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## **The Drivers of Higher Education Leadership Competence: A Study of Moldovan HEI's**

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## **The Drivers of Higher Education Leadership Competence: A Study of Moldovan HEI's**

### **Abstract:**

This paper examines the qualities and skills needed by leaders and managers in Higher Education; the extent to which leaders and managers in 15 Moldovan Institutions perceive themselves to hold those qualities and skills; and the main drivers for holding higher levels of them. Review of the literature suggests that the qualities and skills examined belong to nine domains. The leaders and managers perceive themselves to be strongest on the Personal Values domain and weakest on Managing Resources. Where respondents have moved to the action stage of learning, perceive their organisation to be supportive of development, and have access to a broader range of development activities they are more likely to report higher levels of competence on the qualities and skills. The paper concludes that where institutions want to develop leadership and management capacity they need to help leaders and managers to psychologically commit to acting on their development needs.

### **Keywords:**

Leadership, Competence, Action, Organisational Support

## **Introduction**

This paper explores the state of leadership and management qualities and skills in the context of the transitional economy of the Republic of Moldova. It examines the extent to which leaders and managers in 15 of Moldova's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) perceive themselves to hold relevant qualities and skills for their role. It also ascertains the main drivers for holding higher levels of those qualities and skills. In this it presents part of a wider project aimed at the promotion and development of leadership and management across the Moldovan Higher Education sector.

The Moldovan Higher Education (HE) sector is facing significant change in its environment with the shift from a state managed economy to one that is now primarily market led (Bischof and Tofan 2018) and significant depopulation as younger people leave to find work in other countries (Bouton et al. 2011). More directly, HEIs were passed financial and decision making autonomy in 2013 and are now responsible for setting their own strategies. In response, there is a need to implement structural, policy and operational reforms and become more responsive to the demands of students and employer organisations. However, there is a perception that change is being held back by a lack of leadership and management capacity in the HE sector. To ensure that reform occurs, leaders and managers need to be able to drive through change and cope with greater complexity and it is notable that there has been no coordinated effort to prepare them for this challenge and training in modern management methods.

Determining the qualities and skills needed by HE leaders and managers is not a simple task. There is much debate in the literature about what it is to be a leader or manager in the context

of HE, the relevant domains of activity, and the nature of appropriate qualities and skills (Dopson et al. 2016). Before assessing the state of HE leadership and management, it is important to justify what counts as relevant qualities and skills and their domains. The first objective of this study is to develop a framework that identifies HE leadership and management qualities and skills and the domains to which they belong. The second objective is to establish to what extent HE leaders and managers in Moldova perceive themselves to hold the qualities and skills in those domains.

In the context of a study that aims to set the scene for change, it is also important to identify the main drivers or barriers to people becoming better leaders and managers in the context of HE. Understanding which drivers support people in becoming better leaders and managers will help direct resources to areas that will best support change. As a result, the third objective of the study is to identify the main drivers of leaders and managers perceiving themselves to be more competent regarding those qualities and skills.

In addressing these issues the paper starts by developing ‘a framework of HE leadership and management qualities and skills’ before identifying ‘the drivers of better HE leadership and management qualities and skills’ and five hypotheses that underpin the study. It continues to present the ‘method’ outlining the conduct of the study and ‘results’. Finally, the paper examines the implications of the findings in the ‘discussion’ and ‘conclusions’.

## **A Framework of HE Leadership and Management Qualities and Skills**

Determining appropriate criteria is important when assessing the state of leadership and management in HE. There needs to be a framework which differentiates between a good leader or manager and one that is poor. Defining good leadership and management in this way provides a benchmark to which leaders and managers can be compared and assessment made. In many organisations this work of defining what makes good leaders and managers is done through defining competence (Delamare Le Deist and Winterton 2005).

Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) differentiate between three types of competence: competence that is necessary for permission to practice in an occupation such as training and qualifications, competence as an outcome, and competence in meeting specific work tasks. Being concerned with what underpins good leadership and management practice in HE, it is the third with which this study is concerned. Indeed, it is important to develop a framework of competence that identifies what underpins performance in leadership and management roles in HE (Smith and Wolverson 2010). However, it has to be recognised that there is some concern about whether it is appropriate to use competence frameworks when working with leaders and managers in HE (Bolden et al. 2014, Dopson et al. 2016). This concern is centred on the ability of competence frameworks to encapsulate those things that differentiate high performing leaders from others and take account of the qualitative elements of leadership and management work (Bolden et al. 2014). It is likely that this concern stems from ambiguity on the nature of competences in the workplace. Indeed, there are many different views in the literature on what counts as competence, and how competencies might be categorised (Delamare Le Deist and Winterton 2005, Smith and Wolverson 2010) some of which omit the qualitative factors that Dopson et al. (2016) see as being excluded.

This study works from the position that a range of factors underpin competent performance in leadership and management roles in HE. Rather than taking a narrow focus on behaviours, competence in a role is seen to stem from a broad range of qualities and skills. In addition to the technical skills needed to use tools such as those for financial management or project planning, competence will be underpinned by values, how a person relates to their roles, and what Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) describe as their way of being. For a leader or manager to hold a quality or a skill they will have knowledge of it, be able to act on it, and use it to have a positive impact through their leadership role.

