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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Leadership Competency Mapping for Public Sector Professionals: A Readiness Profiling Framework for Sarawak Civil Service

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study proposes a structured leadership competency mapping framework tailored for Sarawak civil service professionals, focusing on readiness profiling across officer grades. The research identifies key leadership competencies and categorizes them into four domains: Self, Organization, National & International, and Relationship & Diplomatic Engagement. Employing a multi-method qualitative approach—including a literature review, stakeholder consultations, focus group discussions, and document analysis—the study develops a competency framework aligned with the roles and responsibilities of civil servants from Grades 9 to 14. Findings reveal a progressive competency development structure, emphasizing the need for systematic leadership training, career progression planning, and targeted competency assessments to enhance governance effectiveness. The study underscores the importance of adaptive leadership, stakeholder engagement, and strategic alignment in public sector leadership. By implementing this competency framework, the Sarawak civil service can strengthen leadership readiness, improve policy execution, and align with global best practices in public administration.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership competency development is crucial for the effectiveness and sustainability of public sector governance. In Sarawak, civil service officers manage diverse administrative and strategic functions across various ministries. However, competency gaps in leadership readiness can hinder effective governance and service delivery. Addressing these gaps requires a structured approach to leadership development, tailored to the unique challenges of the public sector.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of leadership training programs that cover topics such as effective communication, strategic planning, decision-making, and team building, specifically tailored to address the unique challenges faced by public sector leaders. Additionally, the development of digital competencies has become increasingly important, as highlighted by initiatives in Sarawak to equip its civil service workforce with the necessary digital skills to ensure an open and seamless digital government.

To address these challenges, this study aims to map leadership competencies based on officer grades to ensure systematic skill development and professional growth. The competency mapping framework is designed to profile officers based on four leadership sub-domains: Self, Organization, National & International, and Relationship & Diplomatic Engagement. This approach aligns with best practices in public sector leadership development, which advocate for competency-based frameworks to enhance performance and succession planning.

By implementing a structured competency mapping framework, the Sarawak civil service can enhance leadership readiness, improve governance effectiveness, and ensure that officers are well-prepared to meet the evolving demands of public administration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Competency-Based Leadership Development

Competency-based leadership development frameworks have been extensively implemented across both public and private sectors to enhance organizational performance and facilitate effective succession planning. These frameworks focus on identifying and cultivating specific competencies that are essential for leadership effectiveness (Boyatzis, 2008; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

In the public sector, recent studies have underscored the significance of competencies such as strategic thinking, ethical decision-making, stakeholder engagement, collaboration, and change management. These competencies are pivotal in navigating the complexities inherent in public administration and in driving organizational success (Miller & Dougherty, 2021; Jones et al., 2022). The Public Service Leadership Model, developed by the Partnership for Public Service, highlights four key leadership competencies:

Becoming Self-Aware: Understanding personal values, thought patterns, and motivations to enhance interactions (Partnership for Public Service, 2023).

Engaging Others: Fostering a culture that encourages feedback, recognizes good work, and promotes professional development (Jones et al., 2022).

Leading Change: Initiating and managing change effectively within the organization (Miller & Dougherty, 2021).

Achieving Results: Delivering measurable outcomes that align with organizational goals (OECD, 2023).

These competencies collectively contribute to effective leadership in the public sector. The Public Sector Leadership Consortium developed a competency-based framework that draws from both academic research and insights from field leaders, emphasizing the importance of aligning leadership development with organizational needs (Medicaid Directors, 2023).

Implementing competency-based frameworks in leadership development ensures that training and development efforts are targeted and effective. By focusing on specific competencies, organizations can better prepare leaders to meet current challenges and adapt to future demands (OECD, 2023; Partnership for Public Service, 2023). This approach not only enhances individual performance but also contributes to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of public sector governance.

