

A Competency-Based Approach to Recruiting and Developing Academic Leaders – A Review

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Abstract-The definition of leadership in academia is very similar to the one in business settings: inspiring others, being a role model, being self-aware and self-reflective as well as being decisive, visionary, planning ahead and handling the finances. In summary leadership is described as the ability “to enable the success of other people”. Given the fact that institutions of higher learning are being challenged as never before by many forces: the tough and uncertain economic climate, profound pressure in funding such as “# fees must fall” in South Africa, and unprecedented global competition for the best and brightest students and staff, one would assume that the rigorous processes used in recruiting business leaders would similarly be adopted by institutions of higher learning to recruit and develop their leaders. However, a review of recruitment of academic leaders determined that most universities recruit their academic leaders using the traditional approach based on seniority on the academic rank regardless of whether or not the candidates have proven leadership competencies. The few universities that recruit and develop their leaders based on their leadership competencies appear to have effective leadership. This paper reviews the recruitment and development of academic leaders using a leadership competency model as an approach that leads to effective academic leadership.

Keywords: Academic leadership, business setting, competence, leadership competency model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Given the multiple challenges that universities across the world are facing, it has been important for them to restructure their funding models to include activities such as entrepreneurship that are hitherto considered the realm of the business community. Success today requires universities to pursue excellence in the core functions of teaching and research, and, at the same time, to be more and to do more. Universities are being re-defined in many ways: as levers of social

mobility, as engines of local economic growth, as founts of technological advances that are changing society. All this makes painfully clear that academics can't do all this by staying in their ivory tower of academia.

To be successful, universities now need top quality academic leaders and managers – be they heads of departments, deans of faculty, deputy/ pro-vice-chancellors and even vice-chancellors. There is a need for the leadership of the kinds of people who are willing to stick their necks out. However, in many universities leadership positions at the level of heads of department (HoDs) and faculty deans are held by a faculty member who willingly gives up most of the teaching and research activities and become a full-time administrator. Traditionally, these deans are voted into their positions by colleagues in their schools/ colleges based on their seniority. Depending on campus policy, it may be for a limited period of time. Most deans return to the faculty when their terms in office have expired. For them, leadership in the dean's position is complicated by the desire to bring accomplishment and excellence to the college, school or faculty [1] while keeping in mind that they will have to return to the faculty that they are shaping. For those deans who do not have to return to the faculty, and are normally recruited using a rigorous recruitment process, attention to leadership is more managerial/ professional in nature.

Academics by nature are people suited to working "in the laboratory" – scientific or otherwise – and delving into the intricacies of their specialty with diligence. Therefore, a university leader needs to be an academic to gain the respect of the academic staff he or she leads and to fully understand at the ground level the nature of the university's core intellectual functions. At the same time, a university leader needs to be an entrepreneur, able to make the bold business decisions demanded and to seize the initiative where required [2]. Although many professions within universities operate within a stable institutional context [3], the leaders of these institutions need to be able to adapt to a constantly changing environment and external influences. These skills cannot be learned in a day or on a week-end workshop but need to be developed over some time.

Academic leaders are often faced with the ambiguity in which they need to lead. Academic leaders must be able to adapt their leadership style when working with the different constituencies of the faculty and the university. A more facilitative leadership style is needed when working with faculty in the academic core and a more traditional line-authoritative style is needed when working with the administrative core [3]. Very often academic leaders need to work with both these types of employees which adds pressure on developing their own management skills. There is also constant tension in pursuing academic goals and having the obligation to perform administrative duties. "Having insufficient time to remain current in my discipline" is the number one stress for HoDs and ranked third for Deans [4]. The balance between pursuing academic goals and performing administrative duties leads to time constraints. These time constraints add to the challenge to adapt to new role and its environment, to master newly acquired skills and to function at an operational and strategic level.

Generally, academics do not aspire to do the job of a leader. In a study done by Oliver-Evans [5], it was reported that 70% of the HoDs did not want to do the job. The majority of HoDs see themselves as overburdened in a thankless job that detracts from their scholarly careers, in which their status, and thus their ability to implement leadership, has been eroded, and for which there is inadequate support from their administrative and academic colleagues. Most damaging is the perception that they may have lost the respect of their peers; their colleagues are grateful that the job of HoD is being done, but they are generally not admiring or respectful of the position.

Based on this background, this paper reviews the recruitment and development of academic leaders using a leadership competency model as an approach that leads to effective academic leadership.

