

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY EMERGING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

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**ABSTRACT. Purpose:** This paper explores the 21st-century emerging leadership competencies in a Malaysian higher learning institution. As the forces of change are transforming the leadership landscape, new leadership capabilities are required for the 21st-century evolving globalized environment. Hence, research is needed to determine the key emerging leadership competencies in the higher learning institutions. **Findings:** The significance of the results were the relevance of the leadership competency concept in the context of higher learning institution, future leaders need competencies for effective leadership, and the core competencies of academic leaders are necessary. Additionally, besides the discussion on the emerging leadership competencies of visioning and strategic thinking, leadership agility, adaptability and change, relationship and collaboration, the *new findings* from the field data were corporate leadership and cross-cultural competence. **Research limitations/implications:** This qualitative case study focused on one higher learning institution. At the same time the research also provided the in-depth context-rich information. **Practical implications:** The knowledge and adoption of the emerging leadership competencies concept would enhance the development of progressive leadership.

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**Originality/value:** There is limited study on the emerging leadership competencies in the higher learning institutions. Hence, there is value in this research. The findings were *original* contributions to knowledge. Also, this study showed the link between the expected attributes of institutional leadership to the dimensions of transformational leadership and the key emerging leadership competencies.

**Keywords:** *Emerging leadership competencies, higher education, progressive leadership.*

**JEL Classification:** L290

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## **Introduction**

Literature has shown that the performances of organizations are attributed to leadership capabilities (Pradham & Pradhan, 2015; Yildiz, Basturk, & Boz, 2014). However, there are many challenges confronting the leaders and the organizations. These challenging factors have an effect on the changing leadership landscape and environment which were attributed to the effects of the forces of change. The forces of change include globalization, advancement of technology, speed of change, and scientific and social changes (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2014; Mursal, Idaya, & Dahie, 2016; Wayland, 2015). Leadership in the 21st century has evolved (Pang, 2013; Van Wart, 2013). These changes result in uncertainty and ambiguity (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Petrie, 2014). These evolving trends are causing those concerns to rethink the appropriateness of effective organizational leadership for performance (Boatman & Wellins, 2011). New challenges require new approaches (O'Connell, 2014; Pisapia, 2009).

Scholars have indicated that leading in the 21st-century necessitate an evaluation of leadership practices (Black, 2015; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). There is a need to consider a *new* blueprint and

construct to navigate the uncharted terrain of the changing environment (Darling & Cunningham, 2016; Marques, 2015; Pang, 2013). Different and specific skills may be needed instead (Jogulu, 2010; Petrie, 2014; Van Wart, 2013). It is pertinent to highlight that the leadership competency theorists were proposing the leadership competency approach as the viable option for effective and progressive leadership (De Beeck & Hondeghen, 2009; Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007; Tucker & Lam, 2014; Szeto, Lee, Hallinger, 2015). Leadership needs to reflect the reality of the times and environment.

There were calls for more research to be conducted in the Asian context in understanding the Asian leadership practices (Arvey, Dhanaraj, Javidan, & Zhang, 2015; Kennedy & Mansor, 2000; Yammarino, 2013). Traditionally, most leadership theories originated and was conducted in the western industrialized world (Arvey et al., 2015; Jogulu & Ferkins, 2012; Oc, 2017). As such, the question of the suitability of leadership application outside of the western culture was questioned. At the same time, though there were the various related leadership studies carry out in the Malaysian context, however, there are still the lacked studies in organizational leadership, using the competency approach (Ansari, Ahmad, & Aafaqi, 2004; Boyatzis, 2008; Jogulu & Ferkins, 2012).

In the past, research on leadership was examined from the various leadership theoretical perspectives across the different industries including the higher education sector. Some of the research in educational institutions focused on leadership models and styles such as hierarchical, *lessez-faire*, academic, individual, transactional, transformational, distributed, collaborative or other related leadership behaviors either task-oriented, development-orientated, and relations-oriented (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016; Anthony & Anthony, 2017; Black, 2015). Most of these theories of educational leadership were derived from the corporate practice. However, there were limited studies on the emerging leadership competencies in the higher education sector (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016; Chow, Salleh, & Ismail, 2017a; De Beeck & Hondeghem, 2009; Middlehurst, Goreham, & Woodfield, 2009; Nair, 2012).