A range of frameworks that identify competencies for those undertaking leadership and management roles in an HE context can be found in the literature. For example, Spendlove (2007) proposes a two domain framework and Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky (2011) one based in six. McDaniel (2002) provides a four domain framework that is later refined to five (Smith and Wolverton, 2010, Seefeld, 2016). Although there are differences in the content of the frameworks, nine themes or domains become apparent (Leadership, Managing HE Knowledge, Managing Resources, Managing People: Performance, Managing People: Talent, Personal Impact, Personal Productivity, Personal Behaviours, and Personal Values) that are underpinned by 30 qualities and skills (Table 1).

**Table 1: A Framework for HE Leadership and Management Qualities and Skills**

Domain	Qualities and Skills
<i>Leadership</i>	Creating and communicating vision. Formulating and instilling strategy. Cultivating connections and relationships. Creating change.
<i>Managing Resources</i>	Managing finance. Managing risks. Managing projects. Managing operations.
<i>Managing HE Knowledge</i>	Developing networks for intelligence. Maintaining knowledge of HE sector. Maintaining knowledge of organisation. Leveraging knowledge to operations.
<i>Managing People: Talent</i>	Developing people. Evolving teamwork. Embedding professionalism
<i>Managing People: Performance</i>	Managing performance. Motivating and rewarding. Recruiting and selecting.
<i>Personal Impact</i>	Achieving positive impact on organisation and sector. Inspiring others. Setting clear standards.
<i>Personal Behaviours</i>	Acting for diversity. Delegating appropriately. Acting decisively.
<i>Personal Productivity</i>	Displaying personal resilience. Showing productivity and drive. Engaging others.
<i>Personal Values</i>	Reflecting on practice. Acting with integrity. Valuing learning.



## ***Leadership***

Most HE systems are facing sustained demands for change as their economic and political environment develops (Bolden et al. 2014, Deem et al. 2007, Haddon et al. 2015, Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky 2011) and a central role of leaders and managers in the sector is to shape institutional responses to those demands (Haddon et al. 2015, Scott et al. 2010). As a result, the process of ‘creating and communicating vision’ (Bryman 2007, Bryman and Lilley 2009, Luther 2014, McDaniel 2002, Smith and Wolverton 2010) and ‘formulating and instilling strategy’ (McDaniel 2002, Scott et al. 2010, Scott et al. 2008, Spendlove 2007) are seen to be integral components of effective academic leadership. In order to successfully deliver on vision and strategy, leaders and managers also need to be able to ‘cultivate connections and relationships’ (Bolden et al. 2014, Bryman 2007, McDaniel 2002, Seefeld 2016, Smith and Wolverton 2010) and have the ability to ‘create change’ that is sustained (Angawi 2012, Deem et al. 2007, Luther 2014, McDaniel 2002, Morris and Laipple 2015, Scott et al. 2008, Seefeld 2016, Smith and Wolverton 2010, Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky 2011).

## ***Managing Resources***

As well as responding to the changing demands in the environment, HEI’s are being expected to manage their operations in a more business-like manner, either through a quest for accountability or a drive for a more commercial orientation to their activities (Bryman 2007, Deem et al. 2007). Along with these demands has come a requirement to systematically manage resources and effectively ‘manage finance’ and ‘manage risk’ (Deem et al. 2007, McDaniel 2002, Seefeld 2016, Smith and Wolverton 2010, Wolverton et al. 2005). It is also

an expectation that leaders and managers need to be able to ‘manage projects’ and ‘manage operations’ that support the HEI’s vision (Deem et al. 2007, Scott et al. 2008, Scott et al. 2010, Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky 2011).

### ***Managing HE Knowledge***

Key to effective leadership and management in an HE sector, but also within particular HEI’s, is the ability to understand organisational structures and their relationships in HE, the prevailing culture, and the nature of its internal and external politics. As a result, ‘developing networks for intelligence’ and relationships with key people (Luther 2014, Seefeld 2016, Smith and Wolverton 2010) is important, as is ‘maintaining knowledge of the sector’ and ‘maintaining knowledge of the organisation’ (McDaniel 2002, Scott et al. 2008, Spendlove 2007). Moreover, McDaniel (2002) identifies how understanding of issues of academic administration and enhanced knowledge of an HEI are important when ‘leveraging knowledge to operations’ and ensuring the delivery of operational tasks.

### ***Managing People: Performance***

There is an increasing emphasis on ‘managing performance’ of staff in HEI’s, with leaders and managers being seen as responsible for monitoring and maintaining staff performance in relation to the changing demands of an institution (Bryman 2007, Deem et al. 2007, Morris and Laipple 2015, Wolverton et al. 2005). Leaders and managers need to be cognisant of approaches to ‘motivating and rewarding’ their staff taking note of those things that are

primary motivators for different groups and individuals (Angawi 2012, Haddon et al. 2015, Hamlin and Patel 2015, Scott et al. 2010, Scott et al. 2008, Spendlove 2007). In promoting performance it is also key that leaders and managers are proficient in ‘recruiting and selecting’ the best staff, making good appointments (Bryman 2007).