2. CHALLENGES FACING ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

According to Berg and Jaber [6] leadership in academia is facing the following challenges:

- Leadership in academia is sometimes a matter of leading independent researchers who do not want to be lead. There is scepticism towards leadership as a competency and why money is being spent on leadership development rather than on research.
- Leadership roles are sometimes perceived as a burden which needs to be carried by

someone, and can be perceived as a threat of ruining a research career if too much of the individual's time is spent on leadership rather than on research.

- Combining the roles of subject matter expert and leader in one person, and finding the balance between these roles seems to be a challenge for many leaders in academia. Some leaders express fear of showing their weaknesses. This may hamper the ability and willingness to develop leadership skills.
- Expectations on leaders today are increasing throughout society. In academia, students and employees expect more active forms of leadership such as coaching and mentoring. This requires a different type of leadership that is less hierarchical and more team oriented than traditional leadership. Still the leader should be the subject expert and role model.
- A question raised is whether there are dissimilar requirements for leading academic staff and support staff? Furthermore, the perception of status difference between academic staff and support staff is a challenge, where academic staff have higher status than support staff; can a good leader bridge that difference?

According to De Jager [7] the challenges faced by deans of engineering faculties, focusing on innovative management methods and organisational processes include:

- The quality of teaching and learning;
- The quality of research and innovation;
- Staff recruitment, retention and development; and
- Faculty structure, governance and partnerships.

At the executive levels of university leadership, the challenges faced by the incumbents, i.e., deputy vice chancellors and vice chancellors in addition to the ones mentioned above are related to finance, brand of the institution and the political context. It is clear, therefore, that the expertise of academic staff in their areas of specialisation does not prepare them to navigate the challenges they face in their leadership duties. Therefore, the traditional approach of recruiting academic leaders based on seniority on the academic ladder is not able to address these challenges. An approach that is able to identify and develop the capabilities and competencies required to address these challenges is a necessity.

- Useful behaviours and skills (such as job dedication) [13].

3. COMPETENCY MODEL

3.1 Competencies

Competencies provide a framework for human capital and help organisations focus their employee development in order to gain a competitive edge [8]. Competencies have become a benchmark of organisational effectiveness as organisations realise the intellectual assets their employees are. When an organisation is open about the competencies they require their staff to have, it is easy for employees to understand what they need to work towards to succeed in their careers [9]. Clearly defined competencies will help an organisation to put their business imperatives and objectives into performance requirements for their employees [10]. In order to compile competencies that can be easily understood, it is important to understand what is meant by the term “competence”.

Klemp [11] defines competence as a generic knowledge, skill, trait, or motive of a person that is causally related to effective behaviour, and must be manifested in a variety of ways in a number of situations. The term “causally related” means that there is evidence which indicates or suggests that possession of the characteristic (e.g., knowledge, skill, trait, or motive) precedes and leads to effective performance [11]. Parry [12] defines it as “a cluster of related knowledge, attitudes and skills that affect a major part of one’s job that can be measured against well-accepted standards and that can be improved with training and development. It is clear from these two definitions that all competencies include attributes / abilities, knowledge and skills.

3.2 History of Competency Modelling

Bartram [13] states that most research defining job performance focused on management positions more than on entry-level jobs. Tett, Guterman, Bleier and Murphy [14] conducted a literature study on 12 different competency models dating back to Flanagan (1951). They found similarities between the models, but also found that there were differences in detail, description, definition, emphasis and level of aggregation.

Borman and Brush [15] propose a structure of four broad dimensions, namely:

- Leadership and supervision;
- Interpersonal relations and communication;
- Technical behaviours and mechanics of management; and

Tett et al. [14] developed a taxonomy of 53 competencies clustered under nine general areas. Subject matter experts were consulted to sort 147 behavioural elements in order to derive these 53 competencies. The nine general areas were: traditional functions, task orientation, dependability, open-mindedness, emotional control, communication, developing self and others, occupational acumen, and concerns [13]. Kurz and Bartram [16] describe a job competency framework for managerial and non-managerial positions consisting of 112 competencies which were derived from academic and practice-based competency models. The framework defines the relationships between these competencies, their mapping on to a set of 20 competency dimensions, and their loadings on eight broad competency factors [13].

This paper reviewed the recruitment and development of academic leadership using a leadership competency model.

3.3 Uses of Competency Models

Campion et al., [17] summarised a list of several uses of competency models based on a literature study. Competency models can be useful for selection purposes because competencies of top performers have been identified and new joiners can be measured against a specific profile. Having a competency model in place enables management to identify developmental areas where employees need training. For example, executive development, coaching programs and 360 degree surveys are often built on a competency model foundation [17].