The concept of effective leadership in the higher learning institution is changing. There are new expectations of leaders in managing the universities (MEB 2015-2025 (HE) 2015; UniTP, Orange Book, 2016). The complex challenges in the higher education leadership require the

appropriate leadership competencies (Anthony & Anthony, 2017; Alongerie & Majauskaite, 2016; Rasul Jan, 2014; Shahmandi, Silong, Ismail, Samah, & Othman, 2011). Researchers were proposing that leading in the globalized world requires the emerging leadership competencies. (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Chow et al., 2017a; De Beeck & Hondeghem, 2009). At the same time, there were suggestions for the leadership competency concept as viable option for effective leadership (Chow et al., 2017a; Northouse, 2013). There is a need to review the current leadership competencies in the higher learning institutions (Bird, & Mendenhall, 2015; Rasul Jan, 2014; Tucker & Lam, 2014). Hence, research is needed to determine the key emerging leadership competencies for effective leadership in the higher education institutions (Almatrooshi, Singh, & Farouk, 2016; Middlehurst et al., 2009). This study is about exploring on the emerging leadership competencies in the context of a selected Malaysian higher learning institution in light of the 21st-century globalized environment for leadership development and practice. Specifically, the research question used to guide the enquiry is: What are the emerging leadership competencies in the higher learning institution?

## **Literature Review**

The overview of literature shows that the nature of leadership has evolved over the past decades. Researchers have used the different theoretical approaches and concepts to categorize the complex study of leadership such as paradigms, frameworks, models, eras, and school of thoughts (Dinh et al., 2014; Dionne et al., 2014). The focus of the theoretical concepts in each period shows the emphasis of the teaching and approach. Furthermore, with regards to theories scholars were stressing that newer theories will eventually emerge to replace the older theories (Yammarino, 2013). Dinh et al. (2014) in their research on leadership theories identified a total of sixty (67) theories, where forty-one (41) were classified as established theories and 26 as emerging theories.

There is consensus that leadership plays a significant role on the efficiency and performance of organizations (Muijs, 2011; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015; Yuen Lee, 2011). Researchers stressed that leadership contributed to about forty-five per cent (45%) of an organization's performance (Howell & Coastley, 2006). In short, leadership has an impact

on organizational performance. There are suggestions that there are link between leadership competencies and organizational performance outcomes (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015; Yildiz et al., 2014). The review of literature of this study includes the highlight of the 21st-century paradigm, the integrative strategies of conceptualizing leadership, leadership in the higher education institutions, the transformational leadership, cross-cultural leadership, the leadership competency concept, and the proposed emerging leadership competencies.

#### *The 21st-century leadership paradigm*

The 21st-century is also referred to as the *knowledge* era. The new millennium leadership landscape has also resulted in the complex environment because of the increase changes at work (Lussier & Achua, 2016; O'Connell, 2014). The changes include the paradigm shifts in many spheres from the industrial era to the knowledge economy (Ross, 1991; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). These changes have an impact on organizations and leadership behaviours. Thus, a simplistic and a conventional approach towards understanding leadership is inadequate. The old leadership mind-set is not in congruent with the times (Ashkenas, Siegal, & Spiegel, 2013; Petrie, 2014). Leadership thinking needs to change for strategic purposes so as to be able to compete for optimum results.

In understanding the new paradigm of leadership, there must be the acceptance of the evolving nature of leadership (O'Connell, 2014; Van Wart, 2013). The changed in paradigm would also result in adopting the appropriate leadership style. Leaders were urged to adopt a new mind-set of *adaptive thinking* in organizational leadership in the new era environment (Pisapia, 2006; 2009). Effective leaders must recognize the new reality of the times as it has shaped the face of leadership (Ashkenas et al., 2013; Marques, 2015). The 21st century contemporary leaders should shift their reference point of evaluation and benchmark to be strategic and competitive in tandem with the times (Mosley & Matviuk, 2010; O'Connell, 2014; Pisapia, 2009).

#### *The Integrative Strategies of Conceptualizing Leadership*

Leadership researchers were advocating that leadership development in the new millennium ought to be innovative and dynamic (Black, 2015; Day et al., 2014; Petrie, 2014). They were highlighting for an *integrative strategies* approach of building theory (Avolio, 2007; Dinh et al., 2014;

Gerard, Mcmillan & D'Annunzio-Green, 2017). Essentially, the integrative perspectives are based on the theories, related knowledge, and how the concepts relate to the emergence of *new* leadership construct to advance leadership. The new emerging leadership concept of this study included the incorporation of the theories, the key emerging leadership competencies, and current knowledge. This proposal offers an alternative leadership framework that is viable for today's world as well as for the future reference (Darling & Cunningham, 2016; Gerard et al., 2017). The integrated strategies approach was advocated by the different researchers such as Avolio (2007), Dinh et al., (2014), Weiss & Molinaro, (2006), and Van Seters & Field, (1990). There is contention that the complex globalized 21st-century landscape demands such an integrated leadership capability (Pisapia, 2009; Van Wart, 2013). This study resulted in the emerging leadership competencies concept that combined the respective leadership theoretical concepts to form a comprehensive sustaining leadership construct.

