

# Implications of incompetent coping strategy on managing competency gap among academic leaders

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The increasing changes and demands placed on higher education institutions have resulted on stronger emphasis to develop the diverse management competencies of academic leaders (ALs) (Hecth, 2004). Many universities do not have a systematic approach for either identifying or developing the skills, thus, the ALs frequently have difficulties managing and prioritising the multiple tasks expected of them (Visser, 2009). This study aims to identify the competency gap of the ALs, the coping strategies they adopted and the extent of their coping capabilities. Survey using online administered questionnaires was done with Als from a private and a public university in Malaysia. These leaders included academics who were stream or subject coordinators and Associate Deans responsible for teaching/learning and research. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics that included frequencies and mean tabulation. Findings from the 51 respondents indicated that they have a lack of competence in the core management roles such as planning/organising, leadership, controlling and human resource related areas. They also showed a few weak competencies with regards to their interpersonal skills. The leaders coped with various work-focused, emotion-focused and organisational strategies. However, they also adopted some incompetent strategies that led to a vicious cycle of stress that led to their work-life balance issues. A framework to illustrate the effect of incompetent coping strategies on their competency gap was developed for this study. From the study, institutions can be informed to better identify the relevant and effective coping strategies so that professional learning and support are truly beneficial.

**Keywords:** Academic leaders, competency gaps, coping strategies

## **Introduction**

How challenging is the work of an academic leader (AL)? Due to the demand of various stakeholders, the expectations of higher education institutions are evolving and hence the responsibilities of ALs are also evolving. According to Lyons (2008), roles of ALs are diverse spanning across managerial and instructional/academic realms along with the demands from diverse stakeholders. These include amongst others: communication skills, problem solving skills, conflict-resolution skills and cultural management skills.

Many universities do not have a systematic approach for either identifying or developing leadership skills. As such, ALs frequently have difficulties managing and prioritising the multiple tasks expected of them (Visser, 2009). Additionally, academics who are appointed to administrative positions often do not get enough support in enhancing their management competencies e.g. lack of competency-based training, proper mentoring and coaching programmes (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2010). They become overly task-oriented and disengaged from people relations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Hence, the transition from academia to that of academic leader can be a fear-provoking experience. Based from studies by many researchers, some ALs who do make the move from lecture-room to administration office have reported difficulties in their transition (Cook, 2014; Spillane & Lee, 2013). Hence, a period of transition is very much required which involves both personal and professional growth.

Understanding the ALs' experience and their coping strategies are especially critical for retaining and supporting them. This study aims to identify the competency gap of ALs and to investigate the necessary competencies, institutional support and coping strategies that are required to help them take on their leadership role more effectively. The objectives of this study are to

- investigate the key challenges faced by academic staff as they transition into their administrative positions as ALs
- identify the competency gap of ALs in terms of their management competencies and attitudes
- identify the appropriate coping strategies that ALs can adopt to perform their role more effectively.

This study will provide an opportunity to learn from the individuals who have navigated the transitional phase of an academic leadership position. This will help faculties within the university in developing guidelines for selection and appointment of ALs and a competency-based training framework that will be able to address competency gaps among their ALs.

## **Literature review**

### **Management competency**

Changes in the higher education environment are evident in the shift from “collegialism” to “managerialism” (Simon, 2007). According to Hecht ((2004), the increasing changes and demands placed on higher education institutions (HEIs) and resultant impact on the roles and responsibilities of academic heads/leaders have led to an increasing emphasis on the

development of core ALs' management competencies. As a result, greater demands are being made on academic heads expressing the requirement of certain managerial competencies necessary to improve management performance.

In spite of the changes in the education environment and the changing role of ALs, very little is done to help prepare them for their roles as managers (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2010). Hetch (2004) found that most ALs emerge from faculty ranks. It was postulated that little or no competency training programmes exists within HEIs to equip the ALs with required managerial competencies. Consistent with this notion, Visser (2009) revealed that many universities do not have a systematic approach for either identifying or developing leadership skills. Visser (2009) further elaborated that ALs frequently have difficulties managing and prioritising the multiple tasks expected of them. MacBeath (2011) reported that many well qualified educators are not seeking headship due to the possibility of great stress arising from workload and often feeling unappreciated. Studies also have shown that many of the problems of practice that ALs face are related to activities that span across managerial, instructional and political realms (Cuban, 1988), time and attention (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Horng, Klasik & Loeb, 2010), demands from multiple stakeholders (Duke, 1988) and high level of stress and burnout (Friedman, 2002). Hecht et al. (1999) validated that due to the ALs' experience/ background, they are normally good administrators but poor leaders and strategists.