### ***Managing People: Talent***

In a context where institutions are competing amongst themselves and with commercial sectors for staff, the development of staff and teams is crucial. Leaders and managers need to focus on ‘developing people’ (Angawi 2012, Hamlin and Patel 2015, McDaniel 2002, Smith and Wolverton 2010, Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky 2011), but also embedding them in teams and ‘evolving teamwork’. In addition, when developing a team’s approach to their work ‘embedding professionalism’ is important to underpinning success (Bryman and Lilley 2009, Scott et al. 2008, Seefeld 2016, Spendlove 2007, Wolverton et al. 2005).

### ***Personal Impact***

It is important that leaders and managers in HE establish their credibility through their ability to make a difference and ‘achieve a positive impact on organisation and sector’ (McDaniel 2002, Seefeld 2016). Indeed, through setting a good example they should act to ‘inspire others’ in their work (Haddon et al. 2015, Morris and Laipple 2015). ‘Setting clear standards’ is one element that is important in creating impact by making expectations clear (Scott et al. 2010, Scott et al. 2008). In addition, leaders and managers who ‘act for diversity’ create

impact by building a variety of strengths in their team through introducing a range of perspectives and skills (McDaniel 2002).

### ***Personal Behaviours***

Where the literature moves on to focus on how HE leaders and managers act when operating effectively in their roles, ‘delegating appropriately’ is one of the primary qualities and skills that is apparent (Spendlove 2007). Delegating appropriately allows for a more collaborative approach to leadership and management recognising the contribution of others, but also allows leaders and managers to concentrate on activities where they add the most value and the strategic elements of their role. At the same time, the ability for ‘acting decisively’ generates the momentum needed in supporting change (Haddon et al. 2015, Hamlin and Patel 2015, Morris and Laipple 2015, Scott et al. 2010) and ‘displaying personal resilience’ (Deem et al. 2007) is important in sustaining effective leadership and management.

### ***Personal Productivity***

Leaders and managers in HE need to demonstrate ‘productivity and drive’ (Haddon et al. 2015, Scott et al. 2010, Scott et al. 2008). and ‘engaging with others’ is necessary to ensure personal productivity, as it makes sure ideas are tested out and avoids leaders and managers making mistakes (Angawi 2012, Ladyshewsky and Flavell 2011, Seefeld 2016, Spendlove 2007). Similarly, the ability to ‘reflect on practice’ to ensure that what is being done

continues to be appropriate in a complex and volatile environment is important (Deem et al. 2007, McDaniel 2002, Smith and Wolverton 2010, Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky 2011).

### ***Personal Values***

Finally, these qualities and skills need to be underpinned by a strong sense of values that are congruent with an HE context. Ultimately leaders and managers need to be seen to be ‘acting with integrity’ and be seen as trustworthy and fair (Bryman 2007, Bryman and Lilley 2009, Scott et al. 2010, Seefeld 2016). More specific to the context of HE is the need for leaders and managers to be seen as ‘valuing learning’ as part of practice in HE, but also as part of the mission of HEIs (McDaniel 2002, Scott et al. 2008, Smith and Wolverton 2010).

### **The Drivers of Better HE Leadership and Management Qualities and Skills**

Having established a framework of leadership and management qualities and skills, it is important to understand what is likely to lead someone to be better at them. Understanding the primary variables that contribute to someone becoming a better leader and manager in HE will enable institutions to act to drive improvements. In this section it is argued that four areas have the potential to support leaders and managers in improving their qualities and skills: their ‘stage of change’ in relation to learning, their level of ‘affective organisational commitment’, the level of ‘organisational support for learning and development’, and ‘the range of leadership and management development opportunities’ provided to them.

### *Stage of Change*

The stages of change perspective suggests that as a person approaches a change in any aspect of their life they progress through four stages from not being aware of the need to change, through contemplating a change, preparing for a change, to acting for change (Prochaska et al. 2001). Harris and Cole (2007) have adapted this approach when trying to understand how people relate to their learning and development. Refining Prochaska et al.'s (2001) model to three stages (pre-contemplation, contemplation, and action), they find that people who have progressed from pre-contemplation to contemplation are more likely to identify their qualities and skills as needing development (Harris and Cole 2007).

When examining the stages of change in relation to a person's existing level of competence, rather than their training needs, a different set of relationships would be expected. Indeed, it is those people who have shown an ability to take action to develop their qualities and skills who – through actively working to improve – would be expected to report higher levels of competence. Indeed, as neither pre-contemplation nor contemplation connect with action they cannot be expected to have an impact on the level of qualities and skills a person holds. This leads to two hypotheses:

H1 Pre-contemplation and Contemplation of learning and development opportunities will be negatively associated with perceived competence on qualities and skills

H2 Action on learning and development opportunities will be positively associated with perceived competence on qualities and skills

### ***Affective Organisational Commitment***

Although a person's orientation to their learning is seen to be an important driver for them improving their qualities and skills, there is also evidence that people who are more committed to their organisation are more likely to engage in development. A person who shows organisational commitment recognises their organisation's work and values as being worthwhile and, in turn, is more likely to invest time and effort in developing their qualities and skills (Colquitt et al. 2000). This investment can be made through a desire to contribute effectively to meeting organisational goals that are seen to be worthwhile in themselves, or through a desire to be seen as a valuable member of the organisation therefore increasing the likelihood of continued membership.