In recent times there have been calls by researchers to include the sustainability element in leadership development (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2017). The essence of sustainability development incorporates the long-term consideration for leaders, organizations, and the systems employing sustainable principles (Rogers, 2011). There are discussions of the place of leadership competencies as influencing sustainable development (Tabassi et al., 2016). The conceptualization of the emerging leadership competencies concept of this study encapsulates the underlying principles of sustainable development in the various related aspects accordingly.

#### *Leadership in the Higher Education Institutions*

Organizations of all types are identifying methods that would lead to successful outcomes (Taylor, Cornelius, & Colvin, 2014). The higher education sector is also experiencing many challenges because of its values, goals, and complexities. It is imperative for leaders to be aware of the changed environment; the challenges faced and develop the leadership capacity for performance (Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Shahmandi et al., 2011). The development of the knowledge, competencies, and skills would contribute towards effective leadership in the higher learning institutions (MEB 2015-2025 (HE) 2015; UniTP, Orange Book, 2016; Mohd, 2013).

In terms of organizational sector, leadership research in the past was mainly conducted in the military and business sector (Birnbaum, 1988). Leadership studies in the higher education are considered as still in the relatively early stage in comparison to leadership studies (Middlehurst, 2012). Furthermore, it is said that leadership practices employed at the higher education were generally adapted from the business field (Spendlove, 2007). However, there are differences and uniqueness between the educational institutions and the other types of organizations. There are factors involved that makes leadership in the higher education distinctive such as policy issues, economic, and social dynamic (Ghasemy, Hussin, & Daud, 2016). Another significant point raised in literature is that there is scarce research on leadership in the higher education sector particularly the emerging leadership competencies (Middlehurst et al., 2009). At the same time the higher education landscape is also changing in the past two (2) decades (Alonderience & Majauskaite, 2016; Chinta, Kebritch, & Elias, 2016; Pang, 2013).

#### *Transformational leadership*

The transformational leadership has emerged as one of the dominant leadership paradigms adopted for leadership practice across the various sectors in the last twenty years (Black, 2015; Giddens, 2017). The essence of transformational leadership concerns the effect of change on the organization and people (Muijs, 2011). Research has shown that transformational leadership has proven to be effective world-wide and preferred in contrast to other leadership theories (Deinert, Homan, Boer, Voelpel, & Gutermann, 2015). There was also evidence that transformational leadership is effective universally and accepted in the education field (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016; Giddens, 2017; Litz, 2011). Research has shown that the Malaysian cultural context and values is likely to support the transformational leadership paradigm (Jogulu & Ferkins, 2012; Wahab, Rahmat, Yusof, & Mohamed, 2016).

There was indication that transformational leadership has been promoted implicitly as the preferred leadership approach for leaders in the Malaysian higher learning institutions (MEB 2015-2025 (HE) (2015). This study linked the behaviors of the expected excellence institutional leader highlighted in the publication by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, to the four dimensions of the transformational leadership,

leading to the key emerging leadership competencies of this study (MEB 2015-2025 (HE) (2015; UniTP, Orange Book, 2016). The four dimensions of transformation leadership are inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and individual consideration (Giddens, 2017; Pawar, 2016; Wahab et al., 2016).

### *Cross-cultural leadership*

There are values in the understanding of cross-cultural competence in leadership practice (Chow, Salleh, & Ismail, 2017b; Bartel-Radic & Giannelloni, 2017). Schein (1992) states, "Leadership and culture are intertwined" (p. 273). Culture has an effect on leadership styles, behaviours, and effectiveness (Hanges, Aiken, Park, & Su, 2016; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Researchers were advocating for an integrated perspective of cross-cultural perspective in management including research in educational leadership (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2015; Szeto et al., 2015). The interconnectedness of today's globalized world has resulted in the cultural diversity of organizational setting and society. Hence, is it needful to understand the cross-cultural factors in the exercise of effective leadership.

Research has shown that cross-cultural competency has been identified as one of the key capabilities required for professional success in the future (Future Work Skills 2020, 2011). According to Livermore (2010) a high percentage of ninety percent (90%) of leaders from sixty-eight (68) nations considered cross-cultural leadership as a priority in the coming century. Culture-research focus in international business is becoming increasingly important (Shi & Wang, 2011). It is necessary for leaders in the Malaysian organizational context to inculcate a multi-cultural understanding of leadership (Jogulu & Ferkins, 2012; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008). A sense of cultural intelligence, intercultural competency, and adaptability is an asset for those in leadership (Bartel-Radic & Giannelloni, 2017; Maldonado & Vera, 2014; Nunes, Felix, & Prates, 2017). The understanding of culture facilitates leaders to apply the appropriate principles of leadership practice that *transcends* culture (Chow et al., 2017b; Gurban & Tarasyev, 2016; Middlehurst, 2012). It is an asset for leaders in the 21st-century to be competent cross-culturally to interact and excel in the present-day interconnected societies (Northouse, 2013).