Competency Mapping in Public Administration

Competency mapping in public administration involves identifying and aligning the skills, knowledge, and behaviors required for specific roles to achieve organizational and national objectives. This process ensures that public sector employees possess the competencies necessary to perform effectively in their respective positions. Research indicates that competency identification should be role-specific and aligned with national governance objectives. Competency frameworks should cater to different leadership levels, from tactical implementation at entry levels to enterprise leadership at higher grades (McClelland, 1973; OECD, 2019).

The implementation of competency management in the public sector has been driven by the need for more integrated and strategic human resource practices. Competency management serves as a means to develop an integrated HR policy by facilitating horizontal (aligning HR activities) and vertical (aligning HR and organizational strategy) integration, leading to more professional human resource management (Op de Beeck & Hondeghem, 2010). For instance, the Ontario Public Service (OPS) Leader-Manager Competency Model emphasizes that competencies describe

the behaviors necessary for success in a position or role, reinforcing that leadership exists at all levels within the organization (Ontario Public Service, n.d.).

 Moreover, the Public Service Leadership Model identifies four key leadership competencies—becoming self-aware, engaging others, leading change, and achieving results—that government leaders need to grasp to best serve in the 21st century (Partnership for Public Service, n.d.). These competencies align with the federal government's Executive Core Qualifications, providing leaders with a clear guide to address current and future challenges.

Implementing competency frameworks in public administration facilitates targeted training and development, enhances performance management, and supports succession planning. By aligning individual competencies with organizational goals, public sector organizations can improve service delivery and effectively meet the evolving needs of the communities they serve (Indeed, n.d.).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to rigorously identify and map leadership competencies within the Sarawak civil service. The methodology encompasses several key components that ensure a comprehensive and robust approach to competency mapping.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An extensive literature review was conducted to analyze existing competency models in public administration. This involved examining scholarly articles, government reports, and best practice guidelines to understand the competencies deemed essential for effective public sector leadership (Boyatzis, 2008; OECD, 2019). Such a comprehensive review ensures that the study is grounded in established theories and practices, providing a solid foundation for the competency mapping process. Reviewing past competency models also helps in understanding how leadership skills evolve in response to changing governance demands (Op de Beeck & Hondeghem, 2010).

Stakeholder Consultation

To capture a wide range of insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including government officers, private sector experts, and policymakers. These consultations aimed to gather diverse perspectives on the competencies required for effective leadership within the civil service. Engaging stakeholders is crucial in competency framework development, as it ensures the framework's relevance and applicability (Medicaid Directors, 2023). Best practices suggest that involving key stakeholders enhances the practical applicability of competency models and ensures they reflect the realities of public administration (Jones et al., 2022).

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized with subject matter experts (SMEs) to validate and refine the identified competency categories. These sessions facilitated in-depth discussions, allowing for the exploration of various viewpoints and the identification of any gaps or overlaps in the competency framework. FGDs have been widely recognized as an effective method for refining competency models by capturing qualitative insights from experienced professionals (Miller & Dougherty, 2021). They enable researchers to triangulate findings from different data sources, improving the validity of the competency framework (OECD, 2023).

Document Analysis

A thorough review of relevant documents, such as civil service job descriptions, strategic reports, and performance evaluation criteria, was conducted. This analysis provided contextual understanding and ensured that the identified competencies align with the actual roles, responsibilities, and expectations within the Sarawak civil service. Document analysis is an established method in qualitative research, offering insights into how competencies are defined and assessed in various institutional contexts (Ontario Public Service, n.d.).

Data Analysis

The data collected from the literature review, stakeholder consultations, FGDs, and document analysis were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data, providing a rich and detailed account of the competency structure. Thematic analysis is a foundational method in qualitative research, offering a flexible yet rigorous approach to data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

By integrating these qualitative research methods, the study ensures a comprehensive and rigorous approach to identifying and mapping leadership competencies. This methodological rigor enhances the validity and reliability of the findings, contributing to the development of an effective readiness profiling framework for the Sarawak civil service.