Allen and Meyer (1990) conceptualise organisational commitment as having three components: affective, continuance, and normative. Initial evidence shows that it is the affective component and 'employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization' (Allen and Meyer, 1990: 1) that has the potential to drive people to invest in their learning. Harris and Cole (2007) demonstrate that affective organisational commitment is positively correlated with employees' contemplation of learning activities. von Treuer et al.'s (2013) study goes further, demonstrating that higher levels of affective organisational commitment are associated with higher levels of both motivation to learn and motivation to transfer learning to the workplace. This leads to the hypothesis that:

H3 Affective Organisational Commitment will be positively associated with perceived competence on qualities and skills

### ***Organisational Support for Leadership and Management Development***

Since Noe's (1986) study, organisational factors have been shown to have an important role in the promotion of employee learning and development. Employees are more likely to engage with leadership and management development where their organisation and direct supervisors encourage engagement with, and provide resources for, learning (Lancaster and Di Milia 2014, McCracken 2005). Where the organisation and supervisors display an expectation that employees should engage with leadership and management development it can reduce any misgivings an individual may have about admitting to weaknesses in their qualities and skills (McCracken 2005) and normalises a culture of learning (Tracey et al. 1995).

Lancaster and Di Milia's (2014) qualitative study of employees of an Australian organisation explores the components of organisational support. They show that senior management commitment to learning is seen as a key element of organisational support. Moreover, investment in learning through financial resources and ensuring employees are given time to engage in learning is also demonstrated to be a key element of organisational support. Alvelos et al.'s (2015) study demonstrates the role of organisational support in increasing employee motivation to engage in learning and development. Joo et al. (2011) show that organisational support increases learning transfer and Tracey et al. (1995) show positive associations between positive organisational learning climate and culture and improved behaviours after training takes place. Together these findings suggest the hypothesis that:

H4 Organisational support for leadership and management development will be positively associated with perceived competence on qualities and skills



### ***The Range of Leadership and Management Development Activities Offered***

Although organisations and supervisors may be supportive of leadership and management development and have the resources to invest, it cannot be assumed that they will always have the ability to provide appropriate development opportunities. Organisations may not have the ability to develop training for themselves, lacking staff with the relevant technical knowledge or training expertise. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that the expertise will exist in the organisation's immediate environment, especially in transitional economies where there are often significant shifts being experienced as entirely new approaches to running organisations are being introduced and approaches to training may be shifting dramatically. Indeed, where there is a limited range of training on offer it can act as a barrier to leadership and management development. This leads to the final hypothesis, that:

H5 The range of development opportunities offered will be positively associated with perceived competence on qualities and skills

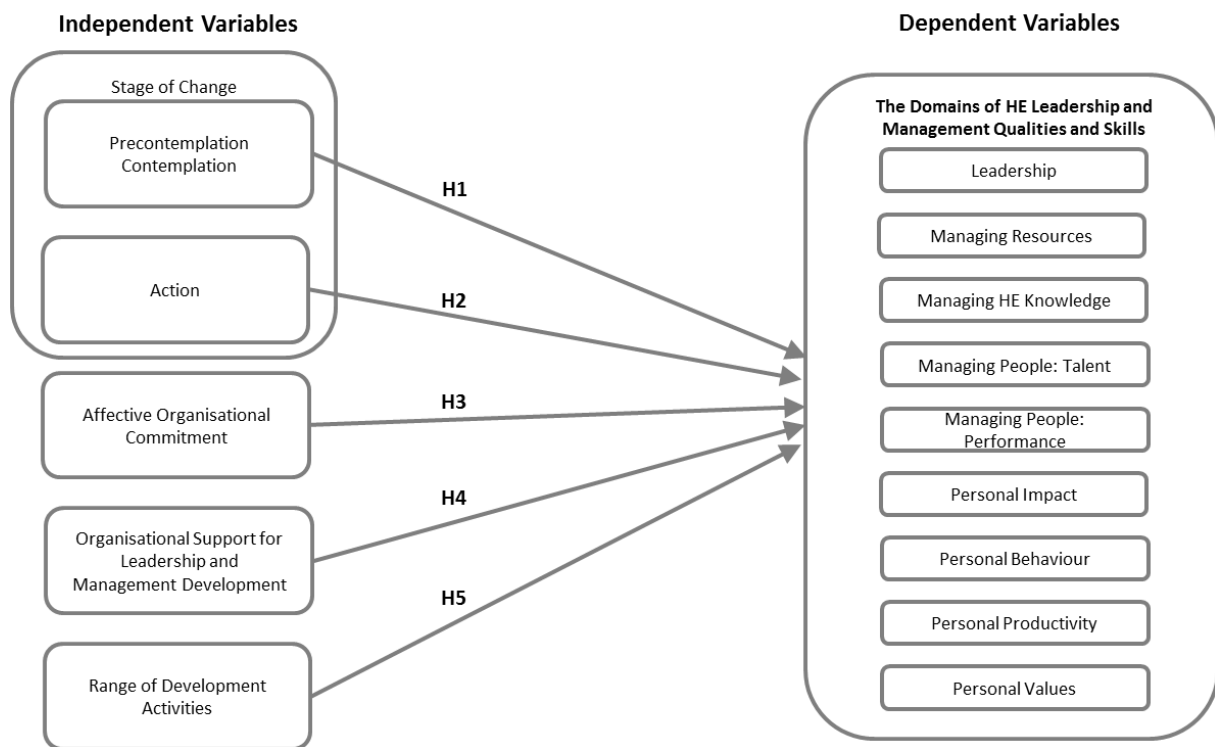


Figure 1: A model of the relationships between the stage of change, affective organisational commitment, organisational support for learning and development, range of development activities, and perceived levels of the nine domains of HE leadership and management qualities and skills.

