Grounded Theory Approach in University Leadership Succession Planning Model Development: From the Methodological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the development of a leadership succession planning model for a Malaysian public university using Charmaz's Grounded Theory Approach. This study emphasised the research methodology, specifically Charmaz's constructivist Grounded Theory Approach, which aligns with the constructivist philosophy of this research. Charmaz (2014) emphasised the constructive interaction between the actor and the researcher. The actor could be a human being, such as participants, or objects, like documents and videos. Therefore, data collection from three sources was conducted concurrently. Specifically, for participants, it began with the selection of a specific public university as a case study. Subsequently, the initially selected participants were identified from the university's organisational chart. Interview invitations were then sent to participants, and those who accepted were interviewed. Chain-referral sampling, with an emphasis on the principle of theoretical sampling, was conducted according to the recommendations of the participants. For documents, these included Malaysian acts, circulars, and guidelines used at the Case University, as well as documents related to LSP. The videos were downloaded from the Case University's official channel and were related to LSP. The data from the three sources were considered as one set; there was no distinction between primary and secondary data. For data analysis, which included open, axial/focus, and selective coding, the process began after the first participant was interviewed. Constant comparison of data started after the second piece of data was collected and continued until the thesis findings were reported. In total, data from fourteen participants, forty documents, and seventeen videos were collected and analysed. To ensure research trustworthiness, four techniques were employed: member checks, active engagement in data collection, the researcher's position and reflectivity, and a detailed description of the research method. The collected data were then used to develop a leadership succession-planning model for the university. Feedback from relevant stakeholders currently involved in the university's leadership succession planning was obtained to ensure the alignment of the developed model with the actual situation at the Case University. A comprehensive description of each step in the process enhances the transferability of the research methodology and can assist other researchers in developing their own models.

Keywords: Case Study, Grounded Theory Approach, Model Development, Reverse Coding, University Leadership Succession Planning

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INTRODUCTION

This study employed Charmaz (2014) Grounded Theory Approach (GTA) as a methodology in leadership succession planning model development in a public university in Malaysia. With a strong emphasis on methodological aspects, the authors thoroughly documented each step in the progression of model development.

According to Rothwell (2015), Leadership Succession Planning (LSP) involves identifying critical management positions, from project manager and supervisor roles to the highest positions within an organisation. The purpose of LSP is to provide flexibility in management promotion and ensure that as individuals progress in seniority,

their management skills become more generalised towards overall organizational objectives rather than just departmental goals.

Therefore, in this study, LSP is defined as a systematic and objective-guided development process provided by the Case University to develop potential leaders internally. The aim was to prepare individuals to replace current leaders in the future. This approach allows for the continuous cultivation of culture, leadership and intellectual talent, effective management of critical knowledge assets, and the preservation of important social relationships within the university. Additionally, the LSP serves to align the future leader with the university's missions, visions, values, strategic plans, and the 2012-2025 National Higher Education Blueprint (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2015). Its purpose is to ensure the university's sustainability, continuity, and future growth regardless of its economic conditions or competitive environments. Consequently, the LSP system follows specific rules and procedures that align with university requirements and philosophies.

Based on this operational definition of LSP, this study formulated eight research questions to understand the operational aspects of the Case University's LSP process and develop a leadership LSP model suitable for the Case University with GTA. Therefore, this study aims to narrate the entire GTA process, starting with the decision to utilise GTA and continuing through the final step of the process. The goal was to formulate a leadership LSP model based on GTA.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

GTA, introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), aims to develop a theory based on empirical data. Researchers employ this method by collecting data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The underlying assumption is that the resulting theory is grounded in collected data (Merriam, 2009). Hence, the researcher initiates the study in a particular area and allows relevant findings to emerge throughout the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Consequently, a theory or model is being constructed inductively using the collected data, and the researcher analyses the data and develops a model to explain a phenomenon based on it (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

A distinguishing feature of GTA is its focus on the development of theory. The approach employs a flexible and systematic strategy involving data collection, coding, synthesis, categorisation, and integration of ideas, all with the explicit goal of developing a middle-range or substantive theory rather than a formal or grand theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Constant comparative, which is a key strategy in GTA, entails a repetitive process of comparing and contrasting data, and plays an important role in model or theory development (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Using this method, researchers generate, test, and revise the classifications of grouped data fragments until they establish a justifiable connection between theory and data. Furthermore, Charmaz (2014) asserts that GTA utilises empirical data and experiential knowledge to form theoretical assumptions or inferences. This is further supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2018) and Morgan (2020), where GTA involves abductive reasoning, whereby existing ideas are combined in novel ways, leading to the revision and alteration of prior theoretical understanding.