RESULTS

Competency Categorization by Leadership Domains.

Through comprehensive data analysis, leadership competencies within the Sarawak civil service were systematically categorized into four primary domains:

Self: This domain encompasses competencies that pertain to personal attributes and internal capacities essential for effective leadership. Key competencies identified include:

Emotional & Social Intelligence: The ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as to empathize and interact effectively with others. This competency is fundamental for building trust and fostering a collaborative work environment.

Leadership Agility: The capacity to adapt leadership styles to varying situations and challenges, demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness in decision-making processes.

Strategic Thinking: The skill to envision long-term goals, anticipate future challenges, and devise plans that align with the organization's mission and objectives.

Organization: Competencies in this domain relate to managing and optimizing internal organizational processes and resources. Identified competencies include:

Team Coordination: The ability to effectively organize, lead, and motivate teams to achieve collective goals, ensuring alignment and synergy among team members.

Effective Communication: The proficiency in conveying information clearly and persuasively, facilitating understanding and collaboration across all levels of the organization.

Intra-preneurship: The initiative to innovate and drive change within the organization, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability.

National & International: This domain focuses on competencies required for engaging with external stakeholders and operating within broader socio-political contexts. Key competencies include:

Stakeholder Engagement: The capability to identify, understand, and collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, ensuring their needs and expectations are considered in decision-making processes.

Business Community Management: The skill to liaise with the business sector, understanding economic trends, and fostering partnerships that benefit public service initiatives.

Strategic Alliance: The ability to form and maintain strategic partnerships and collaborations that advance organizational and national interests.

Relationship & Diplomatic Engagement: Competencies in this domain involve building and maintaining effective relationships and navigating complex diplomatic scenarios. Identified competencies include:

Relationship Building: The proficiency in establishing and nurturing professional relationships that contribute to a positive and productive work environment.

Negotiation Strategy: The capability to negotiate effectively, achieving mutually beneficial outcomes while maintaining positive relationships.

Strategic Diplomatic Engagement: The skill to represent the organization in diplomatic contexts, managing international relations and promoting the organization's interests on a global stage.

Competency Mapping Across Officer Grades.

The competency mapping framework was meticulously designed to align specific competencies with various officer grades within the Sarawak civil service, ranging from Grade 41 to Grade 54. This alignment ensures that competency development is tailored to the responsibilities and expectations at each leadership level:

i) Grade 9 (Entry Level): Tactical Implementation

At this foundational level, officers are expected to develop competencies that enable effective execution of tasks and collaboration within teams:

a. Emotional & Social Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is crucial for self-awareness and effective interpersonal interactions, playing a significant role in team dynamics and leadership effectiveness (Goleman, 1998). It enables individuals to understand and regulate their own emotions, as well as perceive and respond appropriately to the emotions of others. Research indicates that high emotional intelligence correlates with better teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership effectiveness (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2018). Leaders with strong emotional intelligence foster an inclusive work environment and enhance communication among team members, leading to improved organizational performance (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

b. Team Coordination

Effective team coordination ensures smooth collaboration, optimal workload distribution, and high productivity levels (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001). Teams with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle conflicts constructively and maintain a supportive team climate (Jordan & Troth, 2004). Research suggests that shared mental models and mutual trust are key factors in successful team coordination (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). A well-coordinated team is more adaptable to change, making it an essential competency for leadership roles (Druskat & Wolff, 2001).

c. Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is the process of building relationships with individuals or groups affected by an organization's actions, ensuring their perspectives are integrated into decision-making (Freeman, 1984). Successful stakeholder engagement requires active listening, transparent communication, and collaborative problem-solving (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014). Studies emphasize that public and private organizations that prioritize stakeholder engagement achieve higher trust, better policy outcomes, and stronger organizational reputation (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997).

