

Exploring Competencies and Capabilities That High-Potential Academics Should Possess in South Africa

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Abstract – This study explores the competencies and capabilities that high-potential academics (HPAs) should possess to effectively handle academic responsibilities and ascend to leadership positions within higher education institutions. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilising an exploratory design owing to the lack of prior studies on this topic. The study sampled ten academic staff members from a higher education institution in South Africa and conducted face-to-face interviews to gather data. Thematic analysis was used to process the data, revealing the key talent management and leadership themes. The findings indicate that HPAs should possess various competencies, including ambition, analytical skills, adaptability, and effective communication skills. They should also demonstrate strong leadership qualities such as planning, decision-making, and emotional intelligence. This study identifies several constraints to developing HPAs, such as inadequate resources, lack of leadership capacity, and insufficient communication. The study recommends fostering a supportive environment, providing adequate funding, and recognising and rewarding high-potential academics to ensure their development and retention.

Keywords – High Potential Academics, Talent Management, Leadership Development, Higher Education Institutions, Competencies

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1 Introduction

High-potential academics must be identified and developed in South Africa's dynamic higher education environment to promote excellence and innovation. According to Kehoe, Collings and Cascio (2023), high-potential academics are those who not only have extraordinary academic ability but also have a special set of skills and abilities that set them apart as future influencers and leaders in their areas. To develop a strong academic workforce that can tackle society's complex issues, policymakers and educational institutions must have a thorough understanding of these competencies and capacities.

The development and utilisation of the academic talent pool is of great importance to South Africa, a country that aspires to both societal advancement and intellectual achievement (Muyia, Wekullo & Nafukho, 2018). However, there are more standards for spotting and developing academics with great promise than only considering conventional measures of academic success. Academic excellence is still essential, but other skills like leadership, interdisciplinary teamwork, creativity, and the capacity to interact with various groups are becoming increasingly crucial in forming the minds and bodies of the future's thought leaders and change agents.

Furthermore, a high-potential academic is a lecturer in an institution of higher education or university who has been identified as having the aspiration, ability, and potential to hold successive leadership positions within the institution (Hayashi & Dolan, 2013; Gilliam, 2024). In early research, Allen, Bryant and Vardaman (2010) describe high-potential academics as top performers in institutions that can move to higher leadership positions. They consistently and significantly outperform fellow lecturers in a variety of settings and under different circumstances by demonstrating behaviours that reflect the institution's culture and values in an exemplary manner (Fulmer, Stumpf & Bleak, 2009). They also exhibit a strong ability to grow and succeed more quickly and effectively than their peers at the same institution. In a nutshell, high-potential academics are regarded as role models in an institution and are more likely to become future leaders (Hausknecht, Rodda & Howard, 2009; Kehoe, et al., 2023). This study's main objective was to explore the competencies and capabilities that high-potential academics should possess in handling academic matters.

2 Literature Review

Developing high-potential academics (HPAs) has become increasingly important in the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education. HPAs are those individuals who demonstrate exceptional abilities and the potential to ascend to leadership positions within academic institutions. As universities and colleges face new challenges, such as increased competition and the demand for innovative teaching and research, identifying and cultivating HPAs are critical for ensuring academic excellence and institutional sustainability. This literature review focuses on three interconnected themes essential for understanding the development of HPAs: the competencies and capabilities that

define these high-potential individuals, the talent management practices that support their growth, and the leadership competencies necessary to foster their advancement. Although there has been significant research on academic talent management, there is a need for a comprehensive synthesis that integrates these themes to provide a holistic understanding of HPA development.

This review addresses the following questions: What competencies and capabilities are necessary for HPAs to succeed? How do talent management practices within higher education institutions impact the development of these academics? And what leadership competencies are required to guide HPAs on their career paths effectively? This review aims to contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of HPA development by answering these questions. This chapter is organised as follows: The first section examines the characteristics of HPAs, including the distinctions between early and late-stage academics. The second section explores talent management practices in higher education, highlighting critical strategies for nurturing HPAs. Finally, the third section discusses the leadership competencies required to develop and retain HPAs successfully within academic institutions.