### *Leadership competency theory*

Over the years, the competency model has emerged as a significant leadership concept. The development of the competency approach is credited to David McClelland, a Harvard University professor. Northouse (2013) stressed that the skill-based approach is a focused way of developing effective leadership. Leadership competency has been linked to the *quality* of leadership (Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Chow et al., 2017a). Most of the definitions of competency have to do with effectiveness and superior performance (Hoffman, 1999; McClelland, 1973; Sutton & Watson, 2013). The competency concept forms the theoretical base for the emerging leadership competencies (Goldman, Schlumpf, & Scott, 2017; Vizirani, 2010). Researchers further predicted that due to the many changes in many organizational sectors, there will be *more focus* on the emerging leadership competencies (Chow et al., 2017a; De Beeck & Hondeghem, 2009; Ivancevich et al., 2014). In addition, the leadership competencies can be leverage on to develop a leadership distinctiveness of the organization (Intagliata, Ulrich, & Smallwood, 2000).

### *Key emerging leadership competencies*

Studies have shown that the 21st-century leaders and organizations need the emerging leadership competencies (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Dinh et al., 2014; Van Wart, 2013). As the leadership landscape continues to change and emerging leadership competencies are expected to emerge (Ivancevich et al., 2014; Visagies Linde, & Havenga, 2011). Leadership for best practice will evolve (Hagermann & Stroope, 2013; UniTP, Orange Book, 2016). It is necessary to explore on the key emerging leadership competencies that contribute to leadership advancement (Almatrooshi et al., 2016; Bird & Mendenhall, 2016; Black, 2015; Van Wart, 2013). Traditional leadership skills of the past are not enough to navigate the challenging changing environment (Boatman & Wellins, 2011; Visagie et al., 2011).

Leadership approaches for the knowledge era need to be in concert with the environment (Marques, 2015; Ashkenas et al., 2013). Future leaders are advised to develop in the key competencies that contribute to performance (Black, 2015; UniTP, Orange Book, 2016). Some of the emerging competencies such as adaptive thinking, social intelligence, cross-cultural competence, and collaboration were considered as key

competencies for progressive leadership aim for professional success (Future Work Skills 2020, 2011; Tucker & Lam, 2014). This section on the emerging leadership competencies focuses on these competencies of visioning and strategic thinking, leadership agility, adaptability and change, and relationship and collaboration. These theoretical concepts of strategic, adaptive, and relational leadership are considered as emerging concepts (O'Connell, 2014; Wagner, 2008).

### *Visioning and strategic thinking*

The concept of visioning is linked to strategic thinking. Visioning and strategic thinking plays a crucial role in leadership. Vision is a result of strategic thinking. Strategic thinkers were described as visionaries. Strategic thinking is essential to leadership (Goldman & Scott, 2016, 2017; Pang & Pisapia, 2012; Petrie, 2014). Fundamentally, visioning and strategic thinking is the abilities to create a future goal, direction, and effectiveness for the organization (Szeto et al., 2015; Vecchiato, 2014). Visions are like compass that shows the organization its desired direction or goal for the future while strategies involve the various plans formulated to achieve the desired outcomes.

### *Leadership agility*

The notion of agility connotes the idea of the capability to excel in an uncertain and unpredictable environment (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; McPherson, 2016). Literature highlighted that the two main attributes of the definition of agility are flexibility and adaptability (Sherehiy, Karwowski & Layer, 2007). In addition, leadership agility has been described as the leadership abilities consisting of the characteristics of "robustness, resilience, responsiveness, flexibility, innovation, and adaptation" (As cited in Alberts, 2007). Leadership agility is the capability to navigate the complex situations in sustaining the direction and stability (McPherson, 2016). Essentially, it is the leadership skill of the leader to lead well even in a fast changing and complex environment (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Mclean, 2014). The word agility is preferred in comparison to flexibility as agility portrays the idea of intentional and proactive stance.

### *Adaptability and change*

Adaptability is linked to change. The concept of adaptability is currently an emerging field of study (Cocojar, 2008; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Fundamentally it is about being flexible when things change (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The word adaptive carries the idea of the ability to change to be relevant or suitable at the necessary working level (Petrie, 2014). Adaptive suggest the ability to adjust one's leadership and organization to suit the changing environment to compete. Other similar words include versatile, flexible, adaptable, and agile (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Adaptability and change are central to the other leadership competencies and organizational development. The paradigm of adaptability and change is significant at the personal as well as the organizational level (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Bin Taher, Krotov, & Silva, 2015). Adaptability is described as a competitive advantage for leadership and the organization.

