
Unlocking Competitive Talent: a Case Study on the Improvement of Leadership Development Through a Learning Journey (Catalyser Program) at PT Pertamina

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Abstract:

This study critically evaluates the Catalyser Leadership Development Program implemented by PT Pertamina (Persero), Indonesia's state-owned energy giant, against the backdrop of accelerating global energy transitions and organizational restructuring. Through in-depth interviews with three key stakeholders—program alumni, non-alumni, and the HR Designer—the research reveals a paradox: while the program successfully employs blended learning methodologies aligned with the 70:20:10 principles (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996), critical disconnects emerge in sustaining leadership competencies post-program. The study makes a significant contribution by proposing an enhanced “Catalyser 2.0” framework, updated based on stakeholder feedback and grounded in adaptive leadership theory. Furthermore, the study offers policy recommendations that emphasize the urgency of formulating a comprehensive and sustainable talent management strategy.

Keywords: Leadership Development Program, blended learning, Talent Management strategy

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INTRODUCTION

The global energy transition presents unprecedented leadership challenges for state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which must balance commercial viability with national energy security mandates. As the International Energy Agency (2023) projects a 40% increase in demand for leaders capable of steering complex energy system transformations, SOEs such as Pertamina Corporation face acute talent readiness gaps. Against this backdrop, leadership development programs assume strategic importance, yet their effectiveness remains understudied within bureaucratic SOE contexts. The *Catalyser Program* (CP), launched in 2019, exemplifies this challenge. Designed as an 18-month blended learning initiative combining *INSEAD* coursework, cross-subsidiary innovation projects, and executive mentoring, the program represents Pertamina's flagship effort to cultivate next-generation leaders. However, internal audits reveal troubling disparities: while external hires achieve 38% promotion rates to VP+ roles, only 22% of *Catalyser* alumni attain equivalent positions within comparable timeframes.

This performance gap raises fundamental questions about the efficacy of leadership development in SOEs, where bureaucratic inertia often conflicts with transformation imperatives. The study builds on Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism to analyze how organizational systems mediate leadership development outcomes. It extends current literature by examining three underexplored dimensions: first, the tension between leadership program designs and SOE promotion systems, building on Meyerson and Martin's (1987)

work on organizational paradoxes; second, the systemic barriers to sustaining leadership development impacts, echoing Pfeffer and Sutton's (2000) *knowing-doing gap* framework.

The research carries significant implications beyond Pertamina Corporation, as SOE leadership models profoundly influence energy transition trajectories. The study's qualitative approach offers rich insights into contextual constraints through in-depth interviews with program stakeholders. Findings will inform policymakers designing SOE governance reforms, HR professionals developing transition-ready leadership pipelines, and scholars studying organizational change in regulated industries. By bridging the gap between leadership theory and SOE practice, the research contributes to urgent conversations about developing the leadership capabilities needed to navigate the complex, non-linear energy transition ahead.

The global energy transition presents complex leadership challenges for state-owned energy enterprises that must maintain business competitiveness while fulfilling national energy security mandates. According to the International Energy Agency (2023), demand for energy transformation leaders will increase by 40%, a challenge reflected in the performance of Pertamina's *Catalyser Program*. This study aims to: (1) analyze systemic leadership development barriers in SOEs; (2) formulate best practices based on Bass's (1985) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories; and (3) develop a framework to bridge the *knowing-doing gap*.

The research contributes in three dimensions: SOE governance reform, HR solutions for program performance improvement (22% promotion rate for alumni vs. 38% for external hires), and enrichment of organizational change literature. Qualitative analysis of the *Catalyser Program* reveals systemic issues through Meyerson and Martin's (1987) paradox theory approach, while offering practical solutions for the 80% of state energy enterprises facing similar challenges (World Energy Council, 2023). The findings provide valuable references for stakeholders addressing leadership development challenges in the energy transition era.