According to Merriam (2009), a substantive theory developed through GTA is specific and practical for everyday situations, making it more relevant than theories that address broader concerns. Flick (2019) and Vollstedt and Rezat (2019) highlight that the primary goal of GTA is to construct a theory or model of a particular phenomenon within a specific field of study or to provide a comprehensive explanation of the field and the phenomenon it encompasses. Additionally, Charmaz (2014) emphasised on the constructive interaction between actor and researcher. The actor could be human being like participants, or objects like documents and videos. Hence, in this study, data from participants, documents, and videos were grouped together as one. There was no distinction between primary and secondary data.

Creswell (2007) defined a case study as a qualitative methodology in which the researcher examined one or more bounded systems (cases) over time, collected detailed data from multiple sources, and presented a description of the case, along with themes derived from the data. According to Stake (2007), the heuristic nature of case studies enables the identification of previously unrecognised relationships and variables, leading to new ways of thinking about the phenomenon under study. Moreover, it is valuable for their ability to capture complex actions, perceptions, and interpretations, and to present narratives that contribute to naturalistic generalisations.

In a case study, a bounded system refers to what is being studied, defining the unit of analysis and setting the boundaries in a case. It describes what is included within boundaries and what is excluded. The end product of a qualitative case study is an in-depth, comprehensive description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 2009). This design is well suited for addressing practical problems that occur in everyday

situations. It allows for the emergence of new meanings, diverse reader understandings, and the confirmation of existing knowledge. Moreover, the knowledge generated from qualitative case studies is contextually grounded, concrete, and developed through the researcher's understanding and reference populations selected by the researcher.

Data analysis is the process of deriving meaning from collected data (Merriam, 2009). This involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting the information obtained from participants and other sources. The resulting meanings from the data emerge as findings during the analysis process, which can be presented in various forms, such as themes, categories, or even higher-level constructs, such as models and theories. In GTA, data collection and analysis are interrelated processes, and analyses begin from the moment the data are collected. The analysis stays closely connected to the data, constructing levels of abstraction directly from it and refining them through additional data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Furthermore, the GTA follows a coding process consisting of three stages: open, axial/focus, and selective coding (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, coding in GTA is not a linear progression; it involves constant movement back and forth between the data and the different stages of coding, in short, constant comparison (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Moreover, two coding methods were employed in this study: inductive and reverse coding. An inductive approach, based on inductive reasoning, involves reading and understanding textual data and developing concepts and themes based on the data. It is a data-driven approach commonly used in interpretivist-constructivist studies with limited existing knowledge (Chandra et al., 2019). Conversely, reverse coding follows a top-down approach but begins with the assertions found in the data. It starts with a conclusion or assertion observed in the study and works backward to identify the smallest units of analysis. Reverse coding aims to break down ideas into smaller components, like traditional coding, and differs from deductive coding (Sybing, 2022).

Lastly, researchers' credibility is of utmost importance in qualitative research, as researchers are the research instrument. According to Merriam (2009), the trustworthiness of a study relies on the researcher's credibility because the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher's observations, interviews, and data analysis directly inform the interpretation of the reality in qualitative research. Unlike quantitative research, there are no statistical tests, such as Factor Analysis, to assess validity or reliability. Additionally, there are no rules or regulations to guide researchers on when to intervene in sensitive or illegal situations during interviews, or on how to ensure that the study's findings do not harm participants. In light of these challenges, researchers must be aware of the ethical issues inherent in the research process and examine their philosophical orientation toward these matters (Merriam, 2009).

To address trustworthiness, guidelines from Lincoln and Guba (1985), Creswell and Miller (2000), and Merriam (2009) were followed. In line with the constructivist philosophy underpinning this study, the validity procedures involved active engagement in data collection and provided a detailed and comprehensive description of the research method. Techniques, such as member checking, and thick and rich descriptions, were employed to establish credibility. Transferability is enhanced by providing an in-depth and comprehensive description of the research methodology. Finally, reflexivity is employed to ensure confirmability.

METHODOLOGY

Figure 2 illustrates the entire GTA process, which is explained in the following section.