2.1 Characteristics of High-Potential Academics

High-potential academics (HPAs) are individuals within higher education institutions who exhibit exceptional abilities, a solid commitment to their work, and the potential to assume leadership roles. These academics are distinguished by their academic achievements and unique personal and professional characteristics, which set them apart from their peers. Understanding the characteristics that define HPAs is essential for identifying and nurturing future leaders within the academic community. HPAs can generally be categorised into two groups based on their career stage: early-stage and late-stage. Early-stage HPAs are emerging academics who are at the beginning of their careers. They are typically identified based on their robust academic performance, innovative thinking, and ambition to excel within the academic environment. These individuals are often seen as rising stars with the potential to contribute to their fields significantly. Early-stage HPAs are characterised by their enthusiasm for learning, willingness to take on challenges, and proactive approach to career development (Fulmer, Stumpf, & Bleak, 2009). In contrast, late-stage HPAs are more experienced academics who have already demonstrated leadership potential within their institutions. These individuals are often senior lecturers or professors who have participated in formal leadership training programs, such as executive retreats, mentoring, and coaching (Hayashi & Dolan, 2013). Late-stage HPAs are typically involved in decision-making processes and are recognised for their ability to guide and inspire others within their institutions. They are considered valuable assets ready to take on higher leadership roles and drive institutional success (Fulmer et al., 2009).

Critical Characteristics of HPAs:

1. **Ambition and Drive:**

- HPAs are often characterised by their high levels of ambition and drive. They set and are committed to achieving challenging goals for themselves. This ambition is not limited to personal success but extends to contributing to the growth and success of their institutions (Fulmer et al., 2009). According to Gilliam (2024), ambition is a critical factor that distinguishes HPAs from their peers, as it continually drives them to seek growth and development opportunities.
2. **Analytical and Critical Thinking Skills:**
 - Another key characteristic of HPAs is their strong analytical and critical thinking skills. HPAs can analyse complex problems, synthesise information from various sources, and develop innovative solutions. This ability to think critically is essential for navigating the challenges of academic leadership and contributing to advancing knowledge within their fields (Hayashi & Dolan, 2013). Analytical skills also enable HPAs to make informed decisions that align with institutional goals and academic standards.
 3. **Adaptability and Flexibility:**
 - In the rapidly changing landscape of higher education, adaptability is crucial for HPAs. These individuals are comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity and have the flexibility to adapt to new situations and challenges. Adaptability allows HPAs to thrive in diverse environments and respond effectively to changes in academic demands, institutional policies, and external pressures (Conger & Church, 2017). This characteristic is particularly important for HPAs who aspire to leadership roles, as they must be able to navigate the complexities of academic administration and governance.
 4. **Effective Communication Skills:**
 - Effective communication is another hallmark of HPAs. These individuals excel in verbal and written communication, allowing them to convey their ideas clearly and persuasively to a wide range of audiences, including students, colleagues, and administrators. Effective communication is essential for academic leaders, as it facilitates collaboration, fosters a positive work environment, and ensures that all stakeholders communicate and understand institutional goals (Fulmer et al., 2009). Moreover, HPAs with strong communication skills are better equipped to represent their institutions in external forums and contribute to the broader academic community.
 5. **Leadership and Teamwork:**
 - HPAs often exhibit strong leadership qualities, even in the early stages of their careers. They are individuals who can inspire and motivate others, build effective teams, and foster a collaborative work environment. Leadership is a critical characteristic for HPAs, as they are often called upon to guide their colleagues, mentor junior faculty members, and contribute to the strategic direction of their institutions (Ruben, De Lisi, & Gigliotti, 2023). Additionally, HPAs are willing to take on leadership roles and responsibilities, positioning themselves as future leaders within their academic communities.
 6. **Commitment to Continuous Learning:**
 - A defining characteristic of HPAs is their commitment to continuous learning and professional development. These individuals always seek new knowledge, skills, and experiences to enhance their academic and leadership capabilities (Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009). This commitment to lifelong learning is essential for staying relevant in the ever-evolving field of higher education and maintaining a competitive edge in the academic job market. HPAs dedicated

to continuous learning are better equipped to adapt to new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

2.2 Talent Management in Higher Education Institutions

Talent management is a critical strategic function in higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly as these institutions face increasing pressures to innovate and maintain academic excellence. In this context, talent management involves systematically identifying, developing, and retaining high-potential academics (HPAs) seen as future leaders within their institutions. Effective talent management practices ensure that institutions attract the best talent and foster an environment where that talent can thrive and advance. This section explores the role of talent management in nurturing HPAs, examining critical practices and challenges specific to higher education.