d. Relationship Management

Relationship management refers to the ability to develop and maintain long-term professional relationships, which is essential for fostering workplace harmony and collaboration (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This competency involves effective communication, conflict resolution, and mutual respect among team members and external partners (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). In leadership, strong relationship management contributes to increased employee engagement, organizational loyalty, and reduced turnover (Lussier & Achua, 2015).

ii) Grade 10 (Mid-Level): Strategic Implementation

Officers at this level are involved in translating strategic objectives into actionable plans:

a. Motivating Others

Motivating others is a key leadership competency that enhances team performance, employee engagement, and productivity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Leaders who employ intrinsic motivation strategies—such as providing autonomy, purpose, and mastery—help employees feel more committed to organizational goals (Pink, 2009). Research shows that motivational leadership contributes to job satisfaction, performance efficiency, and reduced turnover (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Furthermore, transformational leaders—those who inspire and intellectually stimulate employees—tend to cultivate higher levels of motivation and innovation within their teams (Bass, 1990).

b. Effective Communication

Effective communication enhances clarity, trust, and coordination within an organization (Clampitt, 2016). Leaders who articulate their messages clearly and persuasively create a shared understanding of organizational goals and strategies (Conger, 1991). Studies emphasize that effective communicators actively listen, provide constructive feedback, and adjust their messaging based on audience needs (Keyton, 2011). Communication competence is particularly vital in crisis management, conflict resolution, and organizational change initiatives (Men, 2014). Organizations with leaders who prioritize transparency and open communication experience higher employee engagement and stakeholder trust (Tourish, 2019).

c. Community Engagement

Community engagement is essential for public sector leaders and policymakers to ensure that government programs and services align with community needs (Putnam, 2000). Successful community engagement relies on collaboration, trust-building, and inclusive decision-making (Arnstein, 1969). Research indicates that leaders who engage with communities foster social cohesion and increase policy acceptance (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Effective engagement involves empowering citizens through participatory governance and feedback mechanisms, ensuring that local voices are heard in policymaking (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006). In public administration, stakeholder collaboration and grassroots involvement are key components of sustainable development and community well-being (OECD, 2020).

d. Relationship Building

Strong relationship-building skills are critical for leaders seeking to establish trust, cooperation, and long-term professional networks (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Effective leaders invest time in understanding others, fostering mutual respect, and nurturing collaborative partnerships (Linden, 2002). Research highlights that relationship-oriented leadership enhances teamwork, stakeholder engagement, and inter-organizational collaboration (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). Relationship building is particularly valuable in diplomatic negotiations, interdepartmental coordination, and cross-sector partnerships (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Leaders who excel in building and maintaining professional relationships contribute to higher levels of organizational effectiveness and workplace harmony (Lussier & Achua, 2015).

iii) Grade 12 (Advanced Leadership): Strategic Alignment

At this stage, leaders focus on aligning departmental goals with organizational strategy:

a. Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership is a leadership approach that emphasizes transparency, integrity, and ethical decision-making, which fosters trust and credibility within an organization (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leaders exhibit self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency—all of which contribute to stronger organizational commitment and employee engagement (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Research suggests that employees who work under authentic leaders demonstrate higher levels of job satisfaction and trust in leadership, leading to enhanced organizational performance (Gardner et

al., 2011). Additionally, authentic leadership has been linked to ethical workplace cultures and reduced employee burnout (Leroy et al., 2015).

b. Intra-preneurship

Intra-preneurship refers to an individual's ability to foster innovation and proactive problem-solving within an organization, enabling employees to take ownership of initiatives and drive meaningful change (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001). Organizations that encourage intra-preneurial behavior benefit from higher adaptability, creativity, and competitive advantage (Kuratko et al., 2005). Intra-preneurs play a crucial role in identifying opportunities for process improvements, creating new solutions, and driving transformation in organizations (Rigtering & Weitzel, 2013). Studies highlight that leaders who cultivate a culture of intra-preneurship create work environments where employees feel empowered to take initiative and experiment with new ideas (Urban & Wood, 2015).