Models that depict levels of competency proficiency, job grade and pay levels can be used as tools around which to structure appraisal instruments to establish promotion criteria [18-20]. Employee information can be easily managed by using competency models to record and archive employee skills and training. By identifying and measuring current competencies a higher retention rate of critical skills can be achieved, enabling the organisation to achieve organisational objectives [21-23]. Developed competency models can assist organisations with change management interventions by providing the ability to align the way in which employees are trained, assessed, selected, promoted and rewarded [24].

3.4 Samples of Available Competency Models

The following two competency models will be discussed to elicit the key elements included in such models:

- Leadership Competency Model (LCM) [25], and
- Leadership Competencies Developed at Indiana University School of Medicine (2007-2009) [26].

The first model was selected because it is generic in nature and does not describe the competencies of a specific industry. The second model, developed by Indiana University School of Medicine was chosen specifically because it is one of few models that speak specifically to academic leadership.

3.4.1 Leadership Competency Model (LCM)

The LCM was developed with the purpose of providing a detailed description of leadership to aid in the development of leaders. It describes five dimensions of leadership competencies, as follows [25]:

- Self-Management;
- Leading Others;
- Task Management;
- Innovation; and
- Social Responsibility.

Each of these dimensions as shown in Table 1 includes several core competencies that are considered valuable skills, abilities, behaviours, attitudes and knowledge areas in which leaders are expected to excel [25].

Table 1: Core competencies and related skills of the Leadership Competency Model (LCM)

Dimension of Competency	Core Competencies	Examples of Related Skills
Self-management	Work Habits	Time management; Goal orientation; Organisation skills; Work ethic; Follow through
	Work Attitudes	Initiative; Effort; Persistence; Energy; Optimism
	Stress Management	Self-control; Stress tolerance; Personal resiliency; Work/ life balance; Resiliency; Adaptability
	Self-Insight	Self-confidence; Self-awareness; Self-reliance; Humility; Suspending judgement
	Learning	Learning strategies; Intellectual curiosity; Continuous learning; Seeking feedback
Leading Others	Communicating	Communicating with co-workers; Active listening; Facilitating discussion; Public speaking; Developing external contacts; Communicating outside the organisation
	Interpersonal Awareness	Psychological knowledge; Social orientation; Social perceptiveness; Service orientation; Nurturing relationship
	Motivating Others	Taking charge; Orienting others; Setting goals for others; Reinforcing success; Developing and building teams
	Developing Others	Knowledge of principles of learning; Interpreting the meaning of information for others; Assessing others; Coaching, developing, instructing
	Influencing	Cooperating; Persuading; Resolving conflicts / negotiating; Empowering; Inspiring; Political savvy
Task Management	Executing Task	Task-relevant knowledge; Delegating; Attention to detail; Coordinating work activities; Providing feedback; Multi-tasking
	Solving Problems	Analytic thinking; Analysing data; Mental focus; Decision making; Designing work systems
	Managing Information and Material Resources	Managing materials and facilities; Managing information resources; Performing administrative activities; Maintaining quality
	Managing Human Resources	Succession planning/ recruiting; Personnel decision quality; Managing personnel policies; Maintaining safety
	Enhancing Performance	Enhancing task knowledge; Eliminating barriers to performance; Benchmarking; Strategic task management
Innovation	Creativity	Generating ideas; Critical thinking; Synthesis/ reorganisation; Creative problem solving
	Enterprising	Identifying problems; Seeking improvement; Gathering information; Independent thinking; Technological savvy
	Integrating Perspectives	Openness to ideas; Research orientation; Collaborating; Engaging in non-work related interests

	Forecasting	Perceiving systems; Evaluating long-term consequences; Visioning; Managing the future
	Managing Change	Sensitivity to situations; Challenging the status quo; Intelligent risk-taking; Reinforcing change
Social Responsibility	Civic Responsibility	Communicating and helping the community; Civic action; Adopting beneficial values for society; Providing a good example; Social action
	Social Knowledge	Social and anthropology knowledge; History and geography knowledge; Foreign language knowledge; Philosophy and theology knowledge; Knowledge of organisational justice; Legal regulations
	Ethical Processes	Open-door policy; Instituting and following fair procedures; Explaining decisions in respectful manner; Ensuring ethical behaviour of subordinates
	Leading Others Ethically	Servant leadership; Valuing diversity; Distributing awards fairly; Responsibility for others; Avoiding exploitative mentality
	Acting with Integrity	Financial ethics; Work-place ethics; Honesty and integrity; Being accountable; Courage of convictions

3.4.2 Leadership Competencies Developed at Indiana University School of Medicine (2007-2009)

The Indiana University School of Medicine (IUSM) faced a number of challenges in the recruitment process including (similar to some of those described above) large and highly variable search committees that lacked clarity regarding expectations for members, selection criteria, and even the search process itself. Further, once on the job, chairs rarely interacted with one another and did not receive structured professional development or feedback to help them assess and increase their effectiveness. Without standardisation in the recruitment, development, and feedback processes, each department often reinvented the wheel for each new search [26].

