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# Reforming Model of University Leadership through Collaborative Discourse

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#### **Abstract**

Despite abundant leadership research work, there is still a dearth of truly original, ground-breaking collaborative research discourse. To provide greater insights into linking various disciplinary paradigms and responding to this issue, we evaluate the leadership competency (LDC) model, proposed by Fowler et al. (2018). The paper analyses the different levels of leadership practices that lead to innovation with examples drawn from leadership studies. The model offers theoretical grounding as well as actionable guidelines for generating original research ideas. In response to the need felt by researchers on leadership, collaborative initiatives indeed have a dominant place in the contemporary leadership discourse.

Keywords: Leadership; competency model; leadership practices; theoretical grounding

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### 1.0 Introduction

Leadership competency (LDC) models are useful tools for human resource managers and educators to identify and develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for future industry leaders (Sisson & Adams, 2013). Developing competence in employees is related to employees' professional confidence and job satisfaction (Ko, 2012) and business performance (Blayney, 2009). Leadership competencies are leadership skills and behaviors that contribute to superior performance. By using a competency-based approach to leadership, organizations can better identify and develop their next generation of leaders. Essential leadership competencies and global competencies have been defined by researchers. In 2018, Fowler, Zigarmi, Roberts & Shuck developed a new LDC model based on self-determination theory (SDT), showing that leaders who allow autonomy are less likely to respond or use pressure. When they promote relationships, they show subordinates they care about their contribution to the team and support the connection; they make employees feel competent, encouraging them to show their skills and allowing them to develop and perform. Giving positive feedback on tasks serves to increase people's motivation. (Robescu et al, 2021)

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With the steady movement towards becoming a global entity, there seems common understanding that a global university must have a diverse profile of staff as much as students, a curriculum that reflects a global paradigm, research issues that emphasize global concern, and the like. Education for global citizenship has become a popular concept worldwide. As early as 1996, the OECD promoted the internationalization of curricula for professional and social engagement in a multicultural and globally-minded society. Ten years later, UNESCO announced that the public good and social responsibility were central to the purpose of 21st-century universities. Corresponding to this, being the largest public university in Malaysia and operating as an affirmative university, UiTM is actively engaged in internationalization through networking and collaboration activities and has achieved success thus far in partnering with currently around 800 MoUs/MoAs. Perhaps, a point often overlooked, in making a visible impact on the global stage, strategic effort is needed to improve leadership competency development for university management.

Despite abundant leadership research work, there is still a dearth of truly original, ground-breaking collaborative research discourse. For instance, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has found its way into mainstream literature over recent years (Fowler, 2014), but has yet to influence the leadership competencies used to develop leaders. In addition, there is an obvious lack of integrative frameworks that consider the relative influence of staff in collaborative working environments (Williams and Radnor, 2022), as well as explanations of how individuals' cognitive and motivational mechanisms, together with other resources, contribute to high project performance (Scott and Boyd, 2020). That is to say that many current leadership competency models contain outdated approaches to motivation that undermine their intended purpose of leadership effectiveness. Hence, to provide greater insights into linking various disciplinary paradigms and responding to this issue, this study applies the leadership competency model, along with the three and four blended strategies it recommends. Together with the general reference to good leadership. Ie. the decision-making and process that are transparent, effective, efficient, equitable, and inclusive, and follow the rule of law, the model identifies several areas or tasks for leadership and research collaboration, including fostering global partnerships.

This study explores the relationship between the competencies of leadership and the university's performance. It is contended that competitive strategies link leaders' competencies to university performance. Specifically, this study investigated the link between the ARC model and the competitive strategies of university leadership. These competitive strategies are thought to have positive benefits to university performance.

#### 2.0 Literature Review

Because the concept of engagement or work passion has diverse schools of thought, multiple measures of engagement and work passion were used. The study proposed that when University staff's basic psychological needs for Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence (ARC) are met, they expressed higher engagement and passion scores. They also demonstrated stronger intentions and desires to perform, use discretionary effort, endorse their organizations and leaders, contribute to the welfare of the organization, and remain with the organization (The Ken Blanchard Companies, 2018). With this in mind, the study leverages a tripartite model to guide researchers: observe the world, bridge disciplines, and challenge assumptions and theories (EDB) by Fowler et al. (2018) and adapted from Kock et al (2020)'s Observer-Bridge-Challenge (OBC) model encompasses three fundamental, strategic elements, reflecting three actions: "observe, bridge, and challenge". The application of the model includes concrete guidelines for generating original, courageous research ideas, as well as theoretical grounding for each strategic element of the model and a methodology for making them actionable. In-depth analyses then identify the internal and external factors influencing LDCs.