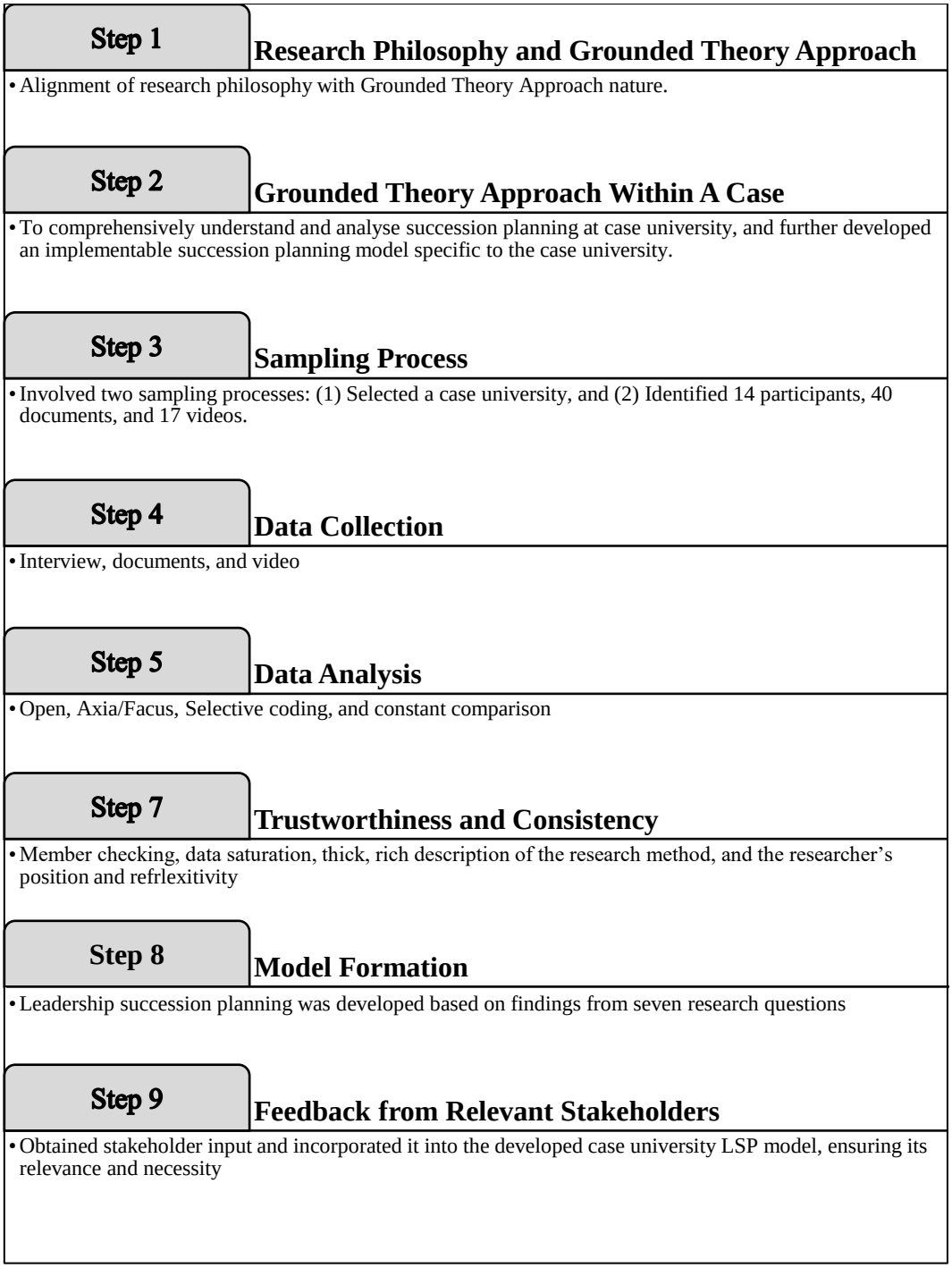

Figure 2: Illustration of the entire Grounded Theory Approach process

Research philosophy and Grounded Theory Approach

This study aimed to develop a LSP model suitable for the Case University, based on eight research questions. The research questions sought to understand LSP at the Case University, acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in the term "understand". The study relied heavily on participants' views, as the realities constructed by participants were influenced by their experiences, backgrounds, and knowledge. The research intention and research questions were aligned with constructivism as ontology and subjectivism as epistemology (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, as this study aimed to develop a model to address the Case University LSP, the GTA is suitable for this study. Charmaz (2014) constructive GTA was chosen based on its interpretative nature and its alignment with the research philosophy of this study.

Grounded Theory Approach Within a Case

The case refers to the LSP phenomenon that occurred within a unit of analysis (Merriam, 2009), which was the selected university, also known as the Case University. The GTA data collection process focused exclusively on LSP within the boundary of the Case University. Therefore, all investigations and analyses centred around LSP at the Case University. All participants in the study were individuals associated with the Case University and had previous or current involvement in the Case University's LSP. The selected documents and videos were limited to those relevant to the LSP of the Case University only.

Sampling Process

This study involved two sampling processes (Merriam, 2009). The first sampling process involved the selection of a Case University from among 20 public universities in Malaysia. The selection criteria considered factors such as university establishment, history, size, achievements, focus, and programs offered. After these criteria were applied, one research university that is located in Klang Valley, Malaysia, ranked in the top 200 of the 2023 QS World University Ranking, was selected.

The second sampling process involved criterion-based selection of participants. Initially, the participants were chosen based on their involvement in the university's LSP, as suggested by the existing literature (Alina Shamsuddin et al., 2012; Bano et al., 2022; Gilbert, 2017; Heuer, 2003; Klein & Salk, 2013; Mateso, 2010; Morrin, 2013; Norzaini Azman et al., 2012; Posiah Mohd Isa et al., 2009; Sakinah Muslim et al., 2012). The participants in the university's LSP were typically in leadership positions, and their identification was done using the university's organisation chart. Initially, ten participants were identified, but only seven of them accepted the interview invitation sent via email.

