## The Development of a Leadership Competency Model for Administrative Staff at a Public University in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, China

*Huimin Han, Nathara Mhunpiew*

# The Development of a Leadership Competency Model for Administrative Staff at a Public University in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, China

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## Abstract

Effective leadership among administrative staff is essential in the internationalization of higher education. This study employed a mixed-method design to develop a leadership competency model for administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City, Guangdong Province. The ideal leadership competencies for university administrative staff were identified through a systematic review, categorized into five categories: motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skills. This study concluded that skills and knowledge were weaknesses of leadership competencies and need priority development. Furthermore, within each category specific leadership competencies require prioritization. All five leadership competencies were incorporated into the leadership competency model, highlighting the elements that require priority development. This study provides theoretical support for leadership training and development among administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City.

Keywords : leadership competency model, administrative staff, leadership development, public university, china

## Introduction

The internationalization of higher education leads to increasingly sophisticated and demanding internal and external stakeholders (including the faculty, education authorities, donors, students, parents, other educational institutions, and businesses) (Marshall, 2018). University administrative staff are non-academic employees who work in the administrative departments of a university. University administrative staff can facilitate organizational development and enhance faculty and student satisfaction and success by creating a professional, efficient, and exceptional environment (Dominguez-Whitehead, 2018; Tickle et al., 2011). However, the current services provided by university administrative staff in China are insufficient to satisfy stakeholders (Hu, 2007; Shen, 2020). Leadership competencies are proven to be strongly associated with stakeholder satisfaction (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). Recent studies have shown that leadership development among administrative staff is essential to sustain high-quality environments for the stakeholders in the dynamic and ever-changing

environment (Baltaru & Soysal, 2018; Morris & Laipple, 2018). Thus, increasing the administrative staff's leadership competencies will contribute to the solution of the problem. Moreover, studies have shown that there is still plenty of room for leadership development among university administrative staff (Xie et al., 2014; Zhu & Zayim-Kurtay, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen leadership training for university administrative staff.

Leadership competency models include specific elements essential for effective leadership, serving as valuable training and development tools (Ruben et al., 2023; Welch & Hodge, 2017). The unique context of public universities in China necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the critical leadership competencies for university administrative staff, as leadership competencies are closely related to the specific tasks of leaders (Hollenbeck et al., 2006). To facilitate leadership training and development among administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City, this study aimed to develop a leadership competency model for administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City.

## Research Objectives

1. To explore the ideal leadership competencies for university administrative staff.

2. To identify the development needs of leadership competencies for administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, China.

3. To develop a leadership competency model for administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, China.

4. To verify the leadership competency model for administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, China.

## Literature Review

The Iceberg model of competencies (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) and servant leadership theory (Laub, 1999, 2018) laid the theoretical foundations for this study.

### The Iceberg Model of Competencies (Spencer & Spencer, 1993)

American psychologist McClelland (1973) defined competency as a personal trait or set of habits that predict superior job performance in his paper "Testing for Competence Rather than Intelligence." Spencer & Spencer (1993) proposed the widely cited Iceberg model of competencies, which classifies competencies into two distinct parts encompassing five categories, as shown in Figure 1. The surface knowledge and skill competencies are the technical competencies that are the fundamental guarantee to completing the job, which are visual and can be easily developed through instructional methods. In comparison, the hidden self-concept, trait, and motive competencies that drive individuals' superior performance at work require additional time and effort-intensive activities (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). All these five components are critical to achieving an organization's outcomes (Ibrahim & Hasnan, 2014). Based on the Iceberg Model of Competencies, leadership competencies are characteristics (including motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skills) that directly predict superior performance in leadership roles (Smith & Wolverton, 2010).

**Figure 1**

*The Iceberg Model of Competencies*
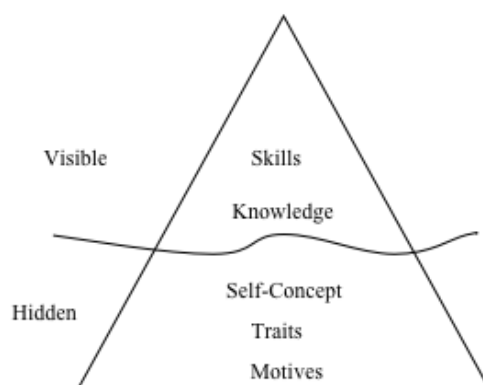


Note: Adapted from: Spencer, L. M & Spencer, S. M. (1993). Competence at work, models for superior performance. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

*Motives*

   In a leadership context, motives refer to the underlying reasons and intentions that drive individuals to take on leadership roles and responsibilities. Leaders with clear and meaningful motives tend to inspire and motivate others more effectively (Locke, 1999).

*Traits*

   Traits refer to personal physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information that contribute to leadership effectiveness. Although specific traits do not guarantee leadership success, evidence suggests that exceptional leaders possess distinct traits that differentiate them from others and are valued in leadership roles (Zaccaro, 2007).

**Self-Concept**

   Self-concept refers to values, attitudes, and self-images related to how a person defines themself. Effective leaders have a positive and confident self-concept, enabling them to clearly understand their strengths, weaknesses, values, and aspirations (Chen, 2016).