METODOLOGY

Adopting a descriptive qualitative design, this study engaged eight key informants across four strata: *Catalyser Program* (CP) alumni in subsidiary director roles (n=2), HR program designers (n=1), and non-CP alumni in subsidiary director roles (n=2). Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews held between March 24–28, 2025, utilizing an interview protocol refined through iterative pilot testing. Thematic analysis followed Saldaña's (2015) cyclical coding approach, with initial codes derived from program dimensions (pre-program selection, learning methods, post-program tracking) cross-referenced against Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Evaluation Model. To ensure methodological rigor, member checking was conducted with two participants, while triangulation incorporated document analysis of *Catalyser's* curriculum maps and pre-/post-assessment reports. Ethical considerations included anonymizing participant identities.

DISCUSSION

A. Redesign Catalyser 2.0

Pre program

To ensure strong participant accountability and program completion, the selection process must be more rigorous, considering both their abilities and their ambitions. Building on previous initiatives for accelerated development, this program should exclusively admit top-tier, carefully

chosen individuals. This aligns with Collings and Mellahi's (2009) assertion that cultivating a highly capable, high-performing talent pool for key roles is crucial for organizational continuity and commitment. Therefore, to guarantee the right individuals participate and that the program supports the company's strategic talent needs, particularly for leadership positions, the participant criteria must be strengthened as follows:

GENERAL	PROFESSIONAL	ASPIRATION
Age range : < 45 yo	High flyer classification	Making a breakthrough project proposal that will be carried out while participating in the program
30 % female	Graduates of the Transformer program	Good recommendation from top management
Cross Subholding and other subsidiaries	Minimum TOEFL Score 500 or TOEIC score 700	Create Individual development plan (IDP)
	Minimum Professional Qualification score are 2	

Figure 1. Pre program

Program Structure

Some methods are good enough but need to be sharpened in terms of their purpose and integration with each other. The Action learning project (ALP) program should be the center of integration of all methods. One issue that arises is that participants often do not understand the purpose of mentoring, even though there should be many things that can be explored through mentoring from the problems faced when running ALP. One of the complaints that is often conveyed by respondents is the weak ability to manage teams, so there are two new program methods proposed, namely the provision of material on influencing skills and shadowing to directors so that they can directly observe how directors manage meetings, decide and interact with stakeholders.

In ALP, participants will collaborate with different characters and capabilities to strategize and execute together, there is certainly a lot of learning to be had. Instead of prioritizing individual personality development (e.g., personality traits, communication styles, etc.), the focus is placed on leadership practices and social interactions.

Leadership Camp	Enhancing strategic leadership and understanding global business ecosystems in Classroom , combining individual and group discussion activities (elaborate global and SOE's case study
Global Immersion	visits to leading companies in overseas to gain international business insights those relate with organization and government goals
Business Coaching	executive coaching sessions with global business schools and professional mentors to elaborate of The challenges of Action learning project
C-Level Mentorship	mentoring sessions with directors of subsidiaries and external coach providing firsthand insights into top level corporate leadership
Action Learning Project (ALP)	Breakthrough Company's project, allowing participants to simulate BoD roles while tackling strategic priorities for Organization's transformation
Mentorship BoD-2 Participants	act as mentors for BoD-2 executives, this activity will challenge the participants in deepening of team management skill
AI-Powered Digital Learning Live session of Influencing	Technology self learning to optimize their capabilities deep exploration regarding influencing skills and knowledge about how to become an effective mentor and coach effective, which will help them develop stronger leadership skills and provide positive impact in their roles in the future
Sociopreneurship Program	Each batch is required to make a social contribution in national-scale .This aims to build leadership oriented towards sustainability and social responsibility.
Roles as a mentor	Training and increasing experience in listening, directing, and motivating the team, because this has become an issue that almost all respondents mentioned
C level shadowing	accompanying, observing, and analyzing how C-level executives lead meetings, make decisions, and manage stakeholders.