To gather more information about the university's LSP, the researcher employed chain-referral sampling (Merriam, 2009). This approach ensured that the selection of additional participants was driven by conceptual saturation, thus contributing to a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the research topic. The initial participants were asked to suggest suitable names for the study, with an emphasis on suggesting names of individuals who had or have experience in the Case University's LSP. This resulted in 14 suggestions. However, only four of the suggested participants agreed to participate in the interviews. After completing these interviews, the authors noticed that there were a few questions that needed to be followed up by certain groups of people who were involved in Case University's LSP. Therefore, theoretical sampling was employed. Three participants were identified from Case University's human resource website, contacted, and interviewed.

The invitations to participate in the interviews were sent at different intervals, starting with one participant per week and extending approximately every month. Participants responded to the emails at various times between June 2020 and August 2022. Fourteen participants were interviewed during the study. The guidelines on elite and expert interviews were used during the interview (Bogner et al., 2009; Harvey, 2011; Liu, 2018).

Data collection was stopped when data saturation was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), alias theoretical saturation in GTA (Charmaz, 2014). Saturation indicators include data repetition, presence of theoretical categories, practical relevance, and the researcher's contextual understanding and knowledge (Suddaby, 2006). Therefore, data collection was concluded after interviewing Participant 14, analysing the 40th document, and the 17th video, as no new information emerged. The total accumulated interview duration for the 14 participants was 749 minutes. Table 1 in Appendix I provides a summary of participants' background profiles, interview acceptance, and duration.

It should be noted that Participants 8 and 9 were interviewed as a group, while Participants 12, 13, and 14 formed another group for the interviews. This arrangement was made based on the participants' requests. The remaining participants were individually interviewed. Additionally, Participant 1 was interviewed three times, compared to the others who were interviewed only once. This was due to the time availability of Participant 1. The authors initially conducted an interview with Participant 1 on 21.6.2020 as per the agreed-upon time between Participant 1 and the authors. However, they could not finish the interview during that session. Subsequently, on 10.7.2020 and 15.7.2020, the authors conducted additional interviews with Participant 1 based on Participant 1's availability. Whenever Participant 1 was available for an interview, the authors would be informed and then promptly conduct the interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

Let's revisit the focus of Charmaz (2014), GTA. Charmaz emphasized the constructive interaction between the actor and the researcher. The actor could be a human being, such as participants, or objects like documents and videos. Therefore, documents and videos were also used for model development. The data from interviews, documents, and videos was worked on as one, with the goal of model development. Therefore, the author combined the data from three sources as one during the open, axial, and selective coding process.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of a cordon sanitaire in Malaysia (Chan & Teh Athira Yusof, 2021; DG of Health, 2020), only one physical interview was conducted, while the rest were conducted online using web conferencing platforms (Chia et al., 2021). To record the online interviews, Zoom Cloud Meeting and Google Meet built-in recorders were utilised, along with Screencast software as a backup (Google, 2021; MacLeod et al., 2017; Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2021). A Sony voice recorder was also connected to the computer for backup recording in case of technical errors. Precautions were taken after experiencing technical issues during the second interview with Participant 2, where the Google Meet recorder failed to capture the interview clearly and the screencasting software stopped recording abruptly. Despite efforts to improve the recording quality during the transcription process, there were still many inaudible parts, leading to the loss of valuable information. However, due to the participants' busy schedules as members of the university's top management team, it was not possible to re-interview them. For face-to-face interviews, a Sony voice recorder and built-in phone recorder were used simultaneously to ensure backup recordings.

The interview protocol was designed based on the research questions, and probes were used during the interviews to dig deeper into participants' responses. The authors transcribed and analysed the interview data line-by-line with inductive open coding using ATLAS.ti 9 (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2020). The next interview was conducted only after the completion of the analysis, as the subsequent questions depended on data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). The interview protocol was iteratively modified based on the data collected from previous interviews, and data analysis was conducted concurrently. The amendment of the interview protocol was stopped after Participant 6 because, at that point, the amended protocol has provided an in-depth data required for this study. This process parallels the GTA (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The documents used for this study were the *Universities and University Colleges Act 1971*, circulars, and guidelines from the government, as well as Case University's documents related to LSP. Furthermore, to ensure the relevance of the documents employed by Case University, the author had verified the related documents with Case University's Human Resource Department and the Public Service Department of Malaysia. This is because Case University is a statutory entity with the authority to decide which government circulars are suitable to be applied within the university (Government of Malaysia, 1971; Kerajaan Malaysia, 2015; MAMMPU, 2021). It is a crucial step, as the document is one of the elements used for model development. The verification process was carried out by emailing the respective documents to the Human Resource Department of Case University and the Public Service Department of Malaysia. The officers in charge were contacted to confirm whether these documents were applied at Case University. Some documents were verified during the interviews. During the verification process, a few documents were removed from data analysis because they were found to be outdated and no longer applied at Case University.