Thus, keen interest to research on the management and leadership competencies are far reaching. The focus of management training should be on developing the management skills and competence required in support of the university's vision, mission and strategy. According to Potgieter and Coetzee (2010), there is a significant relationship between competencies indicated as being important for the job and the level of training required. Hence, the training needs of ALs should be formally assessed and the depth of training required should be considered in the design of training programmes.

Bartram (2005) viewed competencies as sets of behaviours that are contributory in the delivery of desired outcomes and are useful tools for leadership enhancement. Potgieter and Coetzee (2010) defined competency as the blend of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours needed to carry out tasks successfully. They further explained that managerial competencies in higher education depend on both skills to perform one's duty as well as the capacity to transfer knowledge. According to Anitha and Reema (2014), managerial competencies are activities, knowledge, skills or attitudes and also personal characteristics necessary to improve management performance.

Gonzalez (2004) in her study on perception on competencies among senior administrators of higher education institutions in Mexico identified four categories of leadership competencies that can enhance effective academic leadership. They are personal characteristics and skills, administrative competencies, competencies of social responsibilities and institutional competencies.

Potgieter and Coetzee (2010) and Visser (2009) claimed that the increasing changes and demands in the current education environment and resultant impact on the roles and responsibilities of ALs have directed to an increasing importance on the development of core management competencies. An extensive literature review was conducted by Visser and due to its relevancy Potgieter and Coetzee adopted Visser's management competencies framework for their study. The competencies identified can be categories into five different

dimensions: planning and organising, leadership, controlling, human resource (HR) specific aspects and personal attributes.

More recently, Anitha and Reema (2014) in their research on competencies and commitment of higher education teachers concluded that teachers need to be not only competent but must also have the desired commitment to enhance their work performance. In their research on 185 educators, 59 competencies statements were finalised and were grouped into three types of competences: professional competence, teaching competence and managerial competence.

### **Management stress – Coping strategies**

The transition from academia to that of AL may present a unique challenge. Moreover, the complexity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century education environment generates a series of tensions and difficulties for institutions as well as ALs. As a result of this, the nature of leadership is uncertain and challenged (Petrov, 2006). ALs must cope with their roles, while dealing with mixed emotions and challenges with professional integration. Boyland (2011) agreed to that idea. In her study on job stress and coping strategies of ALs (principals) she established that the academic leadership is evidently a challenging position. She claimed that many principals are reporting escalating pressure as well as serious concerns regarding time demand and growing lists of responsibilities. The transitional challenges which ALs face in the educational environment will definitely create stress at work (job stress).

According to Lazarus (1966) stress arises when individuals perceive that they cannot adequately cope with the demands being made on them or threatens their well-being. With respect to job stress, Beehr and Newman (1978) suggested that stress arising from job conditions may force a person to deviate from functioning normally thereby affecting the performance and effectiveness of the individual. Stress stemming from a job might cause problems and will ultimately also affect the organisation (Anbazhagan & Rajan, 2013). They further explained that everyone in their work is exposed to certain level of stress (tension and frustration) as they get through their duties assigned to them. It is therefore necessary for individuals to adopt the technique of moderating and controlling their personal stress levels in order to make their work experience as pleasant as possible. Coping strategies play a significant role in a person's adaptation to stressful situational events. Hence, using appropriate coping strategies might be a driving force that ALs can adopt to perform their role more effectively.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have proposed a process-oriented coping model that distinguishes between two major functions of a coping model: problem-focused responses and emotion-focused responses. Endler and Parker (1994) demonstrated three basic coping styles: task-oriented, emotion-oriented and avoidance-oriented coping.

Anbazhagan and Rajan (2013) in their study on occupational stress and coping strategies expressed that when individuals experience stress, they tend to adopt different ways of dealing with it as they will not be able to keep on being in a state of tension. Hence, they will practice only some coping techniques for dealing effectively when faced with stressful situations at work. Anbazhagan and Rajan (2013) stated that coping strategies can be categorised as individual strategies and organisational strategies. And they further elaborated that individual strategies may further be classified either as 'work-focused' coping strategies and 'emotion-focused' coping strategies.