#### 2.1 The Leadership Competency Model

Leadership is, precisely, the use of power with the ability to exert influence on attitudes, behaviors, or feelings. Competency models are considered a best practice in human resources management (Fowler, 2018; Ross & Stefaniak, 2018). Specifically, it is recommended that organizations use competency models that include both leadership (and "soft skills" such as collaboration and trustworthiness) and technical competencies (Ravichandran & Mishra, 2018). Competency models that include leadership and technical competencies have been used to improve employee engagement and reduce turnover intent (Fowler, 2018; Nair et al., in press). Thus, in the current research, we refer to leadership competency as the combination of skills, knowledge, and abilities to address problems and make important decisions.

#### 2.2 A Portfolio of Drivers

Very often the strategy will be a mix of several drivers. There are no doubt significant synergies between some of them, and one may end up with a portfolio of drivers. If learning is the main driver, it may well be that the cost of setting up learning antennae can be offset by organizing some teaching programs. Collaborative leadership is an important enabler of partnership project performance and sustainability (Boone et al., 2020), characterized by embracing, empowering, involving, and mobilizing project actors' active participation. By taking a heterarchical, democratic approach, collaborative project leadership facilitates transparent decision-making and productive interactions among diverse stakeholders (Cramm et al., 2011). A portfolio of drivers may be appropriate, but one needs to keep clarity about the priorities in the portfolio. There may also be an evolution in the main driver. This needs to be managed carefully. In doing so, it has a motivational spill-over effect on others and boosts overall collaborative functioning. There is a critical need to look beyond the boundaries of disciplines, i.e. discipline-bridging studies – academic, governance, management, and/or even community services.

#### 3.0 Methodology

Various data collection methods, each with its strengths and weaknesses, are explored along with multiple data analysis tools to provide a detailed overview of effective approaches within qualitative research. The aim is to achieve rich theoretical insights and leverage existing literature to enhance understanding (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; LePine & Wilcox-King, 2010). This paper primarily focuses on previously established studies and concepts from academic literature to advance theoretical sampling and enrich categories. In this study, qualitative research examines various paths of the internationalization process and their impacts on UiTM. Insights from literature review and interview data inform the analysis of the study's findings.

Data collection methods in qualitative research, such as individual interviews, are often time-consuming due to the need for extensive interaction with participants, particularly among UiTM's executive and senior management. Consequently, researchers employing qualitative methods tend to be content with smaller sample sizes compared to other approaches. However, constraints in data collection and analysis are addressed through personal experience and engagement, leveraging the researcher's role as the Director of UiTM Global. This direct involvement allows the researcher to closely interact with the subjects and gain valuable insights critical to understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

Moreover, adopting an empathic stance, characterized by openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness, ensures vicarious understanding without judgment during interactions with study respondents. Additionally, researchers remain mindful of dynamic systems, recognizing ongoing changes in individuals, organizations, communities, or cultures under study. This mindfulness allows for a nuanced understanding of system and situational dynamics throughout the research process. (Source: https://libquides.usc.edu/writingguide/qualitative).

#### 4.0 Findings

A recent model of leadership competencies is also useful and derived from well-established scientific principles because it incorporates self-determination theory (SDT) into the model (Fowler, Zigarmi, Roberts & Shuck, 2018). The model posits that leaders need to promote three approaches to competencies to help leaders achieve organizational results while fueling employee work passion and the inherent benefits that come from actively engaged individuals at work (Shuck, Roberts, & Zigarmi, 2018; Thibault-Landry, Egan, Crevier-Braud, Manganelli & Forest, 2018). They are (a) Encourage Autonomy, (b) Deepen Relatedness, and (c) Build Competence. These psychological needs are foundational for all human beings to thrive and flourish, are empirically validated, universal, and, when satisfied, result in high-quality motivation (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2017):

In our study within UiTM, there was widespread agreement regarding the importance of director-level managers exemplifying "university and global service excellence." This finding underscores the significance of selecting academic administrators who can effectively lead internationalization efforts at the Faculty or Department level. Beyond traditional trait-based assessments, there is a growing need for director-level leaders and university administrators to serve as role models and exhibit genuine commitment.