**Knowledge**

   Knowledge refers to the specific information, encompassing the understanding of facts, theories, principles, or feelings. Effective leaders continuously equip themselves with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions and solve problems (Ruben et al., 2023).

**Skills**

   Skills are the practical implication of knowledge. Skills provide leaders the practical abilities to effectively execute their roles and responsibilities (Chuang, 2013).

Significantly, these five types of competency characteristics are interconnected and influence one another(Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Leaders' knowledge and skills invariably are linked to their motives, traits, or self-concept, which drive the utilization of knowledge or skills. On the other hand, motive, trait, and self-concept competencies predict leaders' skill behavior actions, subsequently influencing job performance or leadership effectiveness. The competency approach to leadership effectively matches the competencies with effective leadership practice, which can be used to enhance individuals' development to be active leaders (Ruben et al., 2023; Welch & Hodge, 2017).

**Servant Leadership Theory (Laub, 1999, 2018)**

Servant leadership theory, initially presented by Robert K. Greenleaf in his influential publication "The Servant as Leader" in 1970, is a leadership philosophy that prioritizes the leader's primary role as a servant to those they lead (Greenleaf, 1970). It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first; subsequently, the conscious decision leads one to aspire for leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leaders are genuinely concerned with serving followers (Greenleaf, 1977). Spears (1995) extracted the following ten core characteristics of servant leadership from Greenleaf's writings: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. These characteristics set servant leadership apart and differentiate it from other leadership styles that prioritize the performance and well-being of the organization (Van Dierendonck et al., 2014).

Laub (1999, 2018) supported Greenleaf's idea and further defined "servant leadership as an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader" (p. 83). Laub (1999, 2018) developed the first research-based servant leadership model, the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) model of servant leadership. The OLA model provides an operational and measurable set of servant leadership practices categorized into the following six disciplines:

### Value People

Servant leaders are concerned for their followers' well-being, growth, and development (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leaders demonstrate their appreciation for people by prioritizing the needs of others before their own, trusting & believing in people, and receptive, nonjudgmental listening (Laub, 1999; 2018).

### Develop People

Servant leaders focus on the future growth of team members by facilitating learning opportunities, exemplifying suitable conduct, and fostering personal development through positive reinforcement and support (Laub, 1999; 2018).

### Build Community

Servant leaders create a sense of community by fostering relationships, promoting collaboration, and appreciating diversity (Laub, 1999; 2018).

### Provide Leadership

Servant leaders provide leadership by imagining the future, proactively initiating actions, and providing clarity on guidance & direction (Laub, 1999; 2018).

### Share Leadership

Servant leaders empower and encourage others to lead by facilitating a shared vision, sharing power and releasing control, and sharing status and fostering their growth (Laub, 1999; 2018).

### Display Authenticity

Authenticity means staying true to oneself and honestly articulating one's emotions, intentions, and obligations. Servant leaders display authenticity by maintaining integrity & trust, transparency and responsibility towards others, and being receptive to acquiring knowledge from others (Laub, 1999; 2018).

Servant leadership is a highly effective and promising leadership style that can be successfully applied in modern higher education institutions' dynamic and complex environments (Ghasemy et al., 2022). Servant leadership enhances follower leadership and long-term sustainable performance within the specific university context (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Crippen & Willows, 2019). It is also worth noting that servant leadership and the Chinese traditional philosophy of Confucianism share some fundamental principles (Fu et al., 2007).

**Related Researches**

Leadership development can be achieved through various methods and activities, involving leadership workshops and seminars, action learning projects, leadership assessments and feedback mechanisms, peer learning and networking opportunities, and continuous learning and self-reflection (Day, 2000; Megheirkouni, 2016).

## Research Methodology

**Conceptual Framework**

The Iceberg model of competencies captures the depth and complexity of competencies, going beyond surface-level competencies and recognizing that underlying beliefs, values, and traits influence visible behaviors and skills (Ho & Frampton, 2010). Servant leadership, as an effective model for educational leadership and management sheds light on effective leadership practices to facilitate administrative staff development in this study. Therefore, the Iceberg model of competencies and servant leadership underpin and facilitate the understanding of leadership competency development for university administrative staff. The depiction of Figure 2 illustrates the underlying conceptual framework employed in this study.

A mixed- method design was utilized in this study to collect and analyze data for each research objective. Qualitative methods take center stage in comprehending the leadership competencies essential for university administrative staff and developing the leadership competency model. A systematic review of relevant literature is used to explore research Objective One, defining the ideal leadership competencies for university administrative staff. In-depth interviews and a model development process supported Objective Three to develop a draft leadership competency model. Moreover, expert validation was used to assess the model's feasibility in Objective Four. Quantitative methods were employed to prioritize the development needs of leadership competencies for university administrative staff. Based on the result of the systematic review, a questionnaire survey was used to measure the expected and current leadership competencies among administrative staff. The results showed the expected and current leadership competencies among administrative staff. To prioritize the development needs of leadership competencies, the Modified Priority Needs Index (PNImodified) was used with the following calculation formula: $PNI_{Modified} = \frac{I-D}{D}$