## Research Methodology

Quantitative data were collected through online questionnaires directed to ALs who are either stream/subjects coordinators or associate deans from one private university and one public university in Malaysia. A total of 51 responses were collected. The questionnaire consists of three sections that covered the demographic information of the respondents, their competencies and coping strategies. Demographic information included questions on their faculty, current academic and administrative position, years of teaching experience and duration of the tenure in their respective administrative role. Competencies included areas in planning and organising, leadership, controlling, human resource management and personal attributes. Coping strategies included strategies related to work, emotion and organisation. All questions were assessed on a 4-point semantic differential rating scale. Data were then analysed using descriptive statistics that mainly focused on frequencies and mean values.

For the purpose of our study, ALs refer to academics who teach and hold administrative positions (with allowance) in HEIs. Potgieter and Coetzee's (2010) management competencies framework and Anbazhagan and Rajan's (2013) management stress-coping strategies were adopted for this study. Potgieter and Coetzee's (2010) research work was cited in Pienaar and Cillier's (2014) research as well as Cillier and Pienaar (2015) on the career psychological experiences of academic department chairpersons in a South African University.

## Findings and discussion

### Demographics

The 51 ALs from the both universities were from different faculties, mainly Social Science (43.1%), Business/Law (23.5%) and Science (13.7%). They were mostly senior lecturers (52.9%), lecturers and associate professors (17.6% respectively). Most of them have 4 to 6 years of work experience in their academic positions (31.4%) whereas 29.4% have 1-3 years and few have more than 10 years of experience (33.3%). As for their experience in their current administrative positions, majority of them have 1 to 3 years of experience (70.6%) and 13.8% of them have more than 4 years of experience.

### Competency

#### *Planning and organising*

Overall, ALs were competent in planning and organising as shown in Table 1. Most ALs perceived themselves as capable in the areas of prioritising tasks and activities in their daily (90.2%, mean = 3.24), strategic implementation (84.3%, mean = 3.04) and strategic planning and formulating (80.4%, mean = 3). Possible areas that need further skill enhancement would be delegation of tasks (76.5%, mean = 2.98, ranked 4) and managing projects (78.4%, mean = 2.96, ranked 5).

**Table 1: Planning and organising**

I am capable of	Not Capable		Moderately Capable		Capable		Very Capable		Mean	Rank
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1. planning and formulating strategically	0	0	10	19.6	31	60.8	10	19.6	3	3
2. implementing strategically	0	0	8	15.7	33	64.7	10	19.6	3.04	2
3. prioritising tasks and activities in my day-to-day	0	0	5	9.8	29	56.9	17	33.3	3.24	1

planning										
4. delegating tasks to teams and individuals	0	0	12	23.5	28	54.9	11	21.6	2.98	4
5. managing projects in terms of planning, scope, time, cost and quality management	0	0	11	21.6	31	60.8	9	17.6	2.96	5

### Leadership

Referring to Table 2, the key strengths of the ALs are the ability to manage interdepartmental relationships with peers within the department and motivating the overall team and individual team members (mean = 3.20, rank =1). Managing relationships with key stakeholders may be one area in which the ALs need further enhancement (78.4%, mean = 2.94, ranked 5).

**Table 2: Leadership**

I am capable of	Not Capable		Moderately Capable		Capable		Very Capable		Mean	Rank
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1. leading the overall team and individual team members	0	0	6	11.8	30	58.8	15	29.4	3.18	2
2. motivating the overall team and individual team members	0	0	7	13.7	27	52.9	17	33.3	3.20	1
3. managing change and renewal	0	0	9	17.6	32	62.7	10	19.6	3.02	4
4. managing interdepartmental relationships with peers from within the department	0	0	4	7.8	33	64.7	14	27.5	3.20	1
5. managing relationships with key stakeholders	0	0	11	21.6	32	62.7	8	15.7	2.94	5
6. managing diversity and cross-cultural issues in teams within the department	1	2	8	15.7	29	56.9	13	25.5	3.06	3

### Controlling

Based on Table 3, ALs' competencies in this area focused on monitoring and disseminating information (96.1%, mean = 3.35), planning and running meetings, executing effective follow-up strategies and activities (92.2%, mean = 3.18) and managing performance in terms of planning, conducting and follow up for team and self (86.3%, mean = 3.08). One area that may needed facilitation among the ALs were the ability to understand financial operations such as budgeting, cost control and financial reporting which recorded only 54.9% (mean = 2.57, ranked 7).

