to achieve its goals.

### **Networking/ Relationship Building**

Networking in leadership refers to building relationships and forming alliances with the aim of achieving organisational goals (Grayson & Baldwin, 2011). This ability to build connections or networks is one of the essential talents that a leader must possess in order to be successful. As Ibarra and Hunter (2007) have noted, a capable leader actively seeks opportunities to work with a variety of people and groups to achieve the organisation's goals. In addition, the leader has the ability to operate across cultural boundaries, which enables them to interact and collaborate successfully with individuals from different backgrounds. An important contribution that social networks can make to the process of leadership development is facilitating access to important developmental tasks and acquiring the skills to deal with the obstacles associated with such tasks. The development of interpersonal skills related to dyadic bonds and relational skills related to bonding patterns within networks is necessary for effective leadership. Although the emphasis in leadership development has traditionally been on building intrapersonal skills, it is necessary to develop these skills in order to be effective as a leader. People who want to become leaders can acquire not only human capital but also social capital and system capital. Bartol and Zhang (2007) posited that individuals who aspire to a leadership position can benefit from utilising friendship and support networks as well as task networks.

According to the opinions of the participants, AKEPT must determine whether the leader is able to foster mutually beneficial connections and partnerships based on trust, respect, and the achievement of common goals. In addition, the leader must be able to gain the trust of key stakeholders by actively listening to them and endeavouring to understand their perspectives and requirements. Finally, the leader must be able to show respect and appreciation for others by showing empathy, respecting their time and efforts, and responding to the needs of those they lead. by building and actively maintaining working relationships and/or networks of contacts to further the university's goals. Involve external stakeholders as part of the process of developing relationships and building strategic alliances. Include both the maintenance and enhancement of networks and the implementation of strategic efforts to maintain such networks.

### **Tact and Courtesy**

The participants also mentioned tact and courtesy as two of the competencies that a leader should have. According to Symonds (1930), it encompasses a wide range of qualities, including emotional intelligence, discretion, compassion, honesty, and courtesy. In the context of social interaction, politeness is defined as the ability to adhere to the rules of etiquette, to behave politely, and to show tact and emotional control. For people who are normally very polite, it can be a challenge to grasp the art of politeness, which is one of the most difficult components of professionalism to master.

The participants felt that university leaders need to be able to express their opinions without antagonising an opponent, which is the essence of tact. That is, the leader has the ability to express his message appropriately while maintaining sensitivity to those around him and not unnecessarily antagonising anyone. This is consistent with Kolokolnikova, Lobanova, Gazizova, and Kolesnikova (2018) that suggested that even a tiny detail can cause a recipient to perceive a message as rude or patronising. This talent also includes the ability to properly hear and understand the ideas, emotions, and concerns of others, even if they are only partially expressed or remain unheard. This skill also includes the ability to keep one's emotions under control and refrain from potentially destructive behaviour.

## **4.5 Cluster 5: Achievement and Action Personal Drive and Achievement Orientation**

Personal drive and achievement orientation are also two of the competencies that fall into the category of emotional intelligence (Gomes, Almeida, & Resende, 2020). This competence implies that the person strives to reach or exceed a certain level, welcomes criticism, and wants to constantly develop. The ability to find a balance between one's own personal drive and the demands of the organisation is another aspect of this talent. The ability to self-manage, maintain relationships, and understand the context of an issue are all necessary components. Gibson (1995) noted that a leader must possess a number of qualities to achieve self-mastery, including self-awareness, integrity, intellect, humanism, and drive. The ultimate goal of self-mastery for leaders is to achieve the capabilities of candidates for leadership roles, namely the ability to lead based on the mental quotient and the ability to accept and overcome current obstacles. The theory of accomplishment, also known as the McClelland model, assumes that every person has the ability to achieve more than another

person. According to Karsudjono, Christiananta, and Eliyana (2013), this theory is based on the assumption that the desire for success is different from other desires and can be distinguished from many other needs.

Participants felt that an effective leader must have a performance orientation that allows the AKEPT to judge whether the leader demonstrates high expectations by setting high goals not only for themselves but also for others. Therefore, to achieve exceptional results, the leader must take the initiative to go beyond the usual expectations placed on them and make the necessary sacrifices. In addition, the leader is responsible for ensuring that commitments are honoured with an appropriate sense of urgency. Another way in which AKEPT can assess a leader is by testing their ability to adapt in the face of unforeseen changes in circumstances or the planning process. In this way, the leader will be able to successfully change strategies to achieve the organisation's desired outcomes. In addition, the leader must focus on the results and how to achieve them. In addition, the leader must be able to differentiate between the efforts made and the results achieved. direct their own efforts towards achieving results that are consistent with the university's goals. with the aim of understanding and responding to the needs of current and future stakeholders and providing excellent service to both internal and external stakeholders.