Figure 2. Program Structure

Post Program

All respondents said that no evaluation was provided to them after the program was completed on the extent to which the program had an impact on participants' performance or behavior. In addition, the correlation between the program and the participants' career path is not integrated. Referring to what is conveyed by Patton (2008) that program evaluation is the activity of collecting systematic collection of information about program activities, characteristics, and outcomes in order to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and inform decisions about future programming." This means that there are 2 main things here: the effectiveness of the program itself and the post-program follow-up for participants or the program itself in the future. So there are 2 things that are proposed as a form of post-program evaluation, namely:

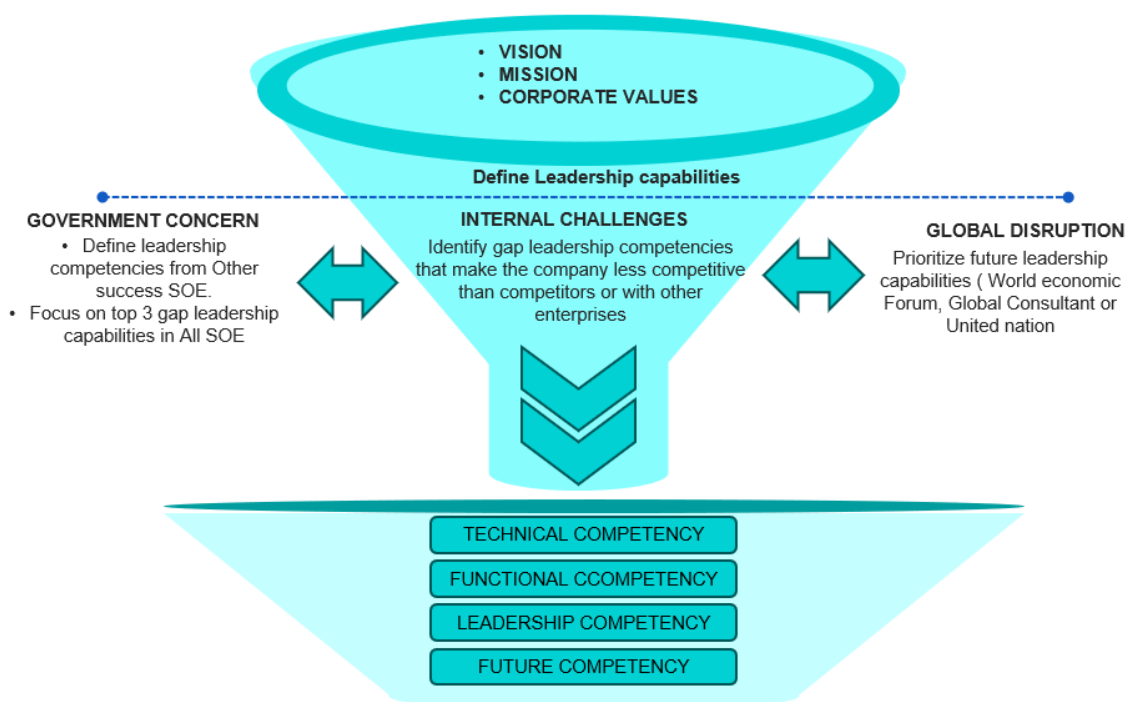
1. Three months post-program, evaluation of participants' competencies and performance can be conducted through 360 interviews, focus group discussions or surveys using questionnaires.
2. Ideally, if the company has a talent committee, career planning for program participants should be structured in various forms, such as
 - a) Career promotion : providing a higher-level new challenge for participants who are identified as having excellent performance and experiencing acceleration in their capabilities
 - b) Project assignment : given exposure to lead a new project on a larger scale, while also providing experience and accelerating their leadership skills
 - c) Cross function mobility : mutation to another function to enrich the competency capabilities of the function, so that when entering the top level, they can manage cross-functional and complex issues well
 - d) External Assignment : assignment to external institutions such as ministries or other state-owned enterprises, with the hope of not only learning something new but also strengthening and expanding networks, where networking is a central issue at the top level