**Table 3: Controlling**

I am capable of	Not Capable		Moderately Capable		Capable		Very Capable		Mean	Rank
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1. monitoring and disseminating information	0	0	2	3.9	29	56.9	20	39.2	3.35	1
2. managing performance in terms of planning, conducting and follow up for team and self	0	0	7	13.7	33	64.7	11	21.6	3.08	3
3. using IT especially communication, planning and reporting systems effectively	0	0	10	19.6	31	60.8	10	19.6	3	4
4. understanding finance and	3	5.9	20	39.2	24	47.1	4	7.8	2.57	7

commerce especially budgeting, cost control and financial reporting										
5. planning and running meetings, executing effective follow-up strategies and activities	0	0	4	7.8	34	66.7	13	25.5	3.18	2
6. performing administrative tasks, reporting performance and financials, monitoring, maintaining and developing reporting systems	1	2	9	17.6	33	64.7	8	15.7	2.94	5
7. managing according to quality standards and procedures with the awareness of quality	0	0	12	23.5	31	60.8	8	15.7	2.92	6

#### *Human resources specific aspects*

Mean scores of human resource (HR) specific aspects are quite low. Results from Table 4 indicate that all mean values are less than 3 indicating that the leaders are moderately competent in this area. Conducting effective induction and orientation for new staff (78.5%, mean = 2.9) and handling grievances and disputes (76.5%, mean = 2.84) were the key areas and so was the ability to deal with issues of discipline (72.6%, mean = 2.8). Besides financial capacities, another area that they needed further skill enhancement would be in human resource policies (62.7%, mean = 2.71, ranked 5).

**Table 4: Human resource specific aspects**

I am capable of	Not Capable		Moderately Capable		Capable		Very Capable		Mean	Rank
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1. handling grievances and disputes	1	2	11	21.6	34	66.7	5	9.8	2.84	2
2. dealing with issues of discipline	2	3.9	12	23.5	31	60.8	6	11.8	2.80	3
3. attracting talent in terms of recruitment; interviewing and selection of new staff members	2	3.9	13	25.5	30	58.8	6	11.8	2.78	4
4. conducting effective induction and orientation of new staff members	0	0	11	21.6	34	66.7	6	11.8	2.90	1
5. managing employment according to policies: equity, disability, harassment, etc. with the awareness of HR policies	1	2	18	35.3	27	52.9	5	9.8	2.71	5

#### *Personal attributes*

Personal attributes were one crucial competency that was analysed and it was interesting to note that 92.1% (mean = 3.12) of the ALs perceived themselves as capable in managing emotional intelligence which was a good indicator. Results from Table 5 reveal that communication (94.1%, mean = 3.29), time management (92.2%, mean = 3.26), and effective presentation (92.2%, mean = 3.20) were three other important competencies that they were able to comprehend. Two areas that may require further development would be creative problem-solving and decision-making (74.5%, mean = 2.94, ranked 6) and negotiating and resolving conflicts (78.4%, mean = 2.92, ranked 7).

**Table 5: personal attributes**

I am capable of	Not Capable		Moderately Capable		Capable		Very Capable		Mean	Rank
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1. managing time	0	0	4	7.8	30	58.8	17	33.3	3.26	2
2. communicating in terms of questioning and active listening, building trust, empathy and mutual understanding	0	0	3	5.9	30	58.8	18	35.3	3.29	1
3. business writing in terms of letters, reports, plans and project plans	0	0	8	15.7	32	62.7	11	21.6	3.06	5
4. creating and giving effective presentations to groups	0	0	4	7.8	33	64.7	14	27.5	3.20	3
5. creative problem-solving and decision making	0	0	13	25.5	28	54.9	10	19.6	2.94	6
6. negotiating and resolving conflicts	0	0	11	21.6	33	64.7	7	13.7	2.92	7
7. managing emotional intelligence in terms of self-development, self-control, compassion and humanity, seeking responsibility and personal growth	0	0	4	7.8	37	72.5	10	19.6	3.12	4

### Coping Strategies

#### *Work focus strategies*

Results from Table 6 show that a majority of the mean values are above 3 indicating that these leaders are more than capable in coping with their role. Working closely with relevant people seems to be a good coping strategy where being accessible to colleagues and students (100%, ranked 1), consulting with the relevant staff (98%, ranked 2), listening to their key players (100%, ranked 3) and searching for information via clarification from their superiors as well as colleagues (100%, ranked 4 respectively) were some methods used.