**Figure 2**

*Research Conceptual Framework*
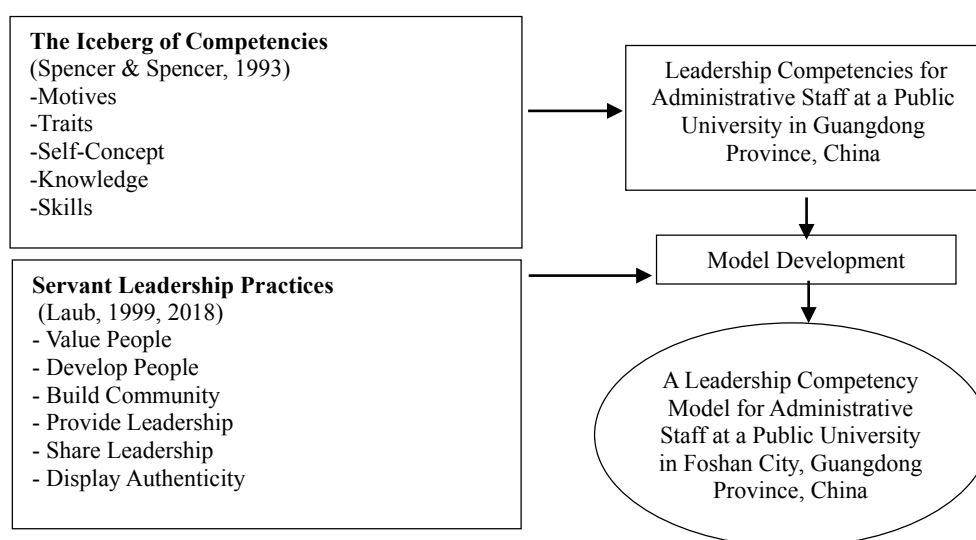


**Population and Samples**

Given that Foshan University is the only public university in Foshan City, this research adopted a total population sampling method. Hence, all 277 administrative staff members at Foshan University were surveyed through online questionnaire platforms. The 30 administrative staff involved in the pilot test were randomly selected. Furthermore, these 30 administrative staff members were included from the full-scale survey due to the limited overall sample size.

**Research Instrument**

The questionnaire comprised three parts to identify the development needs of leadership competencies for administrative staff. Part one encompassed four close-ended questions to capture demographics, including gender, educational background, administrative experience, and position level. The second part of the questionnaire was based on the findings of Objective One to measure the expected and current leadership competencies through a set of 25 questions. The third part comprised 18 questions to assess the degree of agreement among administrative staff regarding the contribution of servant leadership practices to their development. The items were developed based on Laub's (1999, 2018) Servant Leadership Model and subsequently modified to align with the specific context of this study. Five experts with university administration experience validated the developed instrument to evaluate the questionnaire items using Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through a pilot test on 30 administrative staff at Foshan University using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

## Results and Discussion

The research findings are organized into four sections, corresponding to the four objectives of this study.

**Research Objective One:** To explore the ideal leadership competencies for university administrative staff.

Through a systematic review of related literature on the leadership competencies of university administrative staff (See details in Appendix A), the researcher identified 25 high-frequency leadership competencies. After further analyzing the meanings of these leadership competencies and aligning them with the hierarchical structure of the Iceberg model, this research classified them into five distinct categories: motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skills. The driving forces behind individuals' willingness to assume leadership roles and responsibilities are their motives; stable and enduring characteristics are traits, while self-concept is dynamic, reflecting how individuals see themselves an individual's perception of their relationship with others. Additionally, knowledge represents the intellectual understanding required, whereas skills are manifested through observable behavior. Table 1 shows the results of the ideal leadership competencies for university administrative staff.

**Table 1**

*The Ideal Leadership Competencies for University Administrative Staff*

| Category | Competency | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Motives | Achievement Orientation | A mindset that values and prioritizes accomplishments and feels a sense of satisfaction when successfully completing challenging tasks. |
| | Tenacity | The perseverance and ego strength of sticking with their chosen direction and striving for goals in the face of difficulties, setbacks, and obstacles |
| | Initiative | The inclination to take proactive behavior and do more than job requirements or expectations |
| | Leadership Motivation | Desire to lead. |
| Traits | Ethics | Maintaining integrity and honesty, treating all individuals fairly and equitably, respecting everyone, and having excellent reputations for trustworthiness. |
| | Open-Mindedness | Be open-minded to new ideas and experiences, and consider ideas and |