Talent management goes beyond hiring qualified staff in higher education. It involves creating a sustainable pipeline of talent that can adapt to the evolving needs of the institution. Schiemann (2014) pointed out that talent management in HEIs must be aligned with the institution's strategic objectives, such as improving student outcomes, advancing research, and enhancing institutional reputation. This alignment ensures that the development of HPAs is not an isolated effort but a strategic initiative that supports the institution's overall goals. Moreover, talent management is increasingly seen as a competitive advantage in higher education. Institutions that successfully manage and develop their academic talent are better positioned to attract external funding, form strategic partnerships, and enhance their global standing (Thunnissen, 2016). This competitive edge underscores the need for a robust talent management strategy tailored to academia's unique challenges and opportunities. Effective talent management in HEIs typically involves several vital practices which are designed to identify, develop, and retain HPAs. These practices include:

1. **Identification of High-Potential Academics:**
 - The first step in any talent management strategy is identifying individuals with high potential. In HEIs, this often involves a combination of performance evaluations, peer reviews, and leadership assessments (Ruben, De Lisi, & Gigliotti, 2023). Early identification of HPAs allows institutions to tailor development opportunities to these individuals' specific needs and aspirations. Institutions may use various criteria, such as research output, teaching excellence, and leadership potential, to identify HPAs.
2. **Mentoring and Coaching Programs:**
 - Mentoring and coaching are essential components of talent management in higher education. These programs provide HPAs with the guidance and support they need to navigate the complexities of academic careers. Mentoring relationships often involve senior academics who can share their experiences and advise on career development, research, and teaching (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). On the other hand, coaching focuses on developing specific skills, such as leadership or communication, that are crucial for academic success.
3. **Professional Development Opportunities:**

- Continuous professional development is a cornerstone of talent management in HEIs. Institutions offer various opportunities for HPAs to enhance their skills and knowledge, including workshops, seminars, and conferences (Fulmer, Stumpf, & Bleak, 2009). These opportunities allow HPAs to stay current with field developments, network with peers, and gain new perspectives on their work. Professional development also extends to training programs designed to prepare HPAs for future leadership roles within their institutions.
4. **Succession Planning:**
 - Succession planning is another critical aspect of talent management in higher education. This involves identifying potential future leaders and creating a structured pathway for them to move into key leadership positions within the institution (Schiemann, 2014). Succession planning ensures a continuous pipeline of qualified individuals ready to step into leadership roles as they become available. This is particularly important in academia, where leadership transitions can significantly impact the institution's stability and direction.
 5. **Retention Strategies:**
 - Retaining HPAs is a significant challenge for HEIs, particularly in a competitive global academic market. Institutions must implement retention strategies that address the specific needs and motivations of HPAs. This may include offering competitive salaries, providing opportunities for career advancement, and creating a supportive work environment (Thunnissen, 2016). Additionally, institutions must recognise and reward the contributions of HPAs to ensure they feel valued and motivated to remain within the institution.
 6. **Creating a Supportive Institutional Culture:**
 - A supportive institutional culture is essential for successfully implementing talent management practices. HEIs must foster an environment where HPAs feel encouraged and supported in their professional development (Liden, Wayne, Lioa, & Meuser, 2014). This includes promoting a culture of collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity, where diverse perspectives are valued, and individuals are empowered to take initiative. A positive institutional culture also helps attract and retain top academic talent by making the institution an attractive workplace.

While talent management is critical for the success of HEIs, it is not without challenges. One of the primary challenges is the scarcity of resources. Many institutions, particularly those in developing countries, struggle with limited funding and inadequate infrastructure, which can hinder the implementation of effective talent management practices (Muyia, Wekullo, & Nafukho, 2018). Additionally, the traditional hierarchical structure of many HEIs can pose a barrier to talent management, as it may limit opportunities for younger academics to advance. Another challenge is the changing nature of academic work. As academic demands continue to evolve, with increasing emphasis on research output, teaching excellence, and community engagement, institutions must ensure that their talent management practices adapt and respond to these changes (Schiemann, 2014). This requires ongoing evaluation and adjustment of talent management strategies to ensure that they remain relevant and effective in a rapidly changing academic landscape.