Videos that were uploaded to Case University's official channel and related to LSP were used. The researcher cannot disclose the titles of the documents and videos, as doing so would directly reveal the identity of the university. Line-by-line inductive coding was conducted for document analysis. In the case of video analysis, the videos were played in ATLAS.ti and coded according to the time frame, focusing on content related to the LSP at Case University. Inductive coding was primarily used for the analysis, whereas reverse coding was employed for a few themes.

At this phase, the collected data were analysed with the support of ATLAS.ti. All open codes' labels were assigned, starting with "R1" to "R7", representing research questions one to seven, respectively, for which they were intended to provide answers. After open coding, followed by axial coding, also called focus coding by Charmaz (2014), the process involved grouping open codes with similar categories or themes into axial codes. Once again, the labels for axial codes were assigned starting with "R1" to "R7". Subsequently, selective coding took place, where selected axial codes falling under the same core categories were exported as an Excel file, and their labels maintained the "R1" to "R7" convention.

Note that reverse coding with abductive reasoning was employed to address surprising findings from inductive data collection (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Sybing, 2022). This was done by grouping all similar concept open codes under one selective code, for example, 'R1 Succession planning goal' (Figure 3). Then, from open codes in the selective code, further categorization into axial codes occurred, as shown in Figure 4.

A constant comparison was employed throughout the entire process of data analysis. The author constantly compared the data and codes of each newly collected data set with the previous data and codes in all three stages. This constant comparison continued until the findings were reported in the thesis. If necessary, the authors amended the codes based on the data, guided by the research questions. This iterative process involves an interplay between induction and deduction, moving back and forth between new and previous codes (Charmaz, 2014; Suddaby, 2006). From coding to constant comparison, the authors continually asked themselves, "Does this data

from participants answer the research questions?" to ensure that the findings were relevant to the research questions. The following section further describes the coding process in detail.

In the open coding phase, to minimize redundancy, codes with similar meanings were merged. For instance, codes such as 'R1 inspire leadership' and 'R1 leader able to inspire others' were merged into the code 'R1 inspire leadership'. During the constant comparison process, it became evident that the researchers initially misunderstood the meaning of some interviews by interpreting sentences individually, rather than considering the entire paragraph. Consequently, inappropriate quotations and codes were removed and replaced with suitable ones. Moreover, instead of analysing the interview text line by line, the analysis was conducted considering all paragraphs, because participants often responded by starting with a main point and providing multiple examples. A line-by-line analysis was deemed inadequate as it could lead to quoting out of context and fail to capture the participants' actual expressions. Throughout the constant comparison, the researcher consistently questioned the relevance of the codes to the research questions. This process reduced the total number of open codes from 780 to 694.

In the axial coding phase, the authors examined the similarity of meanings within each theme and merged similar notions of codes to avoid redundancy. The interplay between induction and deduction, inter-participant comparisons, and constant-code comparisons continued. The authors also renamed open codes to align them with axial codes and clarify their relationships. Similar axial codes and overlapping open codes within each axial code were merged to further reduce redundancy. For example, 'R2 mentor and coaching' and 'R2 potential leader under the supervision of the incumbent leader' were merged into 'R2 mentor and coaching.' Some axial codes were also moved from one research question to another, based on their relevance. For instance, an axial code related to R2 ('R2 new VC new team new policy new method') was relocated to R5 ('R5 New VC new team new policy').

In the selective coding process, the authors combined similar themes from the axial/focus codes to create selective codes or core categories. These core categories were intended to address the research questions. The researcher continually evaluated whether the core category and categories or themes answered the respective six research questions. Otherwise, themes, categories, or core categories were removed. The interplay between induction and deduction, inter-participant comparisons, constant code comparisons, and redundancy checks persisted in this process. Before finalizing the selective codes (core categories), the researcher thoroughly examined the evidence of data fitting these codes. This involved reviewing each interview transcript and extracting quotation sections and codes, from open to selective. Redundancy checks were conducted by comparing and assessing axial codes within each selective code. Some axial codes were renamed to better align with the core categories and clarify their relationships. Ultimately, seven core categories were constructed from the data to address seven research questions. Research question eight encompasses a model formulated based on the aforementioned seven research questions. In conclusion, the findings from research questions one to seven were synthesized and conceptualized to develop an LSP model for the Case University, providing an answer to research question eight.