What results is a model with five hypothesis that predict the associations between the independent variables (dimensions of the stage of change, affective organisational commitment, organisational support for leadership and management development, and the range of development opportunities offered) and the dependent variables, the nine domains of the HE leadership and management qualities and skills (Figure 1). In this, it is important to note that each hypothesis has 9 sub-hypotheses, one for each of the qualities and skills.

## Method

The study was carried out using a survey so as to ensure enough data was provided to assess statistical relationships. The survey was created in English before being translated by

professional translators into Romanian, the official language of the Republic of Moldova. To ensure that meanings had not shifted, each item was checked through retranslation into English (Regmi et al. 2010). In five instances the potential for translation error was identified. In each case the English and Moldovan authors discussed the meaning of the final items to ensure a common meaning was being conveyed in English and Romanian.

Participants were drawn from 15 public universities in Moldova. Senior leaders at each institution were asked to support the survey of their leaders and managers as part of a training needs analysis conducted in preparation for a national development programme. The senior leaders arranged for the circulation of email messages asking their leaders and managers to participate in the study, each of which contained an electronic link to the survey. In response to the invitation, 159 complete responses were received representing a response rate of 33%<sup>1</sup>. On average respondents were 46 years old, had worked at their institution for 19 years, and had held their current leadership or management role for 6 years. Of the respondents 62% were female, and 93% held a full-time permanent contract with their institution. Participants reflected the full range of seniority of management with 18% being Rectors or strategic leaders, 24% senior leaders, and 57% academic or non-academic managers.

### ***Measures***

Five measures were used to examine the stage of change, affective organisational commitment, perceived organisational support for leadership development, the range of

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<sup>1</sup> The online survey tool used only provides researchers with access to data for respondents who have completed the survey in full. Inspection of the responses showed no evidence of respondent unreliability leading to a 100% usage rate.

development opportunities offered, and perceived level of competence. Except where stated otherwise, participants were asked to respond using a 5 point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

### *Stages of Change*

Assessment of the stage of change took place using the Stages of Change Scale measure adopted from Harris and Cole (2007). In Harris and Cole's (2007) study the scales displayed sound reliability (Precontemplation 4 items,  $\alpha = 0.72$ ; Contemplation 3 items,  $\alpha = 0.75$ ; and Action 5 items,  $\alpha = 0.86$ ). No examples of the measure or individual scales being used in the Romanian language could be found.

The scale reliabilities were only partially replicated in this study. Action displayed high reliability ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) based on five items with 'I am doing something about my leadership shortcomings that have been bothering me' being one example. Precontemplation showed reliability of  $\alpha = 0.72$  based on four items including 'I hope I get some good advice from a leadership development programme'<sup>2</sup>. Further analysis also revealed that deleting the item 'As far as I am concerned, I do not have any leadership development needs' would lead to considerable gains in reliability resulting in  $\alpha = 0.88$ . The Contemplation scale did not show adequate reliability with  $\alpha = 0.54$  and analysis showed that no gains would be made through deleting items. As a result the scale was excluded from the analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> This three items were each positively phrased and reverse scored.

### *Affective Organisational Commitment*

Affective organisational commitment was measured by adopting Allen and Meyer's (1990) Affective Commitment Scale. The scale contains eight items including 'This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me'. The scale has been used extensively showing consistently high reliability. The two examples of studies available that use the scale in the Romanian language also confirm its reliability, Groves and Paunescu (2008) finding  $\alpha = 0.73$  and Felfe et al. (2008)  $\alpha = 0.89$ . The current study found similarly good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

### *Perceived Organisational Support for Learning and Development*

Perceived Organisational Support for Leadership and Management Development was measured using 12 items adapted from Eisenberger et al's (1986) Organisational Support Survey. Items were rewritten to focus on the support of leadership and management development by a participant's line manager and organisation, an example being 'The organisation cares about the development of its leaders'. Three reverse scored items were included to control for agreement response. The measure showed a high level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

### *Range of Leadership and Management Development Activities Offered*

The range of development opportunities offered to leaders and managers by their institution was measured through asking participants to check against a list of nine. The list was derived

through discussions with representatives of the HEIs about the range of development opportunities they offered, for example “Access to online courses” and “Access to formal coaching”. The measure resulted in a score from 0 (the respondent considered that none of the types of development were available to them) to 9 (all of the types of development were available to them).

