

## Exploring Leadership Development Needs in Higher Education: The Case of Morocco

**Karim Moustaghfir**

Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco  
k.moustaghfir@aui.ma

**David Dawson**

The Business School, University of Gloucestershire, United Kingdom  
moustaghfirkarim@gmail.com

**Nada Trunk Širca**

University of Primorska, Slovenia  
trunk.nada@gmail.com

---

### Abstract

#### Context

*The higher Education sector is facing significant changes as it moves to enhancing both the accessibility to and the quality of education. In Morocco, core to these efforts will be the promotion of internationalization and increasing the impact of higher education for Morocco's economy, governance, and society. Central to progress on these issues is its plans to become a regional hub for higher education, research, and innovation that were outlined in an Education Reform Act passed by its government in 2019. Enhancing the quality of higher education is essential as studies show it falls below international standards (the UNDP ranking it 77th from 133 countries). Although investment in higher education has increased, it is still limited compared to more developed nations. This results in a lack of skilled staff educated to doctorate level as the country tries to tackle brain drain as its most talented staff are attracted to work in richer countries. In turn, this is seen to be contributory to the lack of quality (Harrison et al. 2022). Further evidence reports on the nature of existing leadership development in Morocco. Despite interventions (most notably Building Capacity in University Management project 2012-2016) aimed at establishing stronger leadership in HEIs, existing initiatives have focused only on a very limited number of institutions and the most senior leaders. As a result, it is still the case that the vast majority of leaders in Morocco's HEIs receive little to no preparation before assuming the role. There is a lack of awareness of what the role of a leader in HE involves or agreed frameworks to measure the suitability of potential leadership candidates against during their recruitment. Research by Lekchiri et al. (2019) demonstrates what are considered to be positive and negative behaviors of leaders in Higher*

*Education in Morocco. However, there is still a need to develop a national framework for leadership competencies. Available evidence shows that the qualities and skills needed by leaders and managers and the training necessary to develop leaders to meet the challenges of higher education in Morocco are not in place. The implementation of further reform is at risk because most leaders and managers fail to understand the requirements of their role, most of them being experienced as experts in their field of study rather than as managers of universities.*

### **Methodology**

*This research builds on the results of a needs assessment analysis conducted between December 2021 and January 2022, using both a survey involving 98 leaders and managers, employed in 12 universities in Morocco, and 6 interviews with senior university leaders. The needs assessment analysis was based on a framework containing 38 qualities and skills grouped into 11 domains (Dawson et al., 2018). This framework draws on research conducted over 20 years in Australia, Canada, France, Indonesia, Moldova, the UK, and USA, on the qualities and skills that leaders and managers need to deliver good governance of higher education institutions. The nine domains covered in the framework include leadership, managing resources, managing people, managing information and intelligence, as well as personal attributes such as drive and productivity.*

### **Results**

*The survey results show that 32% of leaders and managers had not been provided with any opportunities for leadership development, showing a clear gap in provision. Where development opportunities including access to accredited courses, opportunities to network, and short development workshops were the most commonly taken up by leaders and managers. Even where leadership development opportunities have been provided, the survey suggests there is demand from leaders and managers for significant investment in further development with 90% saying that they would take the opportunity to complete a systematic program of development. The survey also identifies that respondents perceive the qualities and skills of influencing government policy and the economy, managing risk and finance, managing people for performance / motivation and recruitment and selection, developing staff for internationalization, and managing change as the overriding training needs for leaders and managers in Moroccan universities. The interview results suggest that the key challenges of leaders, irrespective of their level of seniority, is to reorient and modernize the HE sector in Morocco so that it 1) is more internationally focused, 2) has more impact for the economy, policy makers, and society and 3) addresses the quality of its staffing to counter the 'brain drain' faced by Morocco. In addition, the interviews show that there is uneven exposure to modern leadership and management methodologies that will enable leaders to address these issues. The majority of leaders have been promoted because they have been successful teachers and researchers in a particular field of study, not because they have experience of leading organizations. There is therefore a need to develop these areas across all HE leaders in Morocco.*

**Keywords:** Higher Education in Morocco, Leadership Development, Capacity Building, Quality in Higher Education, Internationalization