IUSM resolved these challenges by developing a competency model to help in recruiting and developing the future-oriented, emotionally intelligent, talented leaders necessary for success in the changing and complex environment of the current and future Academic Health Care (AHC). This competency model has six competencies [26]:

- Leadership and team development;
- Performance and talent management;
- Vision and strategic planning;
- Emotional intelligence;
- Communication skills; and
- Dedication to the tripartite mission.

Table 2 lists these competencies as well as a subset of skills associated with each competency

Table 2: Leadership Competencies Developed at Indiana University School of Medicine (2009–2011) [26]

Leadership Competency	Examples of included skills
Leadership and team development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages in succession planning • Creates leadership opportunities for others • Serves as a mentor and/or sponsor • Sets the tone of an equitable and supportive climate for all
Performance and talent management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages faculty development • Effectively recruits and supports faculty and learners • Provides ongoing feedback • Empowers others
Vision and strategic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes a shared vision • Inspires others toward a common goal • Encourages innovation • Is fiscally responsible
Emotional intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is self-reflective • Serves as a role model • Welcomes the views of others • Commits to enhancing diversity

Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulates a vision • Negotiates for resources and support • Actively listens • Engages others in decision making
Commitment to the tripartite Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insists that the department advance all three missions • Integrates department goals with stakeholder goals • Advances communities of scholars across mission areas • Adapts to a changing environment

3.5 Evaluation of Models

Before adopting a particular model for use with or without modification, it is important to evaluate it to see how closely it fits the organisation in which it will be used. The evaluation criteria against which each one was measured were:

- External coherence;
- Internal coherence;
- User requirements; and
- Design requirements.

Although these two competency models were developed for different contexts, it is clear that they have many elements in common. For instance, they both identify the skill required for communication, although not under similar rubric.

3.6 Discussion

As noted in the two examples of competency models above, there is a significant departure from the traditional approach of recruiting leaders because of their basis in determining the competencies required for the work at hand and then using them for assessing holders of leadership positions. For this approach to be successful it first and foremost requires the support from the executive leaders. In an academic environment support is particularly helpful when the institution as a whole or a unit in the institution moves from using traditional metrics (e.g., number of funded grants and number of peer-reviewed articles) to a focus on leadership competencies. To ensure the buy-in of all academic staff, current academic leaders as well as executive leaders should be involved in the identification of

specific leadership competencies and in the process of determining how they will be used, communicated, and measured.

Centralising and standardising the search and screen process requires dedicated staff effort, which may require the creation of one or more new position(s). This cost should be weighed against the more efficient, streamlined searches that may create cost savings. Further, the cost associated with an internal search specialist is considerably less than regularly consulting search firms. The review of leaders must align with the identified leadership competencies and should include feedback from staff. Aligning the review with the competencies means that, from the point of interview onward, the leader has a clear set of expectations for the areas in which he or she must be competent. Further, annual unit reviews, which address the leadership competencies, may inform not only the professional development goals of individual leaders but also their professional development programming.

4. DEVELOPING ACADEMIC LEADERS

Wolverton and Gmelch [27] defined three dimensions that constitute academic leadership for deans: building a community of scholars, setting direction, and empowering others. They created a survey which asked deans to rate themselves on eight items related to each dimension as shown on Table 3. Overall the means scores for each dimension of leadership were high. All three dimensions were strongly correlated with the dean's perceptions of leadership effectiveness and the deans in the study believed themselves to be effective leaders.

Table 3: Leadership dimensions for deans [27]

Dimension	Items related to the dimension
Building Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I show I care about others. • I show concern for the feelings of others. • I involve others in new ideas and projects. • I support effective coordination by working cooperatively with others. • I communicate feelings as well as ideas. • I treat others with respect regardless of position. • I provide opportunities for people to share ideas and information. • I make others feel a real part of the group or organisation.

Setting Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I communicate a clear sense of priorities. • I encourage others to share their ideas of the future. • I engage others to collaborate in defining a vision. • I willingly put myself out front to advance group goals. • I have plans that extend beyond the immediate future. • I am oriented toward actions rather than maintaining the status quo. • I consider how a specific plan of action might be extended to benefit others. • I act on the basis that what I do will have an impact.
Empowering Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I make sure people have the resources they need to do a good job. • I reward people fairly for their efforts. • I provide information people need to effectively plan and do their work. • I recognise and acknowledge good performance. • I help people get the knowledge and skills they need to perform effectively. • I express appreciation when people perform well. • I make sure that people know what to expect in return for accomplishing goals. • I share power and influence with others.