### *Leadership and Management Competencies*

The extent to which participants perceived themselves to hold the 30 qualities and skills drawn from the literature was measured through a 90 item measure. A set of three questions was written by the authors to measure each quality and skill – with each set examining the extent to which a participant has knowledge and understanding of the quality or skill, the ability to act on the quality or skill, and the extent to which they create impact in line with the quality or skill. For example, for developing people the questions “I have an understanding of how to train and develop staff”, “I have ensured my staff engage in training and career development activities regularly” and “I have staff who progress in their careers” were used. The 30 competence scales showed good reliability varying from  $\alpha=0.72$  to  $\alpha=0.95$ . The 30 sets of questions for the qualities and skills were subsequently grouped into the nine domains as per the framework and each showed high reliability ranging from  $\alpha =0.79$  to  $\alpha =0.96$ .

## Results

This section presents analysis of the extent to which Moldovan HE leaders and managers perceived themselves to hold relevant qualities and skills and the drivers for those qualities and skills.

First, the mean level of perceived competence for each of the nine domains shows the extent to which leaders and managers in the Moldovan HEIs perceive themselves to hold the qualities and skills in the nine domains. This shows that the domains are ordered from Personal Values ( $M=1.47$ ) as a relative strength through to Managing Resources ( $M=2.51$ ) as a relative weakness (Table 2). Of the demographic variables, only seniority of leadership and management position had a significant association with the extent to which leaders and managers saw themselves to hold the qualities and skills, with the ANOVAs being significant ( $p < .05$ ) for all the domains bar Managing People: Talent and Personal Values. In each case where significant associations existed, more senior leaders and managers reported higher levels of competence.

Second, examination of the descriptive statistics in Table 2 shows that the means of the Stages of Change dimensions indicates that the respondents consider themselves to be closer to Action ( $M=1.73$ ) rather than at the Precontemplation stage ( $M=4.52$ ). When examining the mean for Affective Commitment it can be seen that relatively high levels of commitment exist ( $M = 1.84$ ). The mean for organisational support for leadership development ( $M=2.30$ ) suggests moderate agreement that institutions support leadership and management development. The mean number of leadership and development activities offered to individuals is 1.87. Examination of the frequencies shows that 56 (35%) of the respondents

felt that they were not offered any leadership and management development activities by their institution. A further 37% felt that they were offered 1 or 2 types of development. The Pearson correlation coefficients show no evidence of multicollinearity between the independent variables within themselves or with the leadership and management qualities and skills.



**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficients (N=159)**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>Independent Variables:</i>															
1. Precontemplation	4.52	0.52													
2. Action	1.73	0.46	-.605**												
3. Affective Organisational Commitment	1.84	0.58	-.348**	.383**											
4. Organisational Support for L&M Development	2.30	0.51	-.167*	.284**	.465**										
5. Range of Development Activities	1.87	2.16	-.096	-.094	.040	-.248**									
<i>Dependent Variables:</i>															
6. Leadership	2.09	0.58	-.077	.215**	.128	.153	-.359**								
7. Managing Resources	2.51	0.75	-.059	.338**	.102	.242**	-.272**	.569**							
8. Managing HE Knowledge	2.01	0.53	-.170*	.394**	.220	.359**	-.229**	.592**	.709**						
9. Managing People: Talent	1.96	0.52	-.075	.304**	.198*	.387**	-.184*	.510**	.597**	.761**					
10. Managing People: Performance	2.21	0.58	-.054	.332**	.196*	.340**	-.222**	.596**	.743**	.757**	.802**				
11. Personal Impact	1.82	0.43	-.234**	.533**	.323**	.292**	-.097	.409**	.491**	.694**	.608**	.620**			
12. Personal Behaviours	1.95	0.44	-.137	.383**	.180*	.343**	-.261**	.559**	.637**	.743**	.738**	.759**	.699**		
13. Personal Productivity	1.70	0.43	-.367**	.521**	.311**	.354**	-.106	.495**	.511**	.697**	.717**	.642**	.723**	.767**	
14. Personal Values	1.47	0.44	-.414**	.547**	.286**	.147	-.094	.369**	.350**	.442**	.412**	.441**	.642**	.500**	.680**

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

Hypotheses 1 through 5 are addressed by multiple regression with Precontemplation (H1), Action (H2), Affective Organisational Commitment (H3), Organisational support for leadership and management development (H4), and the range of development activities offered to an individual by their institution (H5) as independent variables (Table 3).