One very interesting aspect to note was their ability to manage time effectively (96.1%, mean = 3.24). However, this was achieved at the expense of having to bring work home where the inability to leave work at work was only 39.2% (mean = 2.22, ranked 12). This may indicate a work-life balance issue where ALs' strategies to manage workload turned out to be ineffective as it generated time management problem and stress-related issues. The ALs also noted that they have room for further improvement in their ability to delegate (76.5%, mean = 2.96, ranked 10) and avoiding unrealistic deadlines (76.5%, mean = 2.94, ranked 11).

**Table 6: Work focus strategies**

I am coping with my role as an academic leader by	Not Capable		Moderately Capable		Capable		Very Capable		Mean	Rank
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1. seeking clarification from my superior when faced with unclear job assignment	0	0	0	0	33	64.7	18	35.3	3.35	4
2. managing my time effectively	0	0	2	3.9	35	68.6	14	27.5	3.24	8



3. learning how to get better organised so that work can be done effectively	0	0	3	5.9	30	58.8	18	35.3	3.30	5
4. delegating work to my subordinates	0	0	12	23.5	29	56.9	10	19.6	2.96	10
5. co-operating with other people in the same situation like dividing the work and sharing information	0	0	1	2	34	66.7	16	31.4	3.30	5
6. leaving my work at work	11	21.6	20	39.2	18	35.3	2	3.9	2.22	12
7. searching for more information on some unclear issues or policies	0	0	2	3.9	34	66.7	15	29.4	3.26	7
8. avoiding unrealistic deadlines	2	3.9	10	19.6	28	54.9	11	21.6	2.94	11
9. being accessible to colleagues and students	0	0	0	0	28	54.9	23	45.1	3.45	1
10. consulting with relevant staff before making a decision	0	0	1	2	28	54.9	22	43.1	3.41	2
11. trying to be as evidence based as possible in all that I do	0	0	3	5.9	31	60.8	17	33.3	3.28	6
12. consulting, listening and following due process when working with colleagues	0	0	0	0	33	64.7	18	35.3	3.35	4
13. listening to the perspective of key players before making any decision	0	0	0	0	32	62.7	19	37.3	3.37	3
14. improving my negotiation and persuasion skills to deal with superiors and colleagues	0	0	4	7.8	34	66.7	13	25.5	3.18	9
15. planning ahead and expecting the unexpected	0	0	3	5.9	33	64.7	15	29.4	3.24	8

### *Emotion Focus strategies*

ALs also tried to cope with their role through emotion focus strategies such as garner more social support (90.2%, mean = 3.28), do what they say (92.1%, mean = 3.24), increasing their tolerance of ambiguity and improving their interpersonal skills (92.2%, mean = 3.18 respectively). Results from Table 7 reveal that the most crucial coping strategy that they adopted was to make things simple (96.1%, mean = 3.31, ranked 1). Nevertheless, they may need to find ways to learn to relax (76.4%, mean = 2.96, ranked 7). Additionally, maintaining health (84.3%, mean 2.94) and dealing with uncertainties (82.4%, mean = 2.94), both ranked 8 are two strategies that recorded lower capability levels.

**Table 7: Emotion focus strategies**

I am coping with my role as an academic leader by	Not Capable		Moderately Capable		Capable		Very Capable		Mean	Rank
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
16. getting social support such as	1	2	4	7.8	26	51	20	39.2	3.28	2

from family members, friends and other colleagues										
17. increasing my tolerance of ambiguity especially in unclear situations	0	0	4	7.8	34	66.7	13	25.5	3.18	4
18. practicing any forms of relaxation techniques	2	3.9	10	19.6	27	52.9	12	23.5	2.96	7
19. learning to deal with reduced perfectionism especially when I am ill or having personal problems	0	0	10	19.6	32	62.7	9	17.6	2.98	6
20. maintaining my health by having proper diet, proper exercise and enough sleep	1	2	7	13.7	37	72.5	6	11.8	2.94	8
21. taking some time off to go for a vacation/shopping/watching movies and etc.	2	3.9	3	5.9	31	60.8	15	29.4	3.16	5
22. improving my interpersonal skills	1	2	3	5.9	33	64.7	14	27.5	3.18	4
23. managing through fear or unexpected outcomes	2	3.9	7	13.7	34	66.7	8	15.7	2.94	8
24. "walking my talk" which means I do what I say	1	2	3	5.9	30	58.8	17	33.3	3.24	3
25. making things simple	0	0	2	3.9	31	60.8	18	35.3	3.31	1