Talent management in higher education institutions is a multifaceted and dynamic process that is crucial in developing and retaining high-potential academics. By implementing effective talent management practices, such as mentoring, professional development, succession planning, and retention strategies, HEIs can ensure that they have a strong pipeline of future leaders equipped to navigate the challenges of the academic world. However, institutions must also address the challenges of resource limitations and changing academic demands to ensure that their talent management strategies remain effective and sustainable.

2.3 Leadership Competencies for Developing HPAs

In higher education institutions (HEIs), effective leadership is crucial for developing and nurturing high-potential academics (HPAs). Leadership competencies refer to the skills, behaviours, and attributes that leaders need to guide and support HPAs in their successful professional growth. These competencies ensure that leaders can identify, develop, and retain talented academics who have the potential to contribute significantly to the institution's success. In this section, we explore the critical leadership competencies necessary for fostering HPAs within HEIs and how these competencies impact talent development.

1. Strategic Decision-Making:

- One of the most critical leadership competencies for developing HPAs is making strategic decisions. Leaders must be able to align the development of HPAs with the broader goals and objectives of the institution. Strategic decision-making involves understanding the long-term vision of the institution and making informed choices that ensure the sustainable growth of academic talent (Ruben, De Lisi, & Gigliotti, 2023). This competency allows leaders to prioritise resources and opportunities that most benefit HPAs, ensuring their development contributes to the institution's success.
- Strategic decision-making also requires leaders to balance the institution's needs with the individual aspirations of HPAs. Leaders must recognise the unique potential of each HPA and make decisions that support their career growth while advancing institutional goals. This competency is particularly important in academic environments where resources are often limited, and leaders must make tough choices about where to allocate time, money, and mentorship efforts.

2. Emotional Intelligence:

- Emotional intelligence (EI) is another essential competency for leaders responsible for developing HPAs. EI involves the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to build strong relationships with HPAs, foster a positive work environment, and provide the support needed for personal and professional development (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013).
- In the context of higher education, emotionally intelligent leaders can recognise and respond to the diverse needs of HPAs. For example, they can pro-

vide tailored feedback, help HPAs navigate challenges, and create a supportive atmosphere encouraging risk-taking and innovation. Emotional intelligence also helps leaders manage conflicts effectively, ensuring that HPAs remain engaged and motivated despite any obstacles.

3. Effective Communication:

- Leadership in higher education demands strong communication skills. Effective communication is not just about conveying information but about engaging with HPAs to inspire and motivate them (Liden, Wayne, Lioa, & Meuser, 2014). Leaders must articulate the institution's vision, goals, and expectations clearly while listening to the concerns and aspirations of HPAs.
- Effective communication also involves providing constructive feedback that helps HPAs improve and grow. Leaders need to communicate both praise and areas for improvement in an encouraging and supportive manner. This competency ensures that HPAs feel valued and understood, which is essential for their continued development and retention within the institution.

4. Mentorship and Coaching:

- Mentorship and coaching are critical components of leadership in developing HPAs. Leaders who excel in these areas can guide HPAs through their career progression by sharing knowledge, providing advice, and offering growth opportunities (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). Mentorship goes beyond traditional supervision; it involves a deep commitment to the professional and personal development of HPAs, helping them to navigate the complexities of academic life and leadership.
- Coaching, conversely, focuses on developing specific skills that HPAs need to succeed. Influential leaders use coaching techniques to help HPAs build competencies such as time management, research skills, and leadership abilities. Mentoring and coaching are essential for preparing HPAs for future leadership roles, ensuring they have the tools they need to excel in their careers.