**Table 3: Multiple regression analysis of the Drivers of Leadership and Management Qualities and Skills**

Variables	$\beta$	<i>T</i> value	Significance of <i>T</i>
<i>Leadership</i>			
Precontemplation	.017	.180	.857
Action	.162	1.664	.098
Affective Organisational Commitment	.096	1.064	.289
Organisational Support for L&M Development	-.022	-.249	.804
Range of Development Activities	-.351	-4.460	.000**
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.141, F = 6.201, significance of F = 0.000</i>			
<i>Managing Resources</i>			
Precontemplation	.175	1.877	.062
Action	.407	4.267	.000**
Affective Organisational Commitment	-.047	-.535	.594
Organisational Support for L&M Development	.133	1.544	.125
Range of Development Activities	-.182	-2.364	.019*
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.178, F = 7.844, significance of F = 0.000</i>			
<i>Managing HE Knowledge</i>			
Precontemplation	.076	.841	.402
Action	.360	3.868	.000**
Affective Organisational Commitment	.005	.059	.953
Organisational Support for L&M Development	.234	2.800	.006*
Range of Development Activities	-.130	-1.736	.085
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.219, F = 9.873, significance of F = 0.000</i>			
<i>Managing People: Talent</i>			
Precontemplation	.153	1.649	.101
Action	.305	3.218	.002*
Affective Organisational Commitment	-.010	-.118	.906
Organisational Support for L&M Development	.316	3.695	.000**
Range of Development Activities	-.062	-.805	.422
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.187, F = 8.279, significance of F = 0.000</i>			
<i>Managing People: Performance</i>			
Precontemplation	.207	2.243	.026*
Action	.372	3.942	.000**
Affective Organisational Commitment	.023	.259	.796
Organisational Support for L&M Development	.231	2.719	.007*
Range of Development Activities	-.111	-1.449	.149
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.194, F = 8.628, significance of F = 0.000</i>			
<i>Personal Impact</i>			
Precontemplation	.159	1.852	.066
Action	.554	6.314	.000**
Affective Organisational Commitment	.118	1.462	.146
Organisational Support for L&M Development	.104	1.315	.190
Range of Development Activities	-.009	-.126	.900
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.306, F = 14.902, significance of F = 0.000</i>			
<i>Personal Behaviour</i>			
Precontemplation	.105	1.152	.251
Action	.378	4.064	.000**
Affective Organisational Commitment	-.028	-.325	.745
Organisational Support for L&M Development	.227	2.712	.007*
Range of Development Activities	-.158	-2.108	.037*
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.220, F = 9.905, significance of F = 0.000</i>			

<i>Personal Productivity</i>			
Precontemplation	-.084	-.973	.332
Action	.395	4.492	.000**
Affective Organisational Commitment	.038	.468	.640
Organisational Support for L&M Development	.202	2.556	.012*
Range of Development Activities	-.028	-.397	.692
<i>Adjusted R2 = 0.301, F = 14.596, significance of F = 0.000</i>			
<i>Personal Values</i>			
Precontemplation	-.131	-1.525	.129
Action	.438	4.983	.000**
Affective Organisational Commitment	.109	1.347	.180
Organisational Support for L&M Development	-.072	-.909	.365
Range of Development Activities	-.087	-1.228	.221
<i>Adjusted R2 = 0.301, F = 14.603, significance of F = 0.000</i>			

\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .001$

Affective Organisational Commitment shows no significant associations with perceived competence on the domains and Precontemplation only shows a weak positive association with Managing People: Performance ( $p < .05$ ) showing that H1 and H3 are disproved. When examining H5 and the range of development activities offered to respondents, a mixed picture emerges. A strong association exists with Leadership ( $p < .001$ ) with participants agreeing more that they have those qualities and skills as the range of opportunities increases. A similar, but weaker, association exists with Managing Resources ( $p < .05$ ) and Personal Behaviour ( $p < .05$ ). This suggests that for particular domains the availability of a greater range of developmental activities is important in raising the level of qualities and skills, but only provides partial support for the hypothesis overall.

There is more support for H4. Perceived Organisational Support for leadership and management development shows significant associations with Managing HE knowledge ( $p < .05$ ), Managing People: Talent ( $p < .001$ ), Managing People: Performance ( $p < .05$ ), Personal Behaviours ( $p < .05$ ) and Personal Productivity ( $p < .05$ ). This suggests that whilst not associated with all areas, organisational support has an important role to play in promoting development of a range of leadership and management qualities and skills. Strong support exists for H2 and for someone who is at the Action stage of development agreeing that they hold the leadership and management qualities and skills. Action is strongly associated ( $p < .001$ ) with seven of the nine domains with a weaker association showing for one ( $p < .05$ ), only Leadership not showing a significant association.

## Discussion

When examining the qualities and skills of HE leaders and managers at Moldovan HEIs the results point to varying levels of competence. The managing resources domain, with its qualities and skills of finance, risk, project and operations management, is the one with which the respondents perceived themselves to be least competent. This reflects the position found before in studies of HE leaders and managers, who being from an academic background may be well qualified in their subject area, but have little training or expertise in the tools for managing resources (e.g. Wolverton et al. 2005). However, this study also showed it to be the case for non- academic leaders in HE. Only those in the most senior leadership positions perceived themselves to be more competent on this domain. This points to a clear need to support HE leaders and managers in developing their qualities and skills in the area of managing resources irrespective of whether they are managers of academic or operational areas in their organisation.

Leaders and managers see themselves as having greater competence on the qualities and skills in the leadership, managing people, and knowledge of HE domains, but still show room for improvement. Again this reflects the findings of other studies where leaders and managers are shown to have a certain level of proficiency in the management of people (Deem et al. 2007) often learning from those managers who have inspired them earlier in their careers (Spendlove 2007). However it also has to be noted that self-ratings on these skills have been shown to differ to those provided by employees who are led and managed (Amundsen and Martinsen 2014, Atkins and Wood 2002, Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky 2011), and this would need to be taken into account when determining the development of leaders and managers in the Moldovan HE sector.