### *Relationship and collaboration*

Relationship and collaboration are related. Collaboration simply means to work together. The paradigm of relationship and collaboration is synonymous with other terms such as shared, inclusive, distributed, participatory, collective, cooperative, and relational (Allen et al., 1999). It is about relational leadership that focuses on the common ground to work together (Cameron & Green, 2012). Researchers have argued that the collaborative leadership is preferred in comparison to the hierarchical leadership approaches (Ibarra & Hensen, 2011; Pisapia, 2009; Tucker & Lam, 2014). The collaborative leadership is classified as one of the transnational competencies that establish strategic relationships (Patterson, Dannhauser, & Stone, 2007). Other related terms include networking, communicating, coordination, and cooperation. Relationship and collaboration are considered as the leadership competencies most favoured in organizations (Black, 2015; Visagie et al., 2011). Additionally, relationship and collaboration are considered as the most suited for the modern organizations (James, 2011; Yammarino, 2013).

## **Methodology**

This section discussed on the research design, selection of case and the participants, the case study in-depth interview, instrument, and data analysis. The methodology involves the process of the research. The

methodology of this study is based on the interpretative paradigm of qualitative case study. There is a lacked empirical study in the emerging leadership study in the higher education institutions. The choice of the methodology is to facilitate answering the question of the study. As such the qualitative case study is appropriate to develop an in-depth understanding of the topic on the 21st-century emerging leadership competencies in the selected Malaysian higher learning institution.

### *Research design*

A research design guides the conduct of the study. This study employed the *qualitative case study*. The qualitative approach is able to provide the context rich data suitable for the study on leadership competencies (Arvey et al., 2015). The qualitative paradigm is suitable for leadership studies due to the multi-discipline nature of the field (Arvey, et al., 2015). It is also suitable for the emergent forms of leadership (Bryman, 2004). The qualitative case study explores the contemporary case in its real-world context in-depth (Takahashi, Ishikawa, & Kanai, 2012; Yin, 2009). Most importantly, the research design supports the topic and research question (Neuman, 2006). Hence, the qualitative case study is the appropriate research design.

### *Selection of the site and participants*

Cases were chosen for research because they would fulfill the purpose of the study. A case can refer to an individual, a group of people, an organization, a community or an era (Cepeda & Martin, 2005; Yin, 2009). The guidelines criteria for the choice of the site and participants includes the organization that has a board of directors and management team that can best offer the leadership insights on the study topic. Therefore, the choice of the case for this study is a selected higher learning institution that has a board of directors and management team. The choice of the university is because it has excelled in performance as an educational institution since its inception in 1931. The university's progress and achievements reflected the organization's visionary and capable leadership. University Putra Malaysia (UPM) which was in the Klang valley, Malaysia, is one of the premier universities as well as one of the research universities in the country among other accomplishments.

Furthermore, UPM has evolved into a premiere institution that has excelled in its rankings and won awards. More importantly the researcher is well supported for the cause of research and data collection.

The purposeful sampling technique was used to select the participants for data collection. Purposeful sampling involves choosing the site and participant that can best help the study. The sampling consisted of twelve (12) participants including two (2) former top leaders comprising of nine (9) males and three (3) females. All the participants have long years of leadership experiences ranging from fourteen (14) years to thirty-seven (37) years.

#### *Case study in-depth interview*

The case study used the various means of data collection. The sources of data collection were in-depth interviews, observations, information from the participant's profiles, and documents or related publications. However, the main source of data collection was the face to face in-depth interview with the participants (Megheirkouni, 2017; Plano-Clark & Cresswell, 2015). The consent letter was sent to the university main administrative office for the approval of data collection. The researcher periodically followed-up with the respective participants for the confirmation of data collection. Upon receiving the confirmation to proceed, a list of the proposed participants was scheduled, and arrangement made for the interview sessions. The twelve interviews sessions were followed up by a second brief clarification meeting of about fifteen minutes and the member check of the interview transcripts via emails. All interviews were conducted at the respective participant's offices that lasted about forty-five (45) minutes to one (1) hour fifteen (15) minutes. In qualitative study, the researcher is the research instrument. In preparing for the study, the researcher was prepared in terms of taking the courses in basic and advance qualitative classes to be familiar and be prepared as a qualitative researcher.

#### *Pilot study*

A pilot study was conducted to improve the data collection process and the interview protocol. It is also an opportunity to conduct the process of interview before the actual research. An interview

protocol was prepared which served as a guide to the data collection process. An interview questions with probing questions were also prepared. The plans for data collection together with the interview protocol, and interview questions were reviewed by the committee of the study project for accuracy. The pilot study was conducted by the researcher with a university leader to test and refine the interview questions. The check and balance process facilitate the rigor of the data collection process. The flexibility of the qualitative research approach allows the researcher to refine the research process accordingly.