5. Visionary Leadership:

- Visionary leadership is inspiring others with a compelling vision of the future. Leaders with this competency can articulate a clear and ambitious vision for the institution and motivate HPAs to align their personal goals with this vision (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Visionary leaders create a sense of purpose and direction, which is crucial for engaging HPAs and encouraging them to take ownership of their roles within the institution.
- Visionary leadership also involves being forward-thinking and innovative. Leaders must anticipate future trends in higher education and prepare HPAs to meet the challenges of tomorrow. This competency ensures that HPAs are successful in their current roles and equipped to lead the institution into the future.

6. Interpersonal Skills and Relationship-Building:

- Building solid interpersonal relationships is essential for leaders responsible for developing HPAs. This competency involves connecting with HPAs personally, understanding their unique strengths and challenges, and creating a

supportive network that fosters their growth (Ruben et al., 2023). Leaders who excel in relationship-building can create a collaborative environment where HPAs feel valued and supported.

- Interpersonal skills also enable leaders to facilitate teamwork and collaboration among HPAs and other faculty members. By fostering positive relationships within the academic community, leaders can create a culture of mutual respect and cooperation, which is essential for the success of HPAs.

7. Cultural Competence:

- In increasingly diverse academic environments, cultural competence has become a vital leadership competency. Cultural competence refers to understanding, respecting, and effectively interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. Leaders with this competency can better support HPAs from diverse backgrounds, ensuring their development is inclusive and equitable (Lumby & Coleman, 2007).
- Cultural competence also involves creating an environment where diversity is celebrated and all HPAs feel they have equal opportunities for growth and advancement. This competency is particularly important in globalised higher education institutions, where leaders must navigate cultural differences and promote a culture of inclusivity.

Leadership competencies are essential for developing High-Potential Academics in higher education institutions. Competencies such as strategic decision-making, emotional intelligence, effective communication, mentorship, visionary leadership, interpersonal skills, cultural competence, and change management are critical in guiding HPAs toward success. By cultivating these competencies, leaders can ensure that their institutions have a robust pipeline of future academic leaders equipped to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing educational landscape.

3 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to acquire extensive information on the role of talent leadership in developing high-potential academics. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2023), this approach is used to understand the participants' subjective and socially constructed meanings of the phenomenon under study. An exploratory design was chosen to provide answers and solutions to the study because of the lack of information regarding the role of talent leadership in developing high-potential academics. After obtaining permission from the selected institution of higher learning to collect data, face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect data from the respondents. A purposive sampling technique was used, and data saturation was achieved on the tenth participant.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse, arrange, and present the data according to themes and categories. After generating the themes and categories, the central ideas were discussed and corroborated with the literature review findings, which yielded a comprehensive view of the phenomenon or situation.

Themes and categories were generated based on these research questions. The data were then compared to establish themes, trends, and patterns. The emerging themes, trends, and patterns were identified and written. The emerging themes were cross-referenced with the research questions to ensure the investigation stayed on track. Related topics were categorised, and data materials belonging to each category were grouped. However, two main themes were generated from the Atlas-ti system: talent management and leadership.

4 Findings (results)

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which explored the competencies and capabilities required by high-potential academics (HPAs) and the role of leadership and talent management in their development. The results are organised into three main themes: HPA competencies, leadership competencies, and talent management practices.

4.1 Theme 1: Competencies of High-Potential Academics The study identified several critical competencies that high-potential academics should possess. These include analytical skills, adaptability, and effective communication.

4.1.1 Analytical Skills:

- Participants overwhelmingly highlighted analytical skills as essential for academic success. As shown in Table 1, 78% of respondents rated analytical skills as 'highly important.'
- *Quote from Participant 1:* "Analytical thinking is crucial for solving complex academic problems and advancing research."

4.1.2 Adaptability:

- Adaptability was also frequently mentioned, with 65% of participants emphasising its importance in the rapidly changing academic environment.
- *Quote from Participant 4:* "The ability to adapt to new methodologies and technologies is what sets successful academics apart."

4.2 Theme 2: Leadership Competencies Participants identified several essential leadership competencies for guiding and developing HPAs.

4.2.1 Strategic Decision-Making:

- Strategic decision-making was noted as a critical skill for leaders in higher education, with 70% of participants acknowledging its importance in aligning academic goals with institutional objectives.