### *Organisational strategies*

Organisational strategies seemed to be the coping strategy that needed the most development as most ALs find themselves not very capable in dealing with their role using these strategies. They coped by attending workshops or training in professional development (84.3%, mean 3.18), research (76.4%, mean = 3) and leadership (68.6%, mean = 2.88). Attention is needed in the areas of health maintenance (43.1%, mean = 2.37), stress reduction (35.3%, mean = 2.28), budget and finance (37.3%, mean 2.37) and dealing with people (49.1%, mean = 2.55) as these areas recorded lower capability levels.

**Table 8: Organisational strategies**

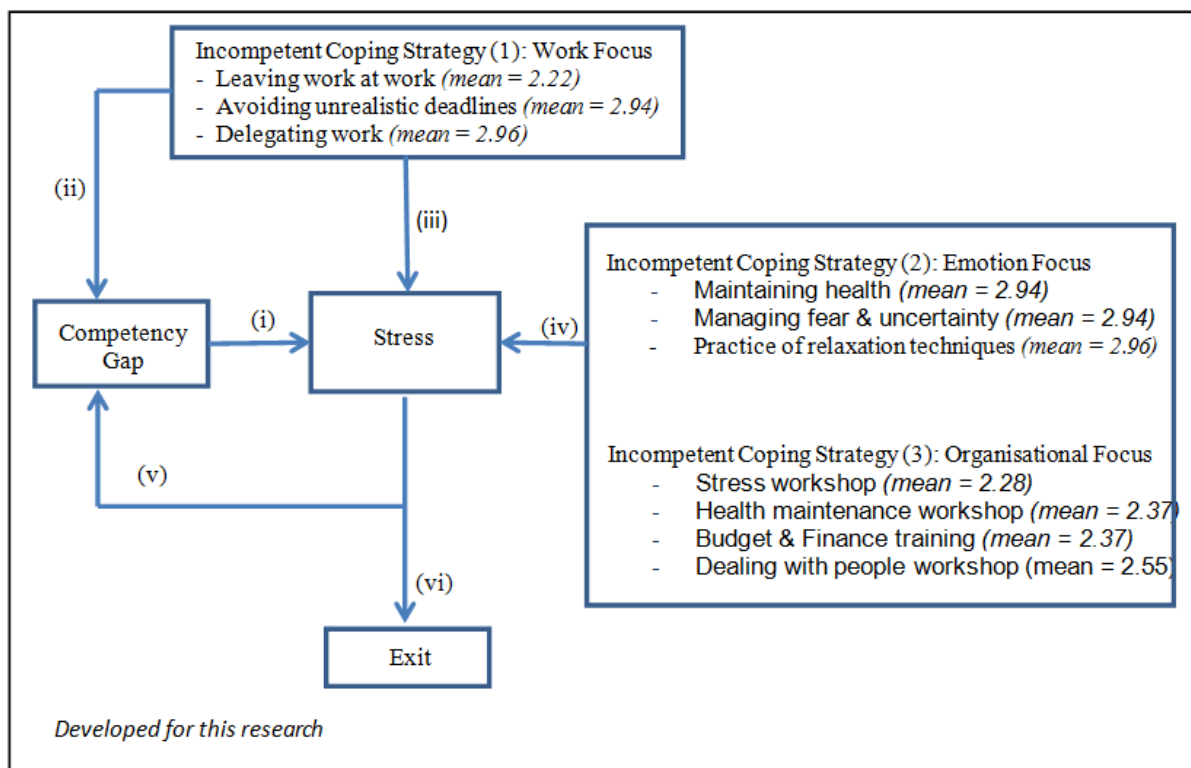
I am coping with my role as an academic leader by	Not Capable		Moderately Capable		Capable		Very Capable		Mean	Rank
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
26. having leadership training	2	3.9	14	27.5	23	45.1	12	23.5	2.88	3
27. attending motivational workshop	2	3.9	15	29.4	23	45.1	11	21.6	2.84	4
28. attending health maintenance workshop	8	15.7	21	41.2	17	33.3	5	9.8	2.37	8
29. attending stress reduction workshop	7	13.7	26	51	15	29.4	3	5.9	2.28	9
30. having management training	2	3.9	14	27.5	27	52.9	8	15.7	2.80	5
31. having budget and finance training	6	11.8	24	47.1	14	27.5	5	9.8	2.37	8
32. attending "dealing with people" workshop	4	7.8	20	39.2	19	37.3	6	11.8	2.55	7
33. having professional development training	0	0	6	11.8	28	54.9	15	29.4	3.18	1
34. attending values and ethics workshop	4	7.8	16	31.4	23	45.1	6	11.8	2.63	6