“One of the most glaring shortcomings in the leadership area is the scarcity of sound research on the training and development of leaders” [28]. Gardner [29] contends that leadership development is a process that extends over many years. Rather than search for answers in specific training programs, three spheres of influence create the conditions essential to develop academic leaders: (a) conceptual understanding of the unique roles and responsibilities encompassed in academic leadership; (b) the skills necessary to achieve the results through working with faculty, staff, students, and other administrators; and (c) the practice of reflection to learn from past experiences and perfect the art of leadership. These three spheres and their intersections, as illustrated in figure 1, serve as the analytical framework for what is believed is needed to successfully develop effective leaders in the academy” [27].

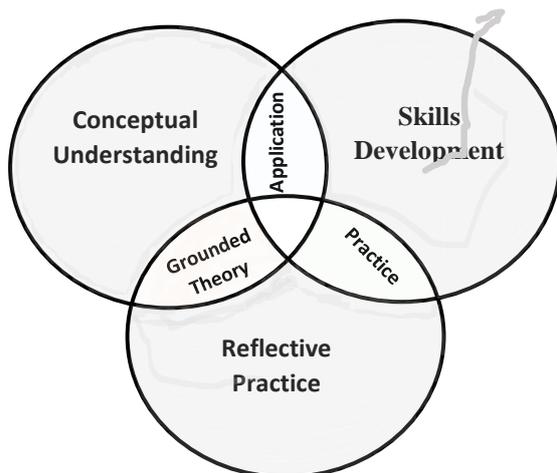


Figure 1: Spheres of effective academic leadership in the academy [27]

4.1 Conceptual Understanding

Understanding the leadership role of the academic leaders involves understanding the dimensions of leadership that are unique to the academy and unique to the college or division. This can be acquired through mentoring or academic leadership programs. Topics specific to academic administration, such as finance, budgeting and planning are available.

4.2 Skill Development

In addition to a conceptual understanding of leadership, development of specific behaviours and skills, such as communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, resource management and performance evaluation and coaching are also necessary for effective leadership. To some degree these can be acquired in formal training, but on-the-job practice and feedback is important to solidify application of these skills.

4.3 Reflective Practice

Wolverton and Gmelch [27] contend that “leadership development is an inner journey. Self-knowledge, personal awareness and corrective feedback must be part of a dean’s leadership journey.” They note that dean’s isolation in their positions tends to work against the ability to discuss and share with peers, which enables reflection. Opportunities to discuss important challenges in peer groups or with a mentor would help the reflective learning necessary for leadership development.

5. CONCLUSION

Although the definition of leadership in academia is very similar to the one in business setting, many universities have continued to recruit their leadership using the traditional approach based on the seniority

on the academic rank and research profile regardless of whether or not the candidates have proven leadership competencies.

Time and again this approach has led to less than the desired outcomes given the fact that the functions of universities are no longer confined to the three core missions of teaching and learning; research and innovation, and engagement. Universities are being re-defined in many ways: (i) as levers of social mobility; (ii) as engines of local economic growth; and (iii) as founts of technological advances that are changing society. All this makes painfully clear that academics are not always by their training equipped to handle these new expectations.

Recruitment and development of academic leaders using competency-based approach appears to provide effective leadership given that the approach deliberately identifies the capabilities and competencies that are required for the job at hand and if they are found lacking in an incumbent, as systematic training programme is developed to impart them.

Generally, on-the-job experience in different types of academic leadership positions is the typical path toward an academic leadership such as deanship. These experiences form the basis of understanding the leadership role of dean, however they often provide an incomplete picture and may not provide the conceptual understanding and skill development necessary for success in the broader role. Some of best skills a dean can possess are the constant thirst for knowledge, commitment to lifelong learning, and the courage to embrace change in the ever evolving world of higher education. It is believed that the continuation of these innovative, entrepreneurial and managerial efforts will support the faculty and university to meet the changes facing higher education.

However, developing academic leaders takes time and specific steps to understand, practice and refine academic leadership skills. This process requires conceptual understanding, skill development and reflection that can be attained through reading, education, mentoring, skill workshops and peer interaction [27]. Developing leaders in the academy has often been left to chance or the individual mentoring efforts of a few. Given the challenges universities are facing, they should implement a more focused and systematic process for developing future academic leaders. A competency-based approach is the way to go.

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