B. Rebuild Talent Development Architect

The interview process in data collection became very interesting because the discussion developed not limited to how to evaluate existing programs, but the need for a big organizational strategy in managing talent development. There are several stages carried out, namely:

1. Determine Leadership Core competency

The importance of LCC is in line with research by Claus (2019), that corporate leadership can support the creation of new roles in the talent value chain (talent management) and contribute significantly to positive organizational outcomes. Starting with the Vision, the mission and values of the organization which are then aligned with internal challenges, shareholder aspirations in this case the government and global dynamics. From here then cascaded into the company's core competencies both technical, functional, leadership and even future competencies.



Government Concern	Internal Challenges	Global disruption			CORE	Respondent (n=5)
		United nation	Global DDI	Alignment		
Strategic Orientation	Strategic Orientation	Thinking and leading strategy	Setting strategy	Strategic Orientation	Strategic orientation	80%
Driving Innovation	Driving Innovation	Building and Nurturing team	Developing future talent	Building and developing talent	Developing other	100 %
Global business savvy	Global business savvy	Driving transformational change	Managing change	Driving transformation	Global Business savvy	100 %
		Managing for result Encourage integrity, Inclusion and Diversity	Decision making and Prioritization	Driving execution	Driving execution	100%
				Integrity	Driving transformation	60 %
				Managing Diversity	Driving Innovation	80 %
				Integrity	Integrity	60 %
Managing Diversity	Managing Diversity	40 %				

2. Cascade leadership core competencies on a multilevel basis

Like the model developed in 2007 by Mumford, Campion and Morgeson, the LDC strataplex is a multi-level competency development model and includes layered (strata) and segmented (plex) skill requirements, in other words, each screen has its own competency target. After we get the core leadership competencies, to the respondents I ask two things: prefer which of the different competency strategies per each position level or all levels are the same but differ in depth of competence. 100 % more approving of the second strategy, where all levels use the same core

competencies but differ in depth. Then we break down the leadership level which is adjusted to the target depth of competence expected.

Leaders level	Strategic orientation	Driving Innovation	Global Business savvy	Building and developing talent	Driving transformation	Integrity	Managing Diversity
TOP TALENT	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
EXECUTIVE LEVEL (19-24)	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
MID LEVEL (16-18)	2	3	2	2	2	3	3
JUNIOR LEVEL (12-15)	1	2	1	1	1	2	2
ENTRY LEVEL (8-11)		1				1	1

3. Determine the Competency focus, Philosophy and Development method per level

The redesigned leadership development program, as outlined in this study, adopts a career-stage-based framework that reflects a more integrated and sustainable approach to leadership capability building within a complex organizational context. This framework was developed in direct response to key challenges identified through stakeholder interviews, including the lack of continuity in leadership development, misalignment between competencies and organizational needs, and the absence of a supportive post-program environment.

LEVEL	PROGRAM	PHILOSOPHY	FOCUS AREA	DEVELOPMENT MODE
TOP TALENT	Global Executive Program	shaping leaders who are transformative, have a global vision and are able to deliver organizational performance and transformation with a clear vision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic orientation Driving Innovation Global business savvy Developing and Building talent Driving transformation Integrity Managing diversity 	Executive coaching, global project (new ideas enter the global market) and C- level global forum
EXECUTIVE LEVEL (19-24)	Catalyser Program	ability and dexterity in managing the dynamics of complex change, quickly responding to any global changes and what is managed is the system (strategic, Execution and stakeholder)		Personalized coaching, national strategic project (real business issues), Ecopreneurship and global exposure
MID LEVEL (16-18)	Transformer Program	first level as a leader, so the ability to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of himself and the team, understand the cross business and cross functional and its challenges in the future and the speed in making decisions is a priority		Classroom, personalized mentoring, having exposure involve in Curennt strategic project, sociopreneurship
JUNIOR LEVEL (12-15)	Emerging leaders Track	The entry level is required to be able to work together, collaborate and communicate effectively with superiors, subordinates and peers. so it requires emotional control stability and practice sharp analytical skills		Workshop, group mentoring, project group assignment
ENTRY LEVEL (8-11)	Basic Leadership program	establishing a strong foundation of the company's core values and integrity, honesty, professionalism and integrity.		Workshop, peer buddy support, group mentoring