4.2.2 Emotional Intelligence:

- Emotional intelligence was highlighted as a critical competency for managing and mentoring HPAs effectively. As shown in Figure 1, 60% of participants identified EI as a 'must-have' trait for academic leaders.

4.3 Theme 3: Talent Management Practices The study explored current talent management practices within higher education institutions and their impact on HPAs.

4.3.1 Mentorship and Coaching:

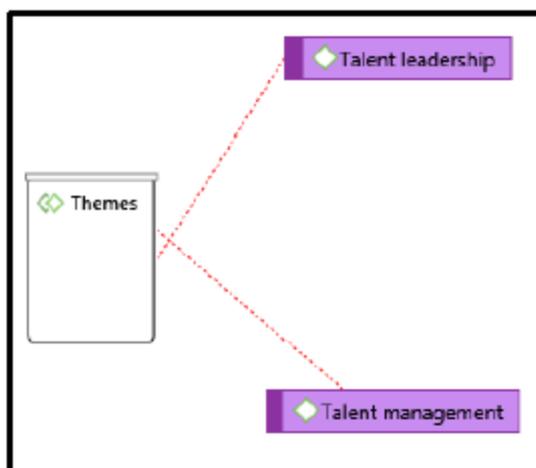
- Many participants pointed to the lack of structured mentorship programs as barriers to HPA development. *Quote from Participant 7:* "Without proper mentorship, high-potential academics are left to navigate their careers on their own."

The results indicate that analytical skills, adaptability, and leadership capabilities are the most valued competencies for HPAs. Additionally, there is a significant need for improved mentorship and coaching within higher education institutions.

5 Discussion

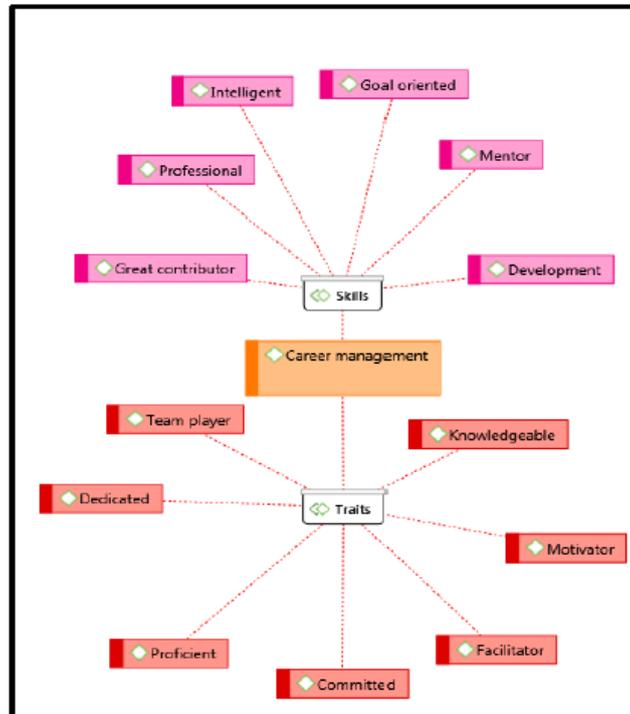
This study explored competencies and capabilities that high-potential academics should possess in South Africa. From the thematic analysis conducted, only three themes were generated.

Figure 1: "Key Themes Identified in Talent Management for HPAs in Higher Education."



Most participants (PA1, 2, 4, 5, 6 & 8) indicated that academically intelligent individuals, developing students, contributing to the body of knowledge, and goal-oriented and professional individuals are typical examples of high-potential academics.

Figure 2: "Traits and Skills of High-Potential Academics Based on Participant Responses."



The participants indicated that proficiency in academic matters, facilitating skills, being knowledgeable, having motivating abilities, commitment to duty, and being a team player should be the capabilities of high-potential academics. Figure 2 presents excerpts from the study participants.