| Category | Competency | Description |
|---|---|---|
| | | suggestions from others. |
| | Empathy | Understand the feelings and concerns of others, take their perspective, and show an active interest in their concerns. |
| | Political Savvy | Having keen insight and judgment in politics, and can clearly understand and deal with the political environment. |
| | Passion for the Work and People | A deep and genuine enthusiasm for work and interacting with others |
| | Service Orientation | A mindset centered on prioritizing the needs of students, faculty, staff, and stakeholders and striving to provide excellent support for their development and success |
| | Flexibility | Be flexible enough to adapt, adjust, and respond effectively to changing circumstances within the dynamic environment and diverse customer base. |
| Self-Concept | Self-Confidence | A person's confidence in their capacity or aptitude to accomplish tasks. |
| | Organizational Commitment | Be dedicated to serving the needs of the university, promoting organizational goals, or meeting organizational needs. |
| | Self-Awareness | The realistic evaluation of one's strengths and limitations, recognizing the consequences of one's own decisions and actions. |
| Knowledge | Expertise | Mastering a body of job-related knowledge (technical, professional, or managerial). |
| | Contextual Knowledge | Understanding the university's history, social role, goals & vision, atmosphere, funding structure, law & regulation, and ethics guidelines. |
| | Work Experience Knowledge | Practical knowledge gained through work and exposure. |
| Skills | Effective Communication | Effective exchange of information and ideas, including both verbal communication skills and written communication skills |
| | Strategic Thinking | The ability to analyze complex issues and make plans that align with the long-term success of the institutions |
| | Relationship Management | The ability to build good relationships, including representing the school and maintaining good relations with the differing stakeholders |
| | Analytical Thinking | The ability to comprehend a situation by breaking down complex problems or situations into smaller parts and analyzing the connections between them |
| | Innovation & Creativity | The ability to incorporate innovative new ideas or think "outside the square" to address challenges and find innovative solutions |
| | Teamwork and Cooperation | The ability to create a collaborative and harmonious environment and work cooperatively with others to achieve common goals |
| | Motivating Others | A person's ability to convince, persuade, and motivate others. |
| | Mentoring & Coaching | The ability to guide, support, and facilitate the growth and development of faculty and students |

Research Objective Two: To identify the development needs of leadership competencies for administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, China.

A total of 243 university administrative staff participated in the survey, including 125 females and 118 males. Regarding university administrative experience, 32 respondents (15.2%) had less than five years of experience. In comparison, 95 respondents (39.1%) had 6-15 years of experience, 71 respondents (29.2%) had 16-25 years of experience, and 40 respondents (16.5%) possessed work experience exceeding 26 years. Regarding educational background, 129 respondents (53.1%) held a bachelor's degree or below, 97 respondents (39.9%) possessed a master's degree, and only 17 respondents (7%) had obtained doctorate degrees. In addition, the respondents comprised university administrative staff from three positions, including 125 staff members (51.5%), 71 section-level administrative staff, and 47 division-level administrative staff (19.3%).

The following tables show the results of this objective. A higher $PN_{Imodified}$ value than the overall level, which means a more significant gap between the expected and current levels, suggests a greater need for attention and development efforts. Meanwhile, a smaller $PN_{Imodified}$ value usually indicates a lower level of need or priority for intervention. Table 2 to 7 analyze the development needs within each categories of leadership competencies.

The development needs of motive competencies for administrative staff are presented is Table 2. Motive competencies have a mean score of $PN_{Imodified}$ at 0.069. Initiative has a PN $PN_{Imodified}$ value of 0.095, and leadership motivation has a $PN_{Imodified}$ value of 0.090. Therefore, initiative and leadership motivation can be identified as the weaknesses of motives, as their scores are higher than the mean score. Also, tenacity has a $PN_{Imodified}$ value of 0.052, and achievement orientation has a $PN_{Imodified}$ value of 0.045. Therefore, tenacity and achievement orientation can be identified as the strengths of motives, as their scores are lower than the mean score.

**Table 2**

*The Priority Needs Index of Motive Competencies for Administrative Staff*

| Motives | Current | | Expected | | $PNI_{modified}$ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\bar{x}$ | Interpretation | $\bar{x}$ | Interpretation | Value | Rank |
| Achievement Orientation | 4.02 | High | 4.20 | High | 0.045 | 4 |
| Tenacity | 4.15 | High | 4.37 | High | 0.052 | 3 |
| Initiative | 3.84 | High | 4.20 | High | 0.095 | 1 |
| Leadership Motivation | 3.11 | Moderate | 3.39 | Moderate | 0.090 | 2 |
| Overall | 3.78 | High | 4.04 | High | 0.069 | |

The development needs of trait competencies for administrative staff are presented is Table 3. Trait competencies have the mean score of $PN_{Imodified}$ at 0.052. Specifically, political savvy ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.096), flexibility ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.092), and empathy ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.086) can be identified as the weaknesses of traits. Also, open-mindedness ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.030), passion for the work and people ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.035), service orientation ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.029) and ethics ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.010) can be identified as the strengths of traits.

**Table 3**

*The Priority Needs Index of Trait Competencies for Administrative Staff*

| Trait | Current | | Expected | | $PNI_{modified}$ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\bar{x}$ | Interpretation | $\bar{x}$ | Interpretation | Value | Rank |
| Ethics | 4.84 | Very High | 4.88 | Very High | 0.010 | 7 |
| Open-Mindedness | 4.60 | Very High | 4.74 | Very High | 0.030 | 5 |
| Empathy | 4.32 | High | 4.69 | Very High | 0.086 | 3 |
| Political Savvy | 3.68 | High | 4.04 | High | 0.096 | 1 |
| Passion for the Work and People | 4.50 | Very High | 4.65 | Very High | 0.035 | 4 |
| Service Orientation | 4.62 | Very High | 4.75 | Very High | 0.029 | 6 |
| Flexibility | 4.16 | High | 4.54 | High | 0.092 | 2 |
| Overall | 4.39 | High | 4.61 | Very High | 0.052 | |

The development needs of self-concept competencies for administrative staff are

presented is Table 4. Self-concept competencies have a mean score of $PNI_{modified}$ at 0.059. Specifically, self-awareness ($PNI_{modified}$=0.085), whose score is higher than the mean, can be identified as the weakness of self-concept. Also, self-confidence ($PNI_{modified}$=0.050) and organizational commitment ($PNI_{modified}$=0.044) can be identified as the strengths of traits.