Furthermore, targeted training programs and exposure to behavioral techniques that reflect university and service excellence, along with assessments validating interpersonal skills such as kindness, friendliness, and empathy, can greatly benefit international managers and the university as a whole.

Moreover, efforts to develop leadership competencies should prioritize understanding the dynamic interplay between global and local contexts. Leadership effectiveness hinges not only on traits but also on behaviors. Therefore, the selection process for international managers should assess their people leadership competencies alongside their global acumen. This holistic approach is essential for nurturing globally situated leaders capable of navigating complex environments effectively. Detailed strategies for fostering these competencies are outlined in the subsequent section.

#### 5.0 Discussion

#### 5.1 Approach I: Encourage Autonomy

Is based on the understanding that people are empowered when they feel a sense of choice and endorsement in a task – their actions are volitional. Autonomy is a person's need to perceive that they have choices, that what they are doing is of their own volition, and that they are the source of their actions (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Leaders erode a person's sense of autonomy by using controlling language, imposing goals and metrics, depending on rewards and incentives to manipulate behavior, micromanaging, and applying pressure (Hardré & Reeve, 2009). Leaders show competence in autonomy when they encourage their subordinates to realize that they have choices and that their behavior is under their control. It requires determination, support from the top-down, and a few champions from faculty and staff who could also push and engage bottom-up and who would willingly and passionately come forward to assume responsibility and be held accountable for their decisions among other aspects (Kamel, 2019). When leaders show relatedness, they show their subordinates that they care about their contribution to the team and sustain connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Effective leaders also make their employees feel competent through hope that can mitigate the adverse effects of high job demands on burnout and reinforce the positive effects of job resources on work engagement (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014) and encouraging them to demonstrate their skills and allow them to grow and flourish (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This is especially true with the notion that "new problems require new theories". For instance, the post-pandemic has compelled UiTM regarding the need for enhanced creativity, innovation, efficiency, and global networking – demanding a more fluid, diversified, which is epitomized by the ever-increasing awareness of the critical importance of becoming a global player.

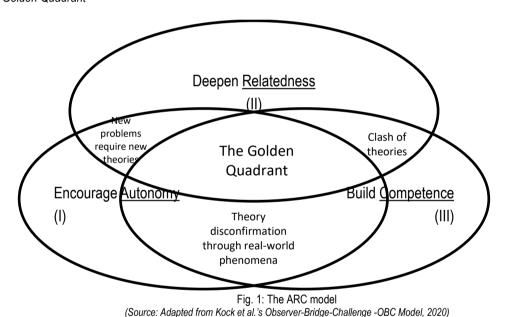
5.2 Approach II: Deepen Relatedness

Collaborative leadership is an important enabler of partnership project performance and sustainability (Boone et al., 2020), characterized by embracing, empowering, involving, and mobilizing project actors' active participation. This sense of relatedness is demonstrated through social connections and a high concern for others through caring. Relatedness is a person's need to care about and be cared about by others, to feel connected to others without concerns about ulterior motives, and to feel that they are contributing to something greater than themselves (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Leaders erode a person's sense of relatedness by failing to provide a rationale for work, promoting metrics without meaning, ignoring feelings, and generating isolation through a lack of justice and transparency (Fowler, 2014). By taking a heterarchical, democratic approach, collaborative project leadership facilitates transparent decision-making and productive interactions among diverse stakeholders (Cramm et al., 2011). As an illustration of UiTM, collaborative research is, when it is put into practice and generates value. The most compelling evidence is when through global networking, the sum of various cross-border activities, such as student and faculty exchange, international collaborative research, the establishment of branch campuses, etc. are possible—to carry out good research in an applied social science like management, one needs to be in close contact with the markets, the local workforces or the local sources of resources to tap into fuzzy and tacit knowledge (Meyer, 2012).

#### 5.3 Approach II: Deepen Relatedness

Originates from the idea that individuals seek to control outcomes and this control allows them to experience mastery over a task or domain. Competence is a person's need to feel effective at meeting everyday challenges and opportunities, demonstrating skill over time, and feeling a sense of growth and flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Leaders erode a person's sense of competence by focusing on performance outcomes at the expense of learning outcomes, punishing mistakes, and failing to provide appropriate direction and support (Gunnell, Crocker, Wilson, Mack, & Zumbo, 2013). In this third approach, courage research involves pushing the boundaries by challenging the assumptions and theories on which previous studies rely. For UiTM, being the mega and an affirmative University, this can be the most difficult step because it deals with competing, counterfactual reasoning, defined as an ability to conceive of alternatives to existing theoretical assumptions through contrastive questioning (Tsang & Elsevier, 2011).