### *Data analysis*

The qualitative data analysis is about making sense of the data and condensing it into emerging themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The overview of the processing of data involves data collection, data processing, and data analysis. The data analysis of the study was analyzed manually. The data analysis process included the steps of preparation, exploration, coding, categorizing, and developing themes (Plano-Clark & Cresswell, 2015). In preparing the data, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. The transcripts were sent back to the participants for *member check* as was agreed upon. During the exploration stage, the researcher was immersed in the interview transcripts including critical reflection, highlight key ideas, and quotations in the data sheet. Coding is the process of labelling and interpreting the meaning accordingly (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Categorizing is about assigning the codes to groups or family codes including constant comparison. Themes are patterns that emerged which are link to the research questions. This study used the thematic analysis of *layering and interconnecting* (Plano-Clark & Cresswell, 2015). There were multiple strategies used to validate the findings. The criteria employed to guide the trustworthiness of the results were credibility, dependability, peer review of interview protocol and data analysis, members checking of interview transcripts, triangulation, and audit trial (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through the data analysis procedures, the data were reduced and condensed into emerging themes which were the findings of the study.

## Findings and discussions

Based on the results of the findings there were two main themes that emerged followed by the related sub-themes. The two main themes are the leadership competency concept and the emerging leadership competencies (Table 1). Under the theme of leadership competency concept were the subthemes of competency relevant, future leaders need competencies, and core competencies necessary. Within the theme of emerging leadership competencies are the subthemes of corporate leadership, visioning and strategic thinking, leadership agility, adaptability and change, relationship and collaboration, and cross-cultural competence (Table 1).

**Table 1: Findings of the Study**

Themes	Leadership competency concept	Emerging leadership competencies
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competency concept relevant</li> <li>• Future leaders need competencies</li> <li>• Core competencies necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate leadership</li> <li>• Visioning and strategic thinking</li> <li>• Leadership agility</li> <li>• Adaptability and change</li> <li>• Relationship and collaboration</li> <li>• Cross-cultural competence</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' compilation

### *Leadership competency theory*

This section discussed on the main theme of the leadership competency concept and the emerging leadership competencies with the related sub-themes.

### *Competency concept relevance*

All the participants concurred that the competency concept is relevant in the higher learning institution context. One of the participants says that the competency concept is not only germane, but it is necessary.

A significant thought expressed was that if a person is appointed into a leadership role, he or she should find out the competencies required and develop accordingly so that they would be effective. The finding showed the flexibility and strength of the leadership competency concept.

Studies have indicated that competencies formed the basis for effective leadership performance (Sengupta, Venkatesh, & K. Sinha, 2013; Vizirani, 2010; Young & Dulewicz, 2009). The competency concept is expected to emerge as the viable option for leadership practice in the 21st-century knowledge-based organizations (De Beer & Hondeghem, 2009; Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly, Marks, 2000; Northouse, 2013; Szeto et al., 2015). The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has highlighted and described the similar leadership competencies in its related publications or guide book (UniTP, Orange Book, 2016).

#### *Future leaders need competencies*

Half of the participants interviewed indicated that modern and future leaders required some key leadership competencies for effective leadership. One of the factors for this view is the changing education and leadership landscape (Pisapia, 2009; Visagie et al., 2011; UniTP, Orange Book, 2016). Due to this development, new leadership capabilities are needed (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; O'Connell, 2014; Van Wart, 2013). Leadership competencies enhance the capability of the individual. The globalized organizational environment coupled with the many challenges faced in the higher education sector requires a multi-facet approach to leadership (Pisapia, 2009; O'Connell, 2014). Future or potential leaders are urged to *identify* and *nurture* the related leadership competencies for effective leadership (UniTP, Orange Book, 2016).

#### *Necessary core competencies*

In every profession there are cores or baseline competencies expected of the person. In the context of the higher learning institutions, the academicians are also not exempted as well (UniTP, Orange Book, 2016). Considering this study, the core competencies are necessary. There is a need to differentiate the core competencies in one's job and the expected leadership competencies for leaders. In the setting of higher education, the core competencies of the academicians are teaching, supervision, research, and administrative services. Academicians are

expected to excel as academic leaders. However, the individual can develop the leadership competencies accordingly in their personal growth and leadership journey.

### *Emerging leadership competencies*

This section discusses on the emerging leadership competencies. The emerging leadership competencies are corporate leadership, visioning and strategic thinking, leadership agility, adaptability and change, and relationship and collaboration. The findings from the participants concurred with these emerging leadership competencies. Corporate leadership and cross-cultural competence emerged from the field data as *new findings* in this study.