c. Stakeholder Management

Stakeholder management is a critical competency that involves identifying, prioritizing, and engaging stakeholders to align their interests with organizational goals (Freeman, 1984). Effective stakeholder management ensures that decision-making processes consider the needs and expectations of both internal and external stakeholders, thereby enhancing organizational legitimacy and fostering collaboration (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Research highlights that organizations that successfully manage stakeholders build long-term trust, mitigate conflicts, and enhance corporate reputation (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). In public administration, stakeholder management plays a crucial role in governance, policy implementation, and community engagement efforts (Bryson, 2004).

d. Negotiation Strategy

Negotiation strategy refers to the systematic approach leaders use to achieve favorable outcomes in complex negotiations (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Effective negotiators must balance assertiveness with collaboration, ensuring that outcomes are mutually beneficial while maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders (Lewicki, Barry, & Saunders, 2015). Research emphasizes that negotiation success is influenced by emotional intelligence, preparation, active listening, and adaptability (Thompson, 2012). Skilled negotiators anticipate counterarguments, employ data-driven persuasion techniques, and remain flexible to achieve optimal results (Bazerman & Neale, 1992). In leadership, strategic negotiation skills are essential for resolving conflicts, forging alliances, and advancing organizational interests (Malhotra & Bazerman, 2007).

iv) Grade 13 (Senior Management): Strategy Formation

Senior managers are responsible for formulating strategies that drive organizational success:

a. Leadership Agility

Leadership agility refers to a leader's ability to adapt quickly to changing environments, make informed decisions under uncertainty, and respond effectively to unforeseen challenges (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). Agile leaders demonstrate situational awareness, flexibility, and resilience, enabling them to navigate crises, embrace innovation, and lead transformational change (Pulakos et al., 2000). Research suggests that organizations led by agile leaders are more adaptive to disruptions, competitive in fast-changing industries, and capable of sustaining long-term growth (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leadership agility is particularly relevant in the public sector, where leaders must manage shifting policies, stakeholder expectations, and emerging global challenges (OECD, 2019).

b. Personnel Resource Management

Personnel resource management involves effectively recruiting, developing, and retaining human capital to ensure optimal workforce productivity and organizational efficiency (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). Effective personnel resource management contributes to higher employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, and improved workplace morale (Dessler, 2020). Research highlights that leaders who invest in workforce development, continuous learning, and performance

management create highly engaged and motivated employees (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). In the public sector, strategic human resource management practices align personnel decisions with governmental objectives and long-term institutional sustainability (Pynes, 2013).

c. Business Community Management

Business community management focuses on building strategic partnerships between public and private sector entities to foster economic growth and sustainable development (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Public-sector leaders who engage with business communities help align governmental initiatives with private sector capabilities, promoting innovation, job creation, and shared economic value (Bryson et al., 2016). Effective business community management requires stakeholder collaboration, corporate social responsibility (CSR) integration, and long-term relationship-building (Freeman, 1984). In governance, establishing strong ties with the business sector enhances investment climate, policy effectiveness, and regional economic development (OECD, 2020).

d. Advocacy Strategy

Advocacy strategy is a key leadership competency that enables individuals to promote organizational initiatives, influence policy decisions, and effectively communicate strategic goals (Teles & Schmitt, 2021). Leaders skilled in advocacy develop persuasive communication techniques, coalition-building strategies, and evidence-based policy recommendations to gain stakeholder support and drive meaningful change (Jenkins, 2006). Research suggests that successful advocacy requires narrative framing, public engagement, and media utilization to ensure that key messages resonate with decision-makers and the broader community (Ganz, 2009). In public administration, advocacy strategies help leaders shape legislative agendas, secure funding, and advance institutional missions (Bryson, 2004).

v) Grade 14 (Top Leadership)