Name	Grounded
R1 academic/expertize/discipline/specilization/clinical/talent/critical post/professional/admin SP important	51
R1 ideal SP outcome - save funds	1
R1 identify leaders earlier and groom	20
R1 momentum from last good VC/DVC only last 4-5 years	5
R1 priority of university/academician is student/education	10
R1 recruite candidate who have needed academic traits/research strengh	36
R1 RU focuses on research	26
R1 SP goal - aligned & support goal, mission, vision, value	63
R1 SP goal - better QS ranking, others ranking and world-renowned	23
R1 SP goal - bring organization to next level	19
R1 SP goal - continuity of blueprint, master plan	11
R1 SP goal - continuity of leadership and talent	32
R1 SP goal - good reputation	10
R1 SP goal - improve overall staffs' KPI	21
R1 SP goal - make sure organization stay relevent to the latest trend	31
R1 SP goal - policy/leadeeship dvelopment must align with MOHE strategic plan and policy, thus align with national policy	49
R1 SP goal - produce leaders	12
R1 SP goal - reach university medium, long strategic & trnsformation plan	34

Figure 3: All similar notion of open codes were grouped into one selective code

Selective Code	Axial Code	Open Code
R1 Succession planning goal	R1 SPG - sustainability of university	R1 ideal SP outcome - save funds R1 momentum from last good VC/DVC only last 4-5 years R1 RU focuses on research R1 SP goal - aligned & support goal, mission, vision, value R1 SP goal - better QS ranking, others ranking and world-renowned R1 SP goal - bring organization to next level R1 SP goal - continuity of blueprint, master plan R1 SP goal - good reputation R1 SP goal - make sure organization stay relevent to the latest trend R1 SP goal - policy/leadeeship dvelopment must align with MOHE strategic plan and policy, thus align with national policy R1 SP goal - reach university medium, long strategic & trnsformation plan R1 SP goal - stay at the edge of competitive R1 SP goal - sustainability of university R1 SP is very important R1 SP planning must consider university future palnning R2 organization run by people with professional, performance-driven attitude R2 SP is cheapter compared to bring in external R2 SP is part of 5-10 years strategic planning
	R1 SPG - continuing of talent pool who are ready for new responsible at anytime	R1 academic/expertize/discipline/specilization/clinical/talent/critical post/professional/admin SP important R1 identify leaders earlier and groom R1 priority of university/academician is student/education R1 recruite candidate who have needed academic traits/research strengh R1 SP goal - continuity of blueprint, master plan R1 SP goal - continuity of leadership and talent R1 SP goal - improve overall staffs' KPI R1 SP goal - produce leaders R1 SP goal - ready, nurtured, developed sustaiable talent pool for all critical position R1 SP goal - right person at right at right time R1 SP goal - smooth leadership transition phase R1 SP inform staffs a transparent career pathway to top R1 SP is very important R1 SP very important for Dean, DVC posts R2 SP is important in Retaining talent

Figure 4: Example of a selective code from reverse coding, where SPG is the succession-planning goal.

Trustworthiness and Consistency

Four techniques were employed to ensure the trustworthiness and consistency of the findings, as discussed below.

Member checking was conducted to ensure the accuracy and credibility of interviews. The authors sent the transcripts in Word format to participants via email or WhatsApp Messenger (WhatsApp Inc., 2020), and participants responded to the researcher's email or WhatsApp Messenger with their confirmation and feedback. Adequate engagement in data collection. The data collection was actively engaged and concluded at Participant 14, with no new categories identified and no new information inconsistent with the categories previously identified from the interviews, in short data saturation (Browning et al., 1995; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Houghton et al., 2013; Morse, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Thick, rich description of the research method. The research methodology is described in detail and comprehensively, providing ample details of all research processes involved in the study. This paper presents a rich and thorough description of the research methodology, aiming to present the entire research process from start to finish in a verisimilar manner.

Researcher's position and reflexivity, in this study, the researcher assumed the role of an *etic* or outsider's view (Merriam, 2009). This choice was made because the authors have no direct involvement in the Case University's LSP or related events, nor did they have any personal experience from previous research. The pragmatist approach was adopted because the goal of this study was to develop a practical LSP model suitable for the Case University. This meant that during the process of data collection and analysis, the authors focused on the mindset of addressing problems faced by the Case University's LSP and finding solutions for them (Farjoun et al., 2015).

Throughout the coding process, the authors engaged in continuous self-reflection to ensure objective data analysis and minimise preconceptions influenced by prior readings on LSP. The entire process of data analysis, included open coding, axial/focused coding, selective coding, constant comparison, and data reduction, was approached with an open mind in order to minimal influence from prior knowledge gained from SP literature (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Suddaby, 2006). The goal was to allow the findings to emerge or be recognised from the data with minimal interference from the authors' knowledge and opinion on LSP. Therefore, preconceptions could be prevented.

To address this, the author checked and rechecked the codes multiple times, leaving a few days gap between each review, before submitted the findings to supervisors. Supervisors also assisted in reviewed codes to ensure their emergence and evidence-based nature. Prior to the supervisors' review, the author shared their thoughts on university LSP. This ensured that when the supervisors reviewed the results, they could maintain objectivity and avoid bias from the author's prior knowledge and views on LSP gained from literature reading (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Suddaby, 2006).