### *Corporate leadership*

The sub-theme on corporate leadership emerged as a significant leadership competency in the selected public university setting. The findings of corporate leadership were an unexpected and important finding in this study. The majority of the participants discussed on this sub-theme of corporate leadership. This new finding of corporate leadership is significant. As the term suggest, corporate leadership refers to the institutional identity perspectives of approaching leadership at the higher educations (Chinta et al., 2016; Middlehurst et al., 2009). Corporate leadership essentially involves the top leaders planning activities of the strategies, direction, and operation of the organization. Many educational institutions worldwide have grown into substantial large organizations. Therefore, the business-like approach requires the corporate identity framework of leadership and management (Mohd, Abu Bakar, Ismail, Halim, & Bidin, 2016; Pang, 2013). The university is led as a business entity or corporation (Pang, 2013).

Some of the contributing factors for the emergence of the competency of corporate leadership include the status of financial sustainability and ensuring the competitiveness of the institution. There are various subsets or skills relating to the various areas of designation and responsibilities within the corporate leadership. Some of the skill sets discussed in the findings included generating income, financial management, manage human resource, develop branding, develop ranking, raise research grant, business mind-set, and manage risk.

### *Visioning and strategic thinking*

The competency of visioning and strategic thinking is viewed as an important leadership competency. Visioning and strategic thinking are necessary activities for the planning and future direction of an organization (Goldman & Scott, 2016; Pang & Pisapia, 2012; Vecchiato, 2014). This competency has also generated a lot of interest and discussion among the participants. Most of the participants have explicitly talked about the significance of the competency of visioning and strategic thinking, though there were variations of perspectives in terms of their descriptions. One of the participants linked this competency of visioning and strategic thinking to strategic leadership. According to a participant interviewed, in leadership, visioning is more important than strategic thinking because strategies can come from the leadership team members. Another participant stressed that the competency of visioning and strategic thinking is a must for leaders. While another added perspective is that it is vital for leaders to have vision and a strategic mind.

### *Leadership agility*

There was agreement from the participants that the emerging competency of leadership agility is relevant. One of the participants who is a key leader indicated that the competency of agility is very important. The participant viewed the competency of leadership agility should be inherent in leaders as well as cultivated in combination with other leadership competencies. The understanding of the competency is essentially about being flexible and adaptable (Sherehiy et al., 2007). Another participant stressed that leaders need to have the leadership agility mindset to explore and find solutions to problems (Pisapia, 2009).

### *Adaptability and change*

The competency of adaptability and change is central to other leadership competencies and leadership (Petrie, 2014; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). This competency essentially is about adapting to new development and the willingness to change (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The paradigm of adaptability and change is applicable at the various organizational levels or even the organization itself. Generally, the participants understand the current changing globalized environment of the organizational context. Thus, leaders need to adapt to new things and change. People tend to be complacent in the normal environment and resist change.

An interesting thought that were raised by a participant stressing the paradigm of change is not only applicable at the individual leadership level but at the management level as well. Due to the tenured based leadership where, top leaders come and go the leadership team needs to be adaptable. According to the participant, the paradigm of adaptability and change is particularly necessary at the middle management team.

#### *Relationship and collaboration*

The paradigm of relationship and collaboration is people centric. It is about working together to achieve a common purpose and outcome. The other common terms used are shared, collective, and distributive. Studies have shown that the competency of relationship and collaboration is preferred in most organizations (Black, 2015; Middlehurst, 2012). A participant acknowledged that dynamic leadership do change and evolve. The exercise of the emerging leadership competency would reflect the overall progress of an organization. One of the hallmarks of the collaborative leadership is that it engages with others for their perspectives to achieve the greater good (Rubin, 2009). Collaborative leaders work in partnership with the team to fulfill the goal of the organization.

#### *Cross-cultural competence*

Culture and leadership have emerged as vital in recent years (Bartel-Radic & Giannelloni, 2017; Chow et al., 2017b; Middlehurst, 2012; Yammarino, 2013). The idea of cross-culture competence fundamentally involves the interaction between two or more cultures or countries. Findings that emerged from data showed that the concept of being competent cross-culturally is significant. Cross-cultural competence is relevant in the higher learning institution environment with its diverse international student's population (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2015; Middlehurst, 2012). Furthermore, the cross-cultural competence essentially underpins the other emerging leadership competencies in leadership practice.

In the context of an international university like the selected higher learning institution and the multi-cultural society like Malaysia, it is imperative that a leader is knowledgeable and competent cross-culturally. One of the participants describes cross-cultural competence as possessing the international perspective and the ability to understand and lead in terms of thoughts and action. Another participant said that cross-cultural leadership is one of the popular subjects discussed in many organization's

managements. Also, a participant highlighted that leaders cannot be ignorant of other cultures. At the same time, leaders are not to take people from other cultures for granted. A participant stressed that the issue of cross-cultural competence need to be address appropriately.