**Table 4**

*The Priority Needs Index of Self-Concept Competencies for Administrative Staff*

| Self-Concept | Current | | Expected | | $PNI_{modified}$ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | x̄ | Interpretation | x̄ | Interpretation | Value | Rank |
| Self-Confidence | 4.24 | High | 4.45 | High | 0.050 | 2 |
| Organizational Com mitment | 4.14 | High | 4.32 | High | 0.044 | 3 |
| Self-Awareness | 4.02 | High | 4.36 | High | 0.085 | 1 |
| Overall | 4.13 | High | 4.38 | High | 0.059 | |

The development needs of knowledge competencies for administrative staff are presented is Table 5. Knowledge competencies have a mean score of PNImodified at 0.094. Specifically, expertise ($PNI_{modified}$=0.134) can be identified as the weakness of knowledge. Also, contextual knowledge ($PNI_{modified}$=0.063) and work experience knowledge ($PNI_{modified}$=0.087) can be identified as the strengths of knowledge.

**Table 5**

*The Priority Needs Index of Knowledge Competencies for Administrative Staff*

| Knowledge | Current | | Expected | | $PNI_{modified}$ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | x̄ | Interpretation | x̄ | Interpretation | Value | Rank |
| Expertise | 3.70 | High | 4.20 | High | 0.134 | 1 |
| Contextual Knowledge | 3.92 | High | 4.16 | High | 0.063 | 3 |
| Work Experience Knowledge | 3.97 | High | 4.31 | High | 0.087 | 2 |
| Overall | 3.86 | High | 4.23 | High | 0.094 | |

The development needs of skill competencies for administrative staff are presented is Table 6. Skill competencies have a mean score of $PNI_{modified}$ at 0.119. Specifically, motivating others ($PNI_{modified}$=0.206), effective communication ($PNI_{modified}$=0.171), mentoring & coaching ($PNI_{modified}$=0.151), innovation & creativity ($PNI_{modified}$=0.131), and strategic thinking ($PNI_{modified}$=0.121) can be identified as the weaknesses of skills. Also, relationship management ($PNI_{modified}$=0.079), teamwork and cooperation ($PNI_{modified}$=0.036), and analytical thinking ($PNI_{modified}$=0.075) can be identified as the strengths of skills.

**Table 6**

*The Priority Needs Index of Skill Competencies for Administrative Staff*

| Skills | Current | | Expected | | PNImodified | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\bar{x}$ | Interpretation | $\bar{x}$ | Interpretation | Value | Rank |
| Effective Communication | 3.71 | High | 4.35 | High | 0.171 | 2 |
| Strategic Thinking | 3.56 | High | 4.00 | High | 0.121 | 5 |
| Relationship Management | 3.95 | High | 4.26 | High | 0.079 | 6 |
| Analytical Thinking | 4.06 | High | 4.37 | High | 0.075 | 7 |
| Innovation & Creativity | 3.55 | High | 4.02 | High | 0.131 | 4 |
| Teamwork and Cooperation | 4.21 | High | 4.36 | High | 0.036 | 8 |
| Motivating Others | 3.62 | High | 4.37 | High | 0.206 | 1 |
| Mentoring & Coaching | 3.79 | High | 4.37 | High | 0.151 | 3 |
| Overall | 3.81 | High | 4.26 | High | 0.119 | |

Table 7 analyze the $PN_{Imodified}$ value of leadership competencies for university administrative staff. The mean of the $PN_{Imodified}$ of leadership competencies for university administrative staff is 0.077. Skills ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.119) and knowledge ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.094) have $PN_{Imodified}$ values that are higher than the mean. It means that skills and knowledge are weaknesses and should be prioritized for further development. Also, the $PN_{Imodified}$ of motives ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.069), self-concept ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.059), and traits ($PN_{Imodified}$=0.052) fall below the mean, so that they are strengths of leadership competencies for university administrative staff.

**Table 7**

*The Priority Needs Index of Leadership Competencies for Administrative Staff*

| Leadership Competency | Current | | Expected | | PNImodified | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\bar{x}$ | Interpretation | $\bar{x}$ | Interpretation | Value | Rank |
| Motives | 3.78 | High | 4.04 | High | 0.069 | 3 |
| Traits | 4.39 | High | 4.61 | Very High | 0.052 | 5 |
| Self-Concept | 4.13 | High | 4.38 | High | 0.059 | 4 |
| Knowledge | 3.86 | High | 4.23 | High | 0.094 | 2 |
| Skills | 3.81 | High | 4.26 | High | 0.119 | 1 |
| Overall | 3.99 | High | 4.30 | High | 0.077 | |

The questionnaire survey also measured the administrative staff's attitude to servant leadership practices. As shown in Table 8, university administrative staff highly agreed that all the servant leadership practices contributed to administrative staff development ($\bar{x}$ = 4.56). Among the six servant leadership practices, the most widely accepted was developing people ($\bar{x}$ = 4.66), particularly expecting university leaders to lead by example by modeling appropriate behavior.