It is the domains of personal behaviours, impact, productivity, and values where the leaders and managers rated themselves as most competent on the qualities and skills. This implies that managers will need little

development on these domains, although it has to be borne in mind that whilst managers perceive themselves to be strong in these areas there may be issues of alignment with what their institutions believe to be appropriate in the changing context of the Moldovan HE sector. So, what emerges is a picture where leaders and managers in Moldovan HE see themselves as being generally competent, but in need of particular support in managing resources and some aspects of managing people.

The results also point to the main drivers of HE leader and manager competence on the qualities and skills. Unlike the studies presented by Harris and Cole (2007) and von Treuer et al. (2013), the results do not show any role for affective organisational commitment in driving better qualities and skills. Rather, it is the leaders and managers who have determined to move to act on developing their skills, seen themselves to have organisational support for that development, and had access to a broader range of development opportunities who report higher levels of competence.

These findings raise some very practical issues for HEI's that are interested in increasing the competence of their leaders and managers. First, it shows the importance of organisational support, confirming the qualitative (Lancaster and Di Milia 2014) and quantitative (Alvelos et al. 2015, Joo et al., 2011, Tracey et al. 1995) findings of previous studies. Organisations need to determine how they will show consistent and active support for the development of leaders and managers. This means a combination of elements need to be in place. Senior leadership needs to promote leadership and management development through policy and communication that encourages a culture of learning and improvement in their leaders and managers (Lancaster and Di Milia 2014). More importantly, supervisors need to work with their leaders and managers to identify their development needs and encourage engagement in development (Colquitt et al. 2000). Supervisors also need to provide financial and time resources that directly support individual leaders and managers to engage in leadership and management development (Holton et al. 2000).

Second, the results show that there is a need to provide a range of learning opportunities when promoting the development of leaders and managers. At its most basic level this means making sure that all leaders and managers have access to some rather than no opportunities. However, two other aspects are also likely to be relevant. Although there is much debate about the role of learning styles and different learning methods in promoting learning, it is important to recognise that learners are different and that amongst leaders and managers there will be people with preferences for different types of learning opportunity (Riding and Sadler Smith 1997, Kolb and Kolb 2005). By offering a range of approaches to development it is more likely that a particular leader or manager's preferences will be addressed increasing the potential for them to engage with learning and development (McCracken 2005). In addition, it is likely that some approaches to development will work better when engaging particular qualities and skills (e.g. Rodgers et al. 2016). Formal training may be better for understanding how financial systems can be used and coaching when understanding how to negotiate the dynamics of a particular team. HEIs will want to address these varied needs by creating interventions that meet the development needs they identify across their organisation and the preferences of individual learners for different ways of learning.

Third, in showing that a major element of increasing the level of HE competence on qualities and skills is associated with a person's stage of change in relation to their leadership and management development and the move to action, it highlights that organisations should adopt strategies that promote that action. Whilst ensuring organisational support and a range of opportunities are in place will inevitably make it easier for someone to engage in action, it is the psychological shift to commitment that ensures that meaningful action takes place. Whilst the particular mechanisms that lead a person to commit psychologically to action on leadership and management development have received limited debate in the literature, it seems that providing a leader or manager immediate feedback and evidence (Kuvaas et al. 2017) will be important, as will be allowing them space to reflect (Gray 2007, Matsuo 2018). It is these strategies and others like them which HEIs interested in developing leadership and management capacity should adopt.

## Conclusions

This paper set out to meet three objectives: to develop a framework of HE leader and manager qualities and skills, determine to what extent leaders and managers in Moldovan HEIs perceive themselves to hold the qualities and skills in that framework, and identify the main drivers of leaders and managers perceiving themselves to be more competent on those qualities and skills. In addressing those objectives the study has developed a framework of competencies that are based on 30 qualities and skills grouped into nine domains. It has found that leaders and managers in Moldovan HEIs perceive themselves to be strongest on the Personal values, Personal Productivity, and Personal Impact domains and weakest on Managing Resources, Managing People: Performance, and Leadership. The results also show that where respondents have moved to the action stage of learning, perceive their organisation to be supportive of development, and have access to a broader range of development activities they are more likely to report higher levels of competence on the qualities and skills.

In providing a framework for leader and manager qualities and skills in HE that is grounded in theory, the study provides a robust foundation on which further research can be driven. Not only can the framework be used as an assessment tool when identifying the level of leader and manager competence, it provides a basis for research. In clarifying the drivers of better HE leaders and managers, the study contributes to evidence in the literature and suggests a range of actions for those HEIs interested in improving their capacity for leadership and management. In particular, the roles of actively supporting leaders and managers as an organisation are demonstrated, but moreover the need to provide them with evidence and space to reflect when encouraging them to psychologically commit to action on their development needs is highlighted as a priority.

These findings and the contribution of this study need to be viewed in the context of its limitations. It is recognised that the findings are based on the perception of leaders and managers of their own qualities and skills, and that they may differ to those of their subordinates, peers and supervisors. Indeed, additional research that introduces the multi-source evaluation of leaders and managers to this research would be valuable. In addition, research needs to take place to ascertain to what extent the findings based on data from Moldovan HEIs can be replicated in a range of national contexts in order to establish the extent to which they can be generalised.

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