35. attending research workshop	2	3.9	8	15.7	27	52.9	12	23.5	3	2
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It is noteworthy to point out that the ALs adopted incompetent coping strategies such as attending workshops on stress reduction (mean = 2.28), health maintenance (mean = 2.37), and budget and finance training (mean = 2.37) to address their competency gaps. Figure 1 shows that these strategies have generated a vicious cycle of inducing higher stress that eventually worsens their incompetence and leads to loss of talent and value through voluntary and involuntary exits from the position or the organisation (Cloud, 1991; Milburn, 2010).

To further illustrate this cycle, ALs who lack competence in performing their roles and responsibilities will experience stress (i). They will then attempt to cope with the demand, challenges and stress of their work by adopting work related coping strategies that are not effective for them, which will worsen their incompetence (ii) as well as their level of stress (iii).

To counter this problem, ALs seek emotion focus and organisational strategies that may again ineffective, thus, further enhancing stress (iv). Burnout, counter productivity, tension and frustration occur (Cloud, 1991; Anbazhagan & Rajan, 2013) that will lead to larger and worse competency gaps (v) and ALs stepping down from the position or leaving the organisation (vi).



**Figure 1: Effect of incompetent coping strategies on competence gap & stress: a vicious cycle**

## Conclusion

Overall, the results indicate that respondents believed they were competent in managing their job. This is common since the ALs were selected for the position hence it can be considered that they do have a certain level of competency. However, a further examination of data

regarding ALs competency and coping strategies give clues as to ways academic institutions can assist ALs cope effectively in this high-pressure position.

Results of this study indicates that the ALs may require further improvement in managing projects, delegation of tasks, managing relationships with key stakeholders, creative problem solving/decision making and negotiating/resolving conflicts. This is understandable as these leaders do not have prior experience in making decisions and managing individuals except those pertaining to students and peers. As described by Spillane and Lee (2013), some ALs who do make the move from lecture-room to administration office have reported difficulties in their transition. As academics they possess extensive teaching experience yet their ability to lead a department still needs to be developed. This suggests that they require extensive training in team leadership in inspiring their teams as well as individual members in order to successfully execute their responsibility as a leader. People management training is also needed as results also reveals that these leaders need skills in managing relationship with key stakeholders as well as “dealing with people”. It is also evident from the results that respondents lack the know-how in financial operations and awareness of HR policies. Hence, it is recommended that preparation and familiarity with these two areas should be prearranged for individuals prior to them taking up the leadership position.

An interesting finding in the option used by the respondents in coping with the demands of the academic leadership position is their inability to leave work at work. Results imply that by bringing back work they are able to manage their work effectively. This is a detrimental work-life balance issue. With respect to this, the respondents do agree that they need to attend health maintenance and stress reduction workshops. Steps should be taken to assist and support ALs in coping with the demand sof their jobs. Keeping job related stress under control is a critical step towards avoiding health issues, burn out or even a job/career change (Boyland, 2011; Colbert, 2008). Hence, education institutions and Deans should provide the support ALs needs in order to manage stress, avoid the vicious cycle and maintain a healthy work environment. The results obtained from this study may help institutions achieve the important goal of retaining quality ALs who are able to perform both effectively and efficiently through identifying the relevant coping strategies and ensuring the comprehension and effectiveness of those strategies for the ALs so that they will truly benefit from the support that they are given.

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