**Table 8**

*Servant Leadership Practices for University Administrative Staff Development*

| Leadership Competencies | x̄ | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| **I Value People** | 4.60 | Very High |
| Put the needs of the staff ahead of their own. | 4.56 | Very High |
| Believe in the unlimited potential of each person. | 4.60 | Very High |
| Are receptive listeners. | 4.63 | Very High |
| **II Develop People** | 4.66 | Very High |
| Provide opportunities and support for people to develop to their full potential. | 4.64 | Very High |
| Lead by example by modeling appropriate behavior. | 4.74 | Very High |
| Build people up through encouragement and affirmation. | 4.59 | Very High |
| **III Build Community** | 4.50 | Very High |
| Facilitate the building of community & team. | 4.58 | Very High |
| Encourage workers to work together rather than competing against each other. | 4.25 | High |
| Value differences in people. | 4.67 | Very High |
| **IV Provide Leadership** | 4.59 | Very High |
| Communicate a clear vision of the future of the organization. | 4.58 | Very High |
| Take appropriate action when it is needed. | 4.59 | Very High |
| Are clear on goals and good at pointing the direction. | 4.60 | Very High |
| **V Share Leadership** | 4.47 | High |
| Promote open communication and sharing of information. | 4.60 | Very High |
| Give workers the power to make important decisions. | 4.39 | High |
| Do not seek special status or the "perks" of leadership. | 4.42 | High |
| **VI Display Authenticity** | 4.60 | Very High |
| Are accountable & responsible to others. | 4.61 | Very High |
| Are open to learning from those who are below them in the organization. | 4.53 | Very High |
| Demonstrate high integrity & honesty. | 4.67 | Very High |
| Overall | 4.56 | |

**Research Objective Three**

After the needs assessment, this study interviewed five administrative staff and ten instructors with at least five years of experience or more in higher education at a public university in Foshan City for design ideas and suggestions on the leadership competency model. The essential content of the leadership competency draft model was sorted by integrating the needs assessment and interview content results. After reviewing other relevant models or research, a circular leadership competency model was drafted. To comprehensively understand the factors contributing to effective leadership among university administrative staff, all the leadership competencies were incorporated into the model, but the categories or elements that require priority development were highlighted. Considering that leadership competencies training is a dynamic process that necessitates integrating learning and practical application, effective leadership practices to facilitate administrative staff development were also incorporated into the model.

**Research Objective Four**

After proposing the model draft, the researcher consulted with ten experts to validate the leadership competency model. All these experts are experiences educators in the field of university administration and leadership, affiliated with a public university located in Foshan City. The components and concepts of the draft leadership competency model were highly

regarded by the experts, who also identified areas that require modification. Considering the experts' feedback and suggestions, the researcher modified the model accordingly. The final model consists of three distinct parts, as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Modified Leadership Competency Model for University Administrative Staff*
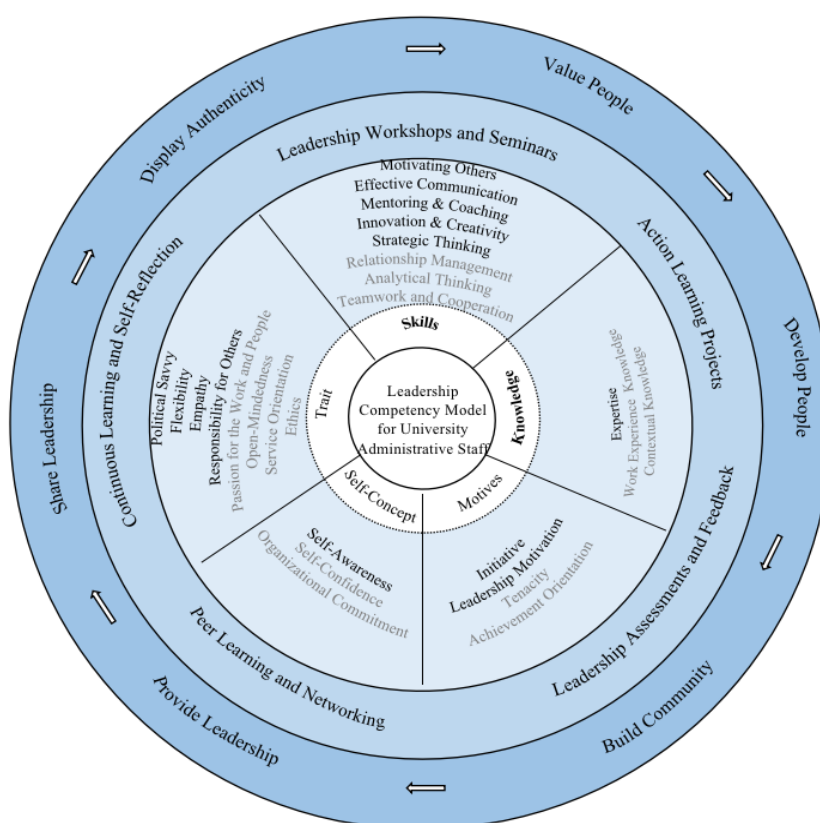