Recognizing that leadership effectiveness is cultivated over time rather than through isolated interventions, the proposed model is structured around five distinct stages corresponding to employees’ career progression: entry-level, junior, mid-level, senior, and top talent. Each stage emphasizes differentiated focus areas and development modes to ensure relevance, adaptability, and alignment with both individual and organizational goals.

Entry-Level: Socialization and Values Internalization

At the entry point, the Onboarding Leadership Program addresses a frequently overlooked but foundational phase of leadership identity formation. New employees are not only introduced to operational norms and organizational expectations, but also to core values, ethical reasoning, and leadership self-awareness. This stage is informed by literature on early-career socialization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996) and cognitive-behavioral learning models, where exposure to role models and real-time feedback shapes initial behavioral scripts. The program deploys buddy-mentor systems to accelerate cultural immersion and relational engagement, creating a baseline for future leadership behaviors.

Junior-Level: Building Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Leadership Capacities

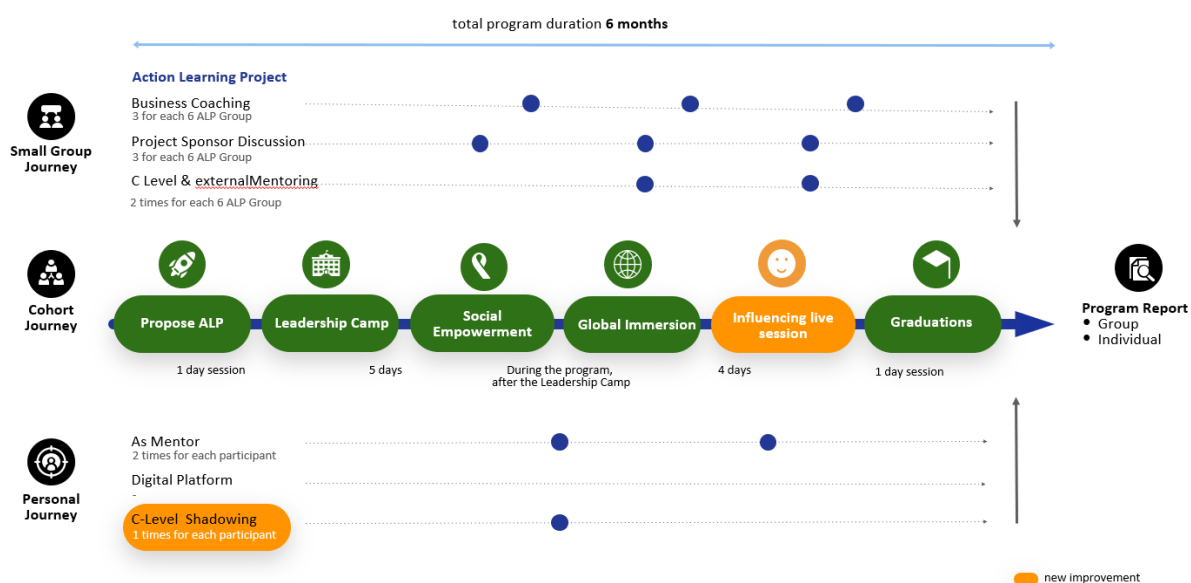
The Emerging Leader Track builds upon the cultural grounding provided at entry-level by focusing on soft-skill mastery, including emotional intelligence, communication, and team collaboration. These capabilities are increasingly cited in leadership literature as critical for navigating matrixed structures, diverse teams, and cross-functional workflows (Dippenaar & Schaap, 2017; Drigas et al., 2023; Duan et al., 2023; Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023; Tsaur & Ku, 2019). Delivered through interactive workshops and peer coaching, this stage leverages principles of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning is optimized through guided interactions with more competent peers or mentors. The integration of peer learning at this stage enhances both cognitive and affective development and sets the foundation for future participative leadership behaviors.