At this level, officers assume roles that require enterprise leadership, where they are responsible for shaping the strategic direction of the organization while maintaining alignment with national and international policies. The key competencies for this level include:

a. Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking is a critical leadership competency that enables leaders to anticipate future challenges and opportunities, formulate long-term goals, and devise actionable strategies that align with governmental priorities (OECD, 2023). Effective strategic thinkers use systems thinking, environmental scanning, and scenario planning to develop sustainable solutions for complex governance challenges (Mintzberg, 1994). Research indicates that leaders who demonstrate strategic thinking contribute to organizational agility, innovation, and long-term policy success (Liedtka, 1998). Within public administration, strategic thinking plays a crucial role in national development planning, economic forecasting, and crisis management (Bryson, 2018).

b. Strategic Alignment

Strategic alignment ensures that all institutional policies, initiatives, and projects are coherent and contribute to national objectives (Jones et al., 2022). This competency requires leaders to synchronize organizational strategies with broader governmental goals, ensuring that efforts are mutually reinforcing and synergistic (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). Research highlights that public sector organizations with strong strategic alignment improve policy implementation, resource allocation, and performance outcomes (Poister, 2010). Leaders who prioritize strategic alignment minimize operational inefficiencies, enhance cross-sector collaboration, and maintain institutional accountability (Hrebiniak, 2005).

c. Strategic Alliance

Strategic alliance refers to the ability to foster and maintain high-level partnerships with government entities, international organizations, and private sector stakeholders to advance public service goals (McClelland, 1973). Strong alliances enhance policy effectiveness, economic cooperation, and knowledge exchange, benefiting all involved stakeholders (Gulati, 1998). Research underscores that successful strategic alliances rely on trust, mutual interests, and shared governance frameworks (Dyer & Singh, 1998). In governance, alliances between public and private entities support economic development initiatives, infrastructure projects, and global policy coordination (OECD, 2020).

d. Strategic Diplomatic Engagement

Strategic diplomatic engagement is essential for government leaders responsible for international relations, negotiations, and cross-border collaborations (Partnership for Public Service, 2023). This competency requires expertise in diplomatic protocols, negotiation strategies, and cross-cultural communication to represent governmental interests effectively (Keohane, 1986). Studies indicate that public sector leaders involved in diplomacy contribute to global security, trade agreements, and international cooperation (Nye, 2004). Leaders skilled in strategic diplomatic engagement strengthen national influence in global affairs and foster positive bilateral and multilateral relations (Putnam, 1988).

This hierarchical competency framework ensures that officers progress systematically in their leadership development, gaining the necessary competencies at each level to prepare them for increased responsibilities. The structured approach to competency mapping supports succession planning, enhances leadership readiness, and strengthens institutional capacity within the Sarawak civil service.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study highlight the progressive nature of leadership competencies, demonstrating how each competency level builds upon foundational skills and integrates more strategic and enterprise-level competencies at senior leadership levels. This structured progression model is critical in ensuring that civil service officers acquire the necessary skills and competencies at each career stage to effectively perform their roles and responsibilities (Boyatzis, 2008). The structured approach enables a seamless transition from tactical execution at entry levels to high-level strategic decision-making at the top echelons of the Sarawak civil service. A key implication of this competency mapping is the need for targeted leadership training programs tailored to different career stages. Entry-level officers (Grade 9) require fundamental training in team coordination, emotional intelligence, and stakeholder engagement, as these skills are essential for effective team management and collaboration. As officers progress to mid-level leadership roles (Grade 10-12), the focus should shift towards strategic alignment, negotiation skills, and effective communication, enabling them to lead teams and projects effectively (Miller & Dougherty, 2021). Senior officers (Grade 13-14), on the other hand, should undergo advanced leadership training in policy alignment, strategic decision-making, and diplomatic negotiations, ensuring that they can navigate complex governance challenges (OECD, 2023). By structuring leadership development programs according to career stages, the civil service can create a well-equipped leadership pipeline that ensures competency progression and organizational effectiveness (Jones et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the competency framework aligns with international best practices in public administration. Many global public sector leadership models, including those from the OECD and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), emphasize competency-based leadership development as a means of enhancing governance effectiveness and institutional resilience (OECD, 2019). These frameworks highlight the importance of adaptive leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making—all of which are reflected in the competencies identified in this study. Benchmarking against these global standards provides an opportunity for the Sarawak civil service to align with best practices, enhance leadership effectiveness, and ensure greater policy coherence in governance (UNDP, 2021).