The first part is the leadership competencies for university administrative development, which provides a solid foundation for the overall model. The model outlines the motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skills administrative staff should possess to excel in their leadership roles. Among these factors, weaknesses lie in skills and knowledge, which should be prioritized for further development among university administrative staff. Specifically, in terms of skills, it is imperative to emphasize motivating others, effective communication, mentoring & coaching, innovation & creativity, and strategic thinking among university administrative staff. Regarding knowledge, the emphasis should be placed on expertise among university administrative staff. Regarding motives, it is crucial to prioritize initiative and leadership motivation for university administrative staff. Concerning self-concept, a strong emphasis must be placed on self-awareness among university administrative staff. Lastly, traits such as political savvy, flexibility, empathy, and responsibility towards others need to be emphasized for university administrative staff.

The second part comprises leadership training activities, including leadership workshops and seminars, action learning projects, leadership assessments and feedback, peer learning and networking, and continuous learning and self-reflection. These activities provide administrative staff valuable opportunities to develop and enhance their leadership competencies.

The third part is the servant leadership practices to facilitate administrative staff development. University leaders must value people, develop people, build community, provide leadership, share leadership, and display authenticity. These practices exhibited by university leaders are essential in creating an environment conducive to staff growth and success.

## Conclusion and Discussions

Based on the findings of this research, a leadership competency model for administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City has been proposed. This model provides a comprehensive understanding of the leadership competencies for administrative staff at Foshan University. Administrative staff should possess specific motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skills to excel in their leadership roles. Currently, less research has investigated the leadership motives of university administrative staff (Badura et al., 2021). Understanding the underlying motives for effective leadership plays a vital role in leadership training and development within organizations, as it aids in evaluating employees' willingness to exert effort toward fulfilling their leadership duties (DeRue & Myers, 2014). However, the leadership competencies with both the lowest expected and current levels in this were motives, indicating that university administrative staff did not realize the importance of motives.

The needs assessment indicated that skills and knowledge are weaknesses and should be prioritized for further development among university administrative staff. In comparison, the hidden self-concept, traits, and motives that require effort-intensive activities have a smaller gap between expected and current levels. A probable reason is that the recruitment of administrative staff at a public university in Foshan City was effective, valuing characteristics that are inherently difficult to cultivate. Additionally, from the list of ideal leadership competencies for university leadership, it can be concluded that effective administrative staff leadership demonstrates various leadership styles, including transformational leadership, servant leadership, and situational leadership.

Servant leadership practices and leadership development activities play crucial role in leadership training among university administrative staff (Drago-Severson & Null, 2012; Megheirkouni, 2016). University leaders should practice servant leadership to facilitate leadership development among university administrative staff, including valuing people, developing people, and building community, providing leadership, sharing leadership and displaying authenticity. Meanwhile, various leadership development activities can be incorporated in the leadership training, involving leadership workshops and seminars, action learning projects, leadership assessments and feedback, peer learning and networking, continuous learning, and self-reflection.

## Recommendations

According to the research findings, this study puts forward the following recommendations.

University leaders should pay significant attention to hidden self-concepts, traits, and motive competencies when recruiting administrative staff. In contrast, training programs for existing administrative personnel should focus on visible knowledge and skill competencies. Furthermore, it is recommended that university leaders adopt servant leadership and implement leadership development activities specifically designed for administrative staff, targeting the areas for improvement in the leadership competency model. Public universities in the regions of China should consider the specific needs and cultural context when applying the leadership competency model in this study.

University administrative staff needs to recognize the significance of leadership competencies, regularly assess their leadership competencies, and strive for improvement. They are recommended to actively engage in continuous self-study and available leadership training activities to foster leadership competencies that align with the university's goals and values.

Additionally, future researchers are recommended to track the impacts of leadership development initiatives over time longitudinally. This can help evaluate the sustainability of improvements in leadership competencies and inform future strategic planning.

## Limitation

The limitation of this research lies in the generalizability of the study findings. The population of this research is 277, while only 243 university administrative staff responded. Despite the high response rate, selection bias is still possible if certain groups within the administrative staff exhibit disproportionate participation rates, potentially influencing the research findings. Also, since this study is specific to Foshan University, its results may not be generalizable to other universities or organizations.