PA1 made the following statements regarding the definition of high-potential academics:

'To define a high potential academics, the issue of value and trust is highly needed; you need to develop somebody you can trust, again, somebody that has vision, somebody that can think out of the box, somebody who is sound to think on his own. High-potential academics are energetic and diverse, who can fit into the organisational culture, and who have substantial significance and contribution to the organisation'

PA3 and PA5 concluded by affirming that high potential academic:

'... are the persons who can develop students, those who can conceptualise theories to practice, their level of understanding improves. Somebody who can link theory to practice'

Three participants, PA1,2,4 & 6 posited that:

Somebody who has skills, diverse knowledge and the ability to work to contribute to the organisation's growth. High-potential academics should be able to adapt to a new world of work, be technologically advanced, and be willing to contribute. They are advanced and willing to adapt to new methods of doing things and contribute to take the organisation to the next level.'

Regarding the competencies of high-potential academics, some excerpts from the participants are highlighted below.

PA2 said:

'The competencies and capabilities of high potential academics should incorporate approachability, be able to listen to students in all circumstances, possess listening skills, and facilitate learning. They must have empathy; they must also be patient. Participants 5 and 10 share the same perception.

PA3 affirmed that the competencies of high-potential academics include:

'Somebody who has good knowledge about the area he is lecturing'.

This study explored how participants view high-potential academics and what they think their competencies and capabilities should be. The results obtained from the participants indicated that high-potential academics are people with high integrity who can develop, teach, and groom students. The results also suggest that high-potential academics should be able to contribute to the body of knowledge in a goal-oriented and result-oriented manner. These results concur with the findings of Hayashi and Dolan (2013), who regarded high-potential academics as individuals aspiring to hold potential leadership positions in Institutions of Higher learning. According to Allen et al. (2010), high-potential academics exhibit the spirit of success to grow and impart knowledge to others to excel in their future endeavours. To further confirm the results obtained in this section, Hausknecht et al. (2009) believe that high-potential academics are lecturers who participate in various formal trainings, including specialised mentoring, real-world action learning, executive retreats, personal coaching, and global research, to contribute to the body of knowledge.

This study made further inquiries to understand the proficiency that high-potential academics should possess. Participants highlighted that they should be competent and knowledgeable in handling academic issues. Other proficiencies include skill-sharing capacity, commitment to duty, team-playing, and motivating skills. Hayashi and Dolan (2013) pointed out that high-potential academics should possess critical thinking ability to face academic challenges, listen to students, be involved in critical decision-making, perform exceedingly in academic matters, and use their vast knowledge to transform students' capabilities. Thus, it can be deduced that high-potential academics are committed to ensuring academic excellence by empowering students with exceptional knowledge to excel in their future endeavours.

The findings from the face-to-face interviews highlighted factors such as a lack of talent management/leadership capacity, inadequate resource funding, inadequate benefits, lack of communication dynamics, and the application of emerging innovation options. These findings are consistent with those of Davin and Leal-Filho (2015), Fulmer et al. (2009), and Knight and Trowler (2000), who argue that there should be a combination of management support in the academic environment. The absence of diverse management support,

such as a lack of interpersonal relationships, institutional structures, shared developmental responsibilities and shared leadership positions, could constrain leaders from developing high-potential academics. These findings in this section reveal that academic leaders should cooperate adequately with potential academics to motivate them and keep them in the work environment to achieve the institution's objectives.

The findings reveal that leaders should select competent leaders and provide an enabling environment for their survival. Additional factors include adopting emerging innovation, funding for projects, creating outstanding roles, building a relationship culture, adequate communication, promotion and provision of incentives, and, above all, recognition. The empirical findings of Saunderson (2010), Beesom (2009) and Groysberg et al. (2004) indicate that the expectations of potential academics must be regularly met to support their development. Furthermore, factors to support the development of high-potential academics, such as funding for research and academic papers, according to Groves (2007), must be constantly provided. In the view of Hitka et al. (2012:107), academic leaders should understand that talent leadership building is a process that an organisation needs to adopt to achieve the institution's objectives. These steps include career management, which involves career pathing, employee development, succession planning, and career progression. Miller (2014) identified five fundamental elements of effective leadership: discipline, support, creativity, insight, and values. Miller (2014) further affirmed that discipline is central to management, which entails an orderly pattern of behaviour that increases the possibility of the desired outcome. To support the development of high-potential academics, leaders should adequately strategy, plan, implement, measure, and adjust their strategic leadership qualities to ensure that academics are happy, productive, and ready to remain with the institution over a long period.