During this reflective process, the researcher removed quotations from the respective open codes that had resulted from inadvertently leading the interviews in a specific direction. This practice is discouraged (Charmaz, 2014; Suddaby, 2006). Consequently, irrelevant quotations and codes were deleted.

Feedback from relevant stakeholders

After developing the Case University LSP model, the researcher sought personnel who were currently involved in the Case University LSP from the Case University central management team for feedback on the developed Case University LSP model. The authors showed the developed Case University LSP to the personnel involved and got feedback from the personnel. The whole process was a face-to-face interview. Only one participant that the authors managed to interview for this feedback.

This step was crucial as it took three years to collect and analyse the data to achieve data saturation. However, it is important to note that LSP practices and related policies may change over time. Gathering feedback from the current personnel involved in the Case University LSP was crucial as it helped improve the reliability and workability of the leadership LSP model developed using the aforementioned data. Therefore, based on stakeholder opinions considering necessity and relevance, the developed Case University LSP model was subsequently amended after receiving feedback from stakeholders (Browning et al., 1995; Charmaz, 2006). This process ensured that the model remained relevant and aligned with the needs and perspectives of the stakeholders involved. This approach is aligned with having a mindset rooted in pragmatism and subjectivism epistemology (Charmaz et al., 2018; Morgan, 2020).

Lessons learned

The researcher made two major mistakes during the data analysis. Initially, the researcher analysed the interview data, documents, and video data using different sets of open codes. Therefore, the author re-analysed the data under one set of codes. Second was the authors cherry-picked the interview data to fit them into the research questions by employing forceful coding instead of allowing themes to emerge naturally from the data. This contradicts the principles of GTA and inductive coding (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the authors needed to reanalyse the data.

When selecting participants, particularly for the purpose of building a model based on the current situation, it is best to choose those who are currently practising rather than individuals with past experience, but no longer in the position. This approach allowed the authors to collect the most up-to-date data as the practice of LSP at a university can change over time.

During the interview process, it is important for the interviewer to patiently wait for participants to answer questions without interrupting their thinking processes. Additionally, the authors should be fully aware of the conversations with the participants to prevent accidentally revealing the identity of those who have been interviewed and to ensure participant identity protection. The other lessons learned were that, during the interviews, the prompt questions should be aligned with the research questions, but they should not intentionally lead participants to answer in a way that aligns with the researcher's intentions (Charmaz, 2014; Suddaby, 2006). Moreover, when listening to participants' answers, the authors must remain mindful and focus on their responses. The authors should not impose any direction or ideas on the participants during the interview process to obtain specific answers to the research questions (Charmaz, 2014; Suddaby, 2006). Additionally, the authors must be fully aware of their questions and interactions with participants during the interviews. The entire interview process should be natural, guided only by a semi-structured interview protocol, and allow participants to freely express themselves. Consequently, the findings from the data reflect the actual situation of the study or are closely aligned with it.

In situations where university top management personnel have incredibly busy schedules and the authors have only one opportunity to interview them within a limited timeframe, it becomes crucial to prioritise and optimise the use of available time. To ensure efficient utilisation, it may be necessary to only follow prompt questions after

completing the main questions in the interview protocol. By incorporating prompt questions earlier in the interview, there might not be sufficient time to address all the questions outlined in the protocol.

Nevertheless, one problem occurred because of the limited time to interview participants. There were some questions that were not stated in the interview protocol but that mattered from the perspective of pragmatism, such as what the solutions to the problems were that participants faced in the case of university LSP. To solve this, the authors looked for the answers from two sources. One was directly from the interview text, where in some situations the participants shared the solutions with the authors without being asked. The second source was the authors' own discussion with supervisors or working experience, and further supported them with literature.

The next lesson pertains to the identity of a PhD student. Can a study be conducted with a PhD candidate's identity? As shown in Table 1, the author took a long time to achieve data saturation for the interviewed participants. This situation has made the author wonder if, instead of being a PhD candidate, being a professor today would make the data collection much easier and faster. Next, can findings be fully or partially reported with a PhD student's identity? This consideration is essential as it can impact the overall reporting of research findings.

Finally, it is on Internet stabilisation. Most interviews were conducted during the pandemic, and, as a result, the online conference platforms Zoom and Google Meet were used. This provided a solution for collecting data during the pandemic, or when face-to-face interviews were impossible (Chia et al., 2021). However, a weakness of this approach is its dependence on the strength of regional internet connections. For instance, sudden disruptions in sound signals from an interviewer's perspective may lead to a potential loss of important information. It is always advisable to have a backup for recording during interviews.

DISCUSSION

GTA within a case, with the lens of pragmatism, provides a method for solving a practical issue and produces a practical solution through research conducted within the research boundaries (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Morgan, 2020; Stake 2007). Yet, this process required high awareness and mindfulness from the authors, as they comprehended each collected data and made decisions based on that comprehension. The authors themselves acted as instruments for this qualitative research. (Merriam, 2009). Especially when making decisions on the co-categories that corresponded to each research question, the authors had to employ an abduction process. This process necessitated the utilization of their previous knowledge, experience, preconceptions, and prior beliefs to assign meaning to the newly emerged co-categories (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kelle, 2019; Morgan, 2020; Mruck & Mey, 2019; Sybing, 2022; Thornberg & Dunne, 2019). In other words, the authors needed to maintain as much objectivity as possible when drawing conclusions from the research, which naturally involved interpretivism and subjectivism.