Additionally, the stakeholder validation process in this study further reinforced the practical relevance of the identified competencies. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and expert consultations provided an opportunity to validate, refine, and contextualize the competency categories to reflect the unique realities of public administration in Sarawak. This bottom-up approach ensures that the competency framework is not merely an abstract theoretical model, but one that is applicable to real-world governance contexts (Medicaid Directors, 2023). Engaging government officials, private sector experts, and policymakers in this process ensures that the framework addresses current governance challenges, including bureaucratic efficiency, cross-sectoral collaboration, and policy implementation gaps (Op de Beeck & Hondeghem, 2010).

The study's findings emphasize that effective leadership development is a continuous process that requires ongoing competency assessments, targeted interventions, and professional development initiatives. To enhance the practical application of this competency mapping framework, it is recommended that the Sarawak civil service:

Implement structured leadership training programs that correspond to career stages, ensuring that officers develop competencies progressively.

Establish competency-based performance evaluations, allowing for regular assessment of leadership skills and targeted improvement plans (OECD, 2023).

Enhance mentorship programs where senior officers can guide and develop emerging leaders, fostering institutional knowledge transfer and leadership continuity (Jones et al., 2022).

Integrate digital competencies into the framework, preparing civil servants for technological advancements in public administration (UNDP, 2021).

By adopting these measures, the Sarawak civil service can strengthen leadership readiness, promote sustainable governance practices, and ensure that civil servants are equipped with the right competencies to drive public sector transformation.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the competency mapping framework provides a systematic approach to leadership development, several challenges were identified during the research process:

Diverse Job Functions Across Ministries – Some competencies may require customization based on the specific roles of officers in different government ministries (Ontario Public Service, n.d.).

Limited Leadership Development Programs – Existing civil service training programs may not fully cover the breadth of competencies identified, necessitating the development of customized leadership training (OECD, 2023).

Resistance to Change – Implementing a competency-based framework may face resistance from stakeholders accustomed to traditional training and promotion systems (Op de Beeck & Hondeghem, 2010).

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:

Develop Competency-Based Training Programs: Civil service training institutions should incorporate the competency framework into their professional development programs, ensuring that officers receive structured leadership training at each grade.

Establish a Leadership Mentorship System: Senior officers (Grade 13-14) should mentor junior officers to transfer knowledge and build leadership capacity, fostering internal succession planning (Jones et al., 2022).

Implement Periodic Competency Assessments: A structured evaluation system should be put in place to assess competency development among civil service officers and provide targeted interventions where necessary (Partnership for Public Service, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study proposes a structured competency mapping framework tailored for Sarawak civil service officers, ensuring a systematic approach to readiness profiling for leadership development. By aligning key competencies with officer grades and leadership domains, this framework establishes a clear progression model that supports continuous professional growth, effective policy execution, and governance excellence.

The findings underscore the progressive nature of leadership competencies, demonstrating how officers must develop foundational skills at entry levels before advancing to strategic and enterprise-level leadership roles. This competency-based approach provides civil service leaders with the necessary tools to adapt to dynamic governance challenges, drive policy innovation, and strengthen institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, the competency mapping framework aligns with global best practices in public sector leadership, as seen in models from OECD, UNDP, and other international governance institutions (OECD, 2023; UNDP, 2021). By benchmarking against these frameworks, the Sarawak civil service can ensure that its leadership pipeline remains agile, competent, and future-ready.

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