*The link between the attributes of institutional leader, dimensions of transformational leadership, and the emerging leadership competencies*

This study also showed the link between the attributes of the expected excellent institutional leader highlighted by the Ministry of Higher Education to the dimensions of transformational leadership, and the emerging leadership competencies (MEB 2015-2025 (HE) 2015; UniTP Orange Book, 2016) (Table 2). The MEB 2015-2025 (HE) 2015 have implicitly highlighted transformational leadership about the highlighted leadership paradigm for the Malaysian higher learning institution leaders. At the same time the UniTP Orange Book, 2016 also listed the expected leadership attributes of the institutional leaders. Hence, this study shows the link between the attributes of institutional leader, to the dimensions of transformational leadership, and the emerging leadership competencies.

**Table 2: Link between the Attributes of Institutional Leader, Dimensions of Transformational Leadership, and the Emerging Leadership Competencies**

<b>Highlights of Attributes of Institutional Leader (MOHE) (MEB 2015-2025 (HE) 2015; UniTP, Orange Book, 2016)</b>	<b>Dimensions of Transformational Leadership (Bass &amp; Avolio, 1994; Pawar, 2016; Wahab et al., 2016)</b>	<b>Emerging Leadership Competencies (Chow, T.W., 2018)</b>
1) Demonstrate excellence in institutional leadership	i) Inspirational motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning and strategic thinking</li> <li>• Leadership agility</li> </ul>
	ii) Intellectual stimulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate leadership</li> <li>• Adaptability and change</li> </ul>

<b>Highlights of Attributes of Institutional Leader (MOHE)</b> (MEB 2015-2025 (HE) 2015; UniTP, Orange Book, 2016)	<b>Dimensions of Transformational Leadership</b> (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Pawar, 2016; Wahab et al., 2016)	<b>Emerging Leadership Competencies</b> (Chow, T.W., 2018)
2) Demonstrate good leadership attributes, sustain best practices, and lead change	iii) Idealized influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning and strategic thinking</li> <li>• Cross-cultural competence</li> </ul>
	ii) Intellectual stimulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate leadership</li> <li>• Leadership agility</li> </ul>
3) Recognized figure at national and international level	iii) Idealized influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership agility</li> <li>• Cross-cultural competence</li> </ul>
4) Demonstrate understanding of key aspects of management/leadership	i) Intellectual stimulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate leadership</li> <li>• Leadership agility</li> </ul>
	ii) Individualized consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship and collaboration</li> <li>• Adaptability and change</li> </ul>
5) Visionary and strategic mindset	i) Inspirational motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning and strategic thinking</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' compilation

### **Conclusion, implications, and recommendations**

In answering the research question, six (6) emerging leadership competencies were discussed including the emergence of the leadership competency of corporate leadership and cross-cultural competence from the field data. The table 3 showed the results of the findings and contributions in addressing the research question.

The study contributed in the areas of theory, practice, context, methodology, and policy. The contribution in terms of theory is the emerging leadership competencies in the selected Malaysian higher learning institution context. The contribution for practice is the key emerging leadership competencies as highlighted: corporate leadership, visioning and strategic thinking, leadership agility, adaptability and change, relationship and collaboration, cross-cultural competence. As for context it is the theme that transcends culture. In the methodological contribution the qualitative case study provided the context-rich data for this study. The recommendations for practice are applicable at three (3) levels. At the Ministry of Education level, the policy decision makers can promote the leadership competency concept and the emerging leadership competencies. At the institutional level, the leadership or management need to explicitly state the relevance of the leadership competency concept for leadership development and practice. At the leader’s level, it would be appropriate for the individuals to identify and develop the key emerging leadership competencies for development and practice.

**Table 3: Findings to the research question**

<b>Contributions</b>	<b>Theory</b>	<b>Practice</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Policy</b>
	The emerging leadership competencies in the Malaysian higher learning institution context.	Corporate leadership, visioning and strategic thinking, leadership agility, adaptability and change, relationship and collaboration, cross-cultural competence.	Leadership that transcends culture.	The qualitative case study provided the in-depth detailed and context-rich data for the research.	Promote the leadership competency concept and the key emerging leadership competencies.

Source: Authors’ compilation

These findings are *original* contributions to knowledge based on this research. The findings extend the knowledge as raised in the research questions. The study also adds to the work of other researchers in the field of leadership. This study focused on one Malaysian higher learning institution. However, it fulfilled the purpose of an in-depth context-rich research. There are two (2) areas where further studies can be conducted. The two (2) areas are the emerging leadership competencies construct in the other Malaysian higher learning institutions and the leadership competency concept in the other organizational sectors. In conclusion it is important to know the right concept of leadership in tandem with the times as the key to strategic advantage for *progressive* leadership development and practice.

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