6 Recommendations

This study explored the competencies and capabilities that high-potential academics should possess in handling academic matters. The study found that high-potential academics have high integrity and great passion for developing students. The study further found that the proficiencies or capabilities of high-potential academics entail knowledge, commitment to duty, passion for skill-sharing, and critical thinking. The managerial implication of this finding is that academic leaders should endeavour to understand employees' skills to develop them and achieve the organisation's objectives.

The recommendations drawn from the study are as follows:

Human Resource Management should identify high-potential academics as motivated to be involved in mentoring and personal coaching, have high integrity, and contribute to the body of knowledge.

- The Human Resource Department should understand that the proficiencies of high-potential academics include being competent in handling academic tasks competently.

- The roles of high education leaders should incorporate identifying talent and providing an enabling environment to manage them.
- The competencies of leaders' roles in developing high-potential academics should include cooperation, adequate communication, rewards, performance management, and the ability to lead.
- The mechanisms to maintain high-potential academics in their workplace should include work support, financial incentives, adequate rewards, publication and conference incentives, and enabling the environment to perform.
- The Human Resource Department should apply adequate talent management/leadership, funding/benefits, communication dynamics, and adoption of emerging communication options to develop high-potential academics.
- Human Resource Management should identify high-potential academics as motivated to be involved in mentoring and personal coaching, have high integrity, and contribute to the body of knowledge.
- The Human Resource Department should understand that the proficiencies of high-potential academics include being competent in handling academic tasks competently.
- The roles of high education leaders should incorporate identifying talent and providing an enabling environment to manage them.
- The competencies of leaders' roles in developing high-potential academics should include cooperation, adequate communication, rewards, performance management, and the ability to lead.
- The mechanisms to keep high-potential academics in their workplace include work support, financial incentives, adequate rewards, publication and conference incentives, and an enabling environment.

6.1 Academic staff are required to report grievances or other developmental measures that will enhance the development of the HR Department to achieve the organisation's objectives.

Future research should adopt longitudinal research (quantitative design) to track the career trajectories of the identified high-potential academics over time. This would provide insights into the long-term impact of talent management practices and the effectiveness of leadership development programs in educational institutions.

7 Conclusion

This study explored the competencies and capabilities required by high-potential academics (HPAs) and the role of leadership and talent management in their development within higher education institutions. The findings indicate that critical competencies for HPAs include analytical skills, adaptability, and leadership capabilities. Moreover, structured mentorship programs and strategic leadership were identified as essential components for effectively developing and retaining HPAs.

Practical Implications:

1. **Implement Structured Mentorship Programs:** Institutions should develop formal mentorship programs connecting HPAs with experienced academic leaders.
2. **Invest in Leadership Development:** HEIs should invest in training programs that equip HPAs with necessary skills such as strategic decision-making and emotional intelligence.
3. **Enhance Talent Management Practices:** Institutions should adopt comprehensive talent management strategies that include succession planning and retention initiatives.
4. **Create a Supportive Work Environment:** HEIs should foster a positive and inclusive work environment that encourages collaboration and innovation among HPAs.

Theoretical Implications:

1. **Expansion of Talent Management Theory:** This study contributes to understanding how talent management practices can be effectively applied in higher education settings.
2. **Integration of Leadership and Competency Models:** The findings support integrating leadership competency models with talent management frameworks.
3. **Understanding the Role of Institutional Culture:** The research highlights the importance of institutional culture in shaping the development of HPAs.

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, such as the small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research with more extensive and diverse samples is needed to validate these results and explore the long-term impact of leadership development programs on HPAs.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical role of leadership and talent management in shaping the future of higher education. By fostering the development of high-potential academics, institutions can ensure a solid and innovative academic workforce capable of addressing the challenges of tomorrow. It can be concluded that the study discovered that the application of motivational factors, satisfaction factors, balancing input and reward, or input and output is vital to developing high-potential academics. Finally, the study recommends that high-potential academics endeavour to cooperate adequately with high-potential academics to motivate and keep them in the work environment to achieve the institution's objectives. In addition, to support the development of high-potential academics, leaders should align their strategies, plan adequately, implement promising measures, and adjust their strategic leadership qualities to ensure that academics are happy, productive, and ready to remain with the institution for a long time.

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