#### 5.4 The Golden Quadrant



Fowler (2018) defined leadership competencies are designed to equip leaders with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics required to effectively lead people toward the achievement of organizational goals. Thus, individual characters also play an important role in determining which competencies are the most important. The most recently emerged leadership competency school, synthesizes all previous schools, considering traits, behavior, and emotional intelligence as competencies and suggesting that competency profiling is appropriate in different situations and competencies (Robescu et al, 2021). In this context of encouraging autonomy, deepened relatedness, and building competence, the synergy effects in total can make an impact. Researchers can gauge the true character of an impactful leader through the intersection of all these three dimensions. An illustration that fits the principles of the golden quadrant can be seen from Beckett (2023), in which she defines competencies as the observable behaviors that successful performers demonstrate on the job. Those behaviors are the result of various abilities, skills, knowledge, motivations, and traits an employee may possess. Competencies take "skills" and incorporate them into on-the-job behaviors. Those behaviors demonstrate the extent to which UiTM global managers can perform the job requirements competently.

#### 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The results showed that competency leadership was significantly related to university orientation. In this study, the authors define university orientation in terms of the culture it propagates. To clarify, the organization's culture underscores values and norms that positively contribute to university worth. In addition, competent leaders are thought to impact and help form the university culture. For UiTM, competent leadership was also positively linked to the university's global strategies. Further, the ARC model was positively related to university performance metrics i.e. University rankings are, arguably and by default, one of the most influential types of statistics or indicators in common use (James, et al., 2018). Consequently, the competency of transformational leadership was found to have a positive impact on university performance through global strategy. The results imply that one way to advance UiTM's global agenda is to develop the competency of university leadership. This study shows that leadership competencies can have an impact on the bottom line of organizations through competitive strategies. Top management at UiTM, particularly the Vice-Chancellor or the University Board can influence university performance by identifying and developing key leadership competencies in the university.

In this respect, there is a direct correlation between university leadership and the pathway to global excellence and the diffusion of collaborative research discourse:

- Humans have an innate tendency for growth, development, and integrated functioning, but this tendency often gets undermined by external forces
- There are clear and specific environmental and personal factors that either support or thwart this innate tendency to thrive and flourish
- The most critical element for psychological thriving is the satisfaction of three universal needs for Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence, or ARC.

Leaders must shift from the notion of using their power to influence to using their positions of power to empower others by:

- · Inviting choice and exploring options within boundaries
- Exploring an individual's natural interest in and enthusiasm for the goal
- Providing a rationale and sharing information

In terms of developing director-level managers' global leadership competencies, this study recommends university global managers go beyond knowledge-based training and provide advanced skills-based training, using complex case studies, simulations, problem-based learning, situational judgment exercises, and learning-by-doing practices. Moreover, training and development of director-level managers should also focus on "leads change and supports innovation" because the ability to be agile and to adapt quickly to the everchanging needs of industries and the economy can be a strategic advantage. Additionally, it is also recommended in terms of goal setting which primarily focuses on cognitive aspects (Locke and Latham, 2019), leaders should not neglect other individual-level resources that boost project workers' goal commitment, mitigate goal stress, and facilitate goal attainment (Scott and Boyd, 2020).

One fact remains uncontested: globalization has had a grave impact on the spread of policy and practices across national geographies, including the influence on educational leadership and leadership development, albeit relatively nascent (Easley and Tulowitzki, 2013). According to the results of our research, in response to this scenario, UiTM should initiate immediate action to overcome the communication and feedback competence gap of the leadership team. Both should be addressed in a common development plan. For future research, as communication needs a fast and decisive reaction, the study on establishing a common leadership language could be the start of the development plan that guides policy and practices.

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#### Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study provides meaningful, practical advice to help researchers find original ideas and challenge traditional norms. The OBC model developed by Kock et al. (2020) was blended with the elements of autonomy relatedness and competence to enrich theory providing a new theoretical model development for strategic leadership thus providing pertinent guidelines and encouraging researchers to continue to perform original and courageous research in a model of university leadership particularly through collaborative research discourse.

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