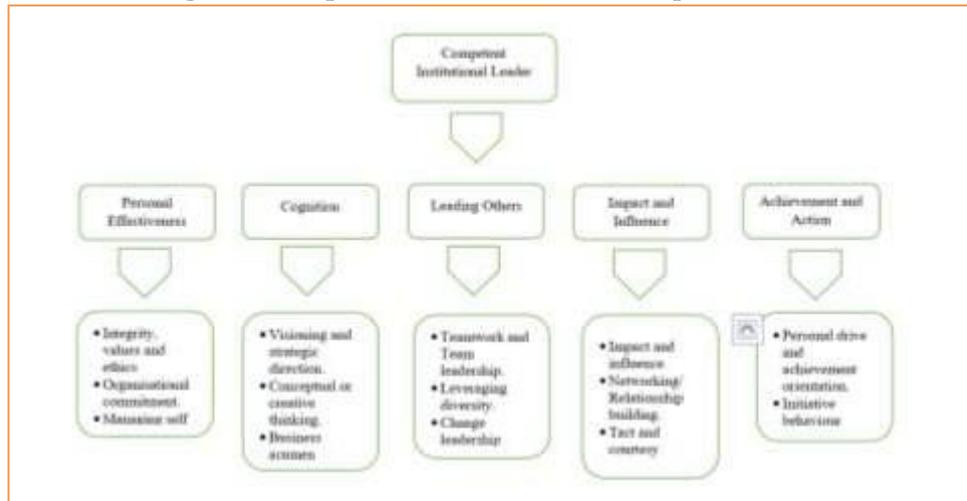
### **Initiative Behaviour**

The participants believe that for a leader to lead his teams successfully, encourage them, and achieve their goals, managers use initiative behaviours in their leadership style. These behaviours include actions and behaviours referred to as "initiative behaviors." Fay and Frese (2001) describe initiative as a work activity characterised by acting on one's own initiative, adopting a proactive attitude, and persevering to overcome challenges that arise in the pursuit of a goal. By taking the initiative, successful leaders are able to fulfil all of these characteristics: not waiting for someone to tell them what to do; thinking and acting independently; being proactive rather than reactive; being flexible, confident, and courageous; helping their teams and organisations to innovate, progress, and overcome competition; and identifying and seizing opportunities that others overlook (Kim, 2022). To give an example: An administrative assistant had to perform a series of difficult procedures consistently. They came to the conclusion that they would record every step and set up a shared directory where other team members would have unsolicited access to the information.

AKEPT can use this competence to assess the manager's ability to set goals. It is the leader's responsibility to set goals for both the team as a whole and for each individual employee that are consistent with the vision and purpose of higher education academic institutions. In addition, the leader should be able to mobilise both monetary and non-monetary resources to achieve the goals of the team as well as the goals of the individual members. Another assessment that AKEPT must make is whether the manager is able to regularly support their employees in achieving their goals, recognise their achievements, and provide timely, relevant, and constructive feedback. Whether the manager is able to ensure that their teams and employees are accountable for achieving their goals is another critical attribute that AKEPT can assess. At the same time, the leader is able to hold their employees accountable for demonstrating strong character and exemplifying the values of the organisation. Next, the leader is able to conduct frequent performance evaluations of both the team and the individual and identify learning needs. Proactively and relentlessly identify and solve problems, seize opportunities when they arise, and/or avoid problems or risks that you have anticipated.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study describes the construction of a leadership competency framework in order to address the challenges associated with finding competent leaders in universities in Malaysia. Based on the findings of this study, there are five different clusters that should be included in the leadership competencies framework. Personal effectiveness, cognition, leading others, impact and influence, and achievement and action are the five categories that make up the different clusters. The competency theme is then defined by these clusters, which is consistent with the findings of previous studies. AKEPT needs to consider some concerns that are addressed in each of the competency themes. These issues need to be considered when assessing prospective leaders. For example, one of the competency themes that falls under cluster 4, which is about impact and influence, is building connections and networks. The leader's ability to connect with a variety of people and organisations to achieve the organisation's goals, the ability to work across cultural boundaries, and the ability to work successfully with people from different backgrounds were some of the challenges found under this theme. Another question that needs to be answered is whether the leader is able to build connections and partnerships that are mutually beneficial and based on trust, respect, and the achievement of common goals. In addition, the leader must be able to earn the trust of key stakeholders and show respect and admiration for others by showing empathy, considering their time and contributions, and responding to their needs. Figure 2 shows the proposed institutional leadership framework based on the focus group discussion in this study.

**Figure 2:** Proposed Institutional Leadership Framework

In summary, based on the findings of this study, AKEPT developed a leadership competence framework. This framework is designed to help higher education institutions define what constitutes a competent leader. When it comes to assessing the skills of a leader, this framework consists of five different clusters that need to be considered. The findings of this study contributes to the existing literature on the possible alternatives to existing leadership competency frameworks.

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