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## APPENDIX A

Sources of Information for Systematic Review on Leadership Competencies

| No. | Author(s) | Study Title |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ruben et al. (2023) | A guide for leaders in higher education: Concepts, competencies, and tools |
| 2 | Teniente-Matson (2013) | A leadership competency study of higher education chief business officers |
| 3 | Jung and Shin (2015) | Administrative staff members' job competency and job satisfaction in a Korean research university |
| 4 | Spendlove (2007) | Competencies for effective leadership in higher education |
| 5 | Chansiri (2008) | Core competency of public university supporting-line administrators: An analysis, techniques of development and structure of the program for development |
| 6 | Smith (2007) | Creating and testing the higher education leadership competencies (HELC) model: A study of athletics directors, senior student affairs officers, and chief academic officer |
| 7 | Parylo and Zepeda (2014) | Describing and "effective" principal: Perceptions of the central office leaders |
| 8 | Leong (2013) | Developing middle manager competencies in the Chinese university: A grounded theory study |
| 9 | Ariratana et al. (2015) | Development of leadership soft skills among educational administrators |
| 10 | Polat et al. (2017) | Diversity leadership skills of school administrators: A scale development study |
| 11 | Bektas (2017). | Effective Leadership: A Study on the Administrative Staff |
| 12 | Vilkinas et al. (2020) | Effective leadership: Considering the confluence of the leader's motivations, behaviors, and their reflective ability |
| 13 | Huang (2013) | Effective school leadership competencies: A psychometric study of the NASSP 21st century school administrator skills instrument |
| 14 | Maulding et al. (2012) | Emotional intelligence and resilience as predictors of leadership in school administrators |
| 15 | Dunn et al. (2014) | Gender and leadership: Reflections of women in higher education administration |
| 16 | Gayle et al. (2011) | Governance in the Twenty-first-century university: Approaches to effective leadership and strategic management |
| 17 | Yang (2005) | Institutional Challenges and Leadership Competencies in Chinese Ministry of Education Directed Universities in Implementing the 1999 Chinese Action Scheme for Invigorating Education Towards the 21ST Century |
| 18 | Ramsey (2005) | Lead, follow, or get out of the way: How to be a more effective leader in today's schools. |

| No. | Author(s) | Study Title |
|---|---|---|
| 19 | Wheat and Hill (2016) | Leadership identities, styles, and practices of women university administrators and presidents |
| 20 | Kalargyrou et al. (2012) | Leadership skills in management education |
| 21 | Eddy and Kirby (2020) | Leading for tomorrow: a primer for succeeding in higher education leadership |
| 22 | Wang (2006) | Middle manager leadership competencies in China: perceptions of MBA and EMBA students at Nankai University |
| 23 | Hamlin and Patel (2017) | Perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness within higher education in France |
| 24 | Burch et al. (2015) | Perceptions of administrators' servant leadership qualities at a Christian university: A descriptive study |
| 25 | Vilkinas et al. (2009) | Predictors of leadership effectiveness for Chinese managers |
| 26 | Moldazhanova et al. (2018) | Qualities of a modern manager in the education system: A study of the teaching and administrative staff of Universities in the Republik of Kazakhstan |
| 27 | Gorton et al. (2007) | School Leadership & Administration |
| 28 | Leithwood et al. (2008) | Seven strong claims about successful school leadership |
| 29 | Reyes (2018) | Teachers and school administrators' perceptions of the strategic leadership practices of school administrators |
| 30 | Niewiesk and Garrity-Rokous (2021) | The academic leadership framework: A guide for systematic assessment and improvement of academic administrative work |
| 31 | Stueber (2000) | The characteristics of an effective Lutheran high school administrator |
| 32 | Harris et al. (2004) | The characteristics, behaviors, and training of effective educational/leadership department chairs |
| 33 | Smith et al. (2009) | The Chief Student Affairs Officer: What constitutes effective leadership |
| 34 | McCaffery (2018) | The higher education manager's handbook: Effective leadership and management in universities and colleges |
| 35 | Nderitu and Bula (2022) | The influence of leadership performance of non–academic employees in public learning institutions |
| 36 | Day (2004) | The passion for successful leadership |
| 37 | McIllhatton et al. (1993） | What can educational managers learn from private enterprises? |
| 38 | Kalargyrou and Woods (2009) | What makes a college administrator an effective leader? A study |
| 39 | Chait (1988) | What makes a leader in higher education |
| 40 | Middle-level University Leader Competency Research Group (2014) | Research on the competency model of university middle-level leading and management cadres |
| 41 | Zhao and Sun (2012) | Research on the competency model of Party and administrative leaders in higher education institutions |
| 42 | Lin et al. (2007) | The preliminary construction of the competency model of middle management cadres in universities] |
| 43 | Xie et al. (2017) | A Study of Developing and Management System for University Cadres: Competency Model Perspective |
| 44 | Liu and Liu (2006) | Some suggestions and reflections on strengthening the construction of university leading group |
| 45 | Cai (2011) | A brief discussion on the law of scientific development of university leading group construction |
| 46 | Chen (2013) | The construction of cadre troops unifying knowing and doing and building the university meets the people's satisfaction |
| 47 | Zhang (2008) | Educational Leadership |
| 48 | Zhang (2006) | On the innovative quality of university leading cadres in the new period |
| 49 | Tang (2012) | Analysis on the quality construction of middle-level cadres in higher education institutions |
| 50 | Liu (2005) | On the ability and quality construction of leading cadres in higher education institutions in the new period |

| No. | Author(s) | Study Title |
|---|---|---|
| 51 | Ju et al. (2021) | A Study of Administrative Staff's Job Competency and its Promotion Strategy in the Construction of Modern University Governance System-Based on the Case of University A |
| 52 | Chen (2007) | Functional characteristics and quality cultivation of middle-level leaders in higher education institutions from the perspective of modern education |
| 53 | Liu and Zhou (2014) | The College Leaders' Capacity Building in New Period |