From the above discussion, another question emerges: Should a researcher who uses GTA as their research method start research without reading prior literature, to prevent their perception from being influenced by prior knowledge or preconceptions during data collection and analysis? The answer is no, as stated by a famous quote in qualitative research from Dey. (1999), *"There is a difference between an open mind and an empty head."* (p. 251). A literature review assists in theoretical scepticism and theoretical pluralism during qualitative research. (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003; Kelle, 2007; Thornberg, 2012). However, the suitability of this approach, including the amount of literature required, the process of approaching the field with an open mind, and determining the appropriate level of generality versus excessive specificity, depends on the researcher's experience in conducting GTA research. According to Charmaz (2014), there is no standardized guideline or tangible criterion for qualitative research for this situation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper demonstrates the entire process of using GTA as a research method in LSP model development for a Malaysian public university, from the decision to choose GTA as a research method to formulate of a LSP model based on the collected data. A comprehensive description of each step in the process enhances the transferability of the research methodology and can assist other researchers in developing their own models.

During the writing process, the authors recognised that the research methodology not only addresses the research problems, objectives, and questions but also serves as a practice for the authors to think, read, ask questions, and logically find answers through a systematic process. Additionally, the authors realised that maintaining integrity is crucial in qualitative research, as the trustworthiness of the findings relies on the integrity of the authors.

From the perspective of an interpretivist ontology and subjectivist epistemology regarding the phenomenon of LSP in a university, future studies can focus on investigating the transferability of the research methodology to other public or private universities. Although employing a duplicated methodology, the outcomes may differ due to variations in the participants' perspectives and understanding of the ideology and implementation of succession planning within their respective universities. Additionally, utilising a realist or critical realist lens in future research could potentially uncover insights that were not discovered using the pragmatist lens in the present study.

DECLARATION OF STATEMENT

The lead author confirms the manuscript's integrity, stating that it provides an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the reported study. No crucial aspects of the study have been omitted, and any discrepancies from the planned (and, if applicable, registered) study have been appropriately explained.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this paper, the authors used ChatGPT to assist with language grammar checking. The authors provided a prompt: “correct grammar only without changing original voice”. After using this tool, the authors had reviewed and edited the content as needed and had taken full responsibility for the content of the thesis.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest. All co-authors have reviewed and approved the manuscript, and there are no financial interests to disclose.

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APPENDIX I: Table 1: Participants' background profiles, interview acceptance, and duration

Names (Pseudo-name)	**Current Management Leadership Position**	**Past Management Leadership Position**	**Years of Experience**	**Interview length, minutes**	**Interviewed Date**	**Sampling Methods**
Participant 1	Deputy Director of a Centre	The Orange Book Writers Team LSP and Framework taskforce Head of Unit Deputy Director Acting Director	5-10	108	21.6.2020 10.7.2020 15.7.2020	Criterion-based selection
Participant 2	-	Head of Department Deputy Dean Director Chairman Deputy Vice-Chancellor Acting Vice-Chancellor The Orange Book Writers Team	10-15	56	24.6.2020	Criterion-based selection
Participant 3	Vice-Chancellor	Head of Department Deputy Dean Acting Dean Deputy Vice-Chancellor	10-15	65	13.7.2020	Criterion-based selection
Participant 4	Senate member	Head of unit Senate member Member of Medical Centre Board of Director Dean	10-15	20	4.11.2020	Criterion-based selection
Participant 5	Retired	Director Deputy Vice-Chancellor	20-25	39	26.11.2020	Criterion-based selection
Participant 6	Retired	Head of Department Dean Vice-Chancellor	30-35	80	8.12.2020	Criterion-based selection

Participant 7	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor Acting Deputy Dean Deputy Dean Associate Dean Dean Deputy Director Senate Member Chairman Director	20-25	26	25.2.2021	Criterion-based selection
Participant 8	Retired	Head of LSP Unit	6	164 (Group interview)	10.3.2021	Chain referral sampling
Participant 9	Senior Assistant Registrar	Senior Assistant Registrar	5-10			
Participant 10	Retired	Vice-Chancellor	20-25	71	22.3.2021	Chain referral sampling
Participant 11	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Coordinator Head of Department Acting Dean Dean Director Chairman Assistant Vice-Chancellor	20-25	60	25.3.2021	Chain referral sampling
Participant 12 Participant 13 Participant 14	Had been required not to disclose any information.			60 (Group interview)	10.8.2022	Theoretical Sampling
Total interview time				749 minutes		