Mid-Level: Competency Expansion and Behavioral Application

The Catalyst Program is positioned as the core accelerator for mid-career professionals who are transitioning from functional expertise to leadership accountability. The design of this program is grounded in the 70:20:10 learning framework (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996; Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. E. 2003), which asserts that 70% of leadership competencies are developed through experiential learning, 20% through social feedback and mentoring, and 10% through formal education. Participants engage in multi-modal experience that include classroom-based learning, individual mentoring sessions, strategic project implementation, and social impact activities. This not only strengthens decision-making and team orchestration skills but also reinforces stakeholder management critical dimensions in politically complex or multi-entity organizations such as state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Assessment mechanisms in this stage align with Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Evaluation Model (Kirkpatrick, 2006), measuring learning effectiveness from reaction to behavioral and organizational impact.

Senior-Level: Systems Thinking and Strategic Agility

The Executive Preparation Program is tailored for individuals on the cusp of entering top management. At this level, the leadership paradigm shifts from team management to systems leadership, where complexity, ambiguity, and stakeholder multiplicity dominate the decision-making environment. Drawing from systems theory and global leadership frameworks, this stage facilitates mobility assignments, cross-functional projects, and global exposure. The objective is to cultivate strategic foresight, adaptability, and a global mindset, all of which are essential for navigating disruption and transformation.

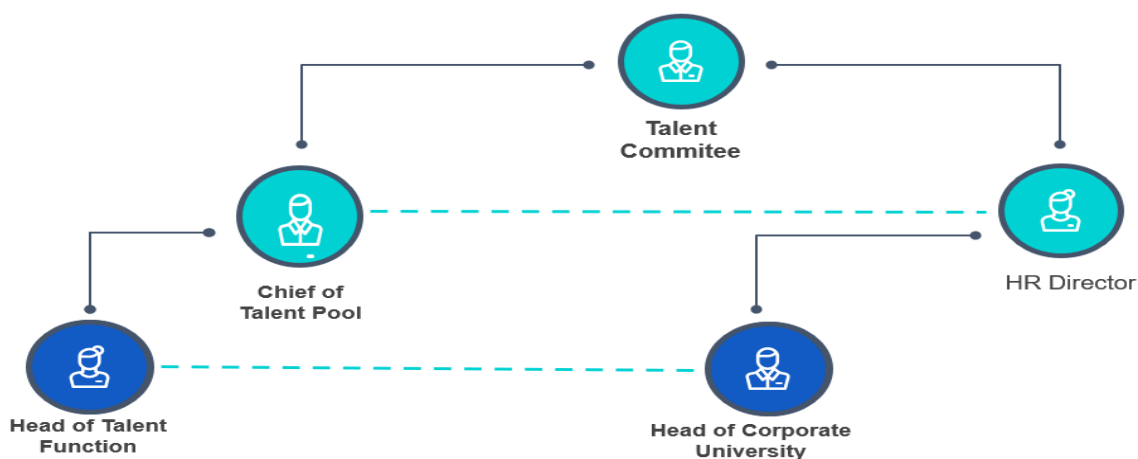


Top Talent: Enterprise-Level Leadership and Strategic Influence

The final tier, the Strategic Leadership Track, is designed for high-potential individuals who have demonstrated readiness for enterprise-level leadership roles. This stage transitions from competency development to strategic stewardship, emphasizing cross-entity influence, innovation, and societal impact. Participants are immersed in executive sponsorship arrangements and cross-entity mobility, allowing them to operate beyond their functional or organizational silos. They are also periodically reviewed by a Talent Committee, which not only validates developmental progress but also integrates findings into succession planning and future executive pipeline strategies. This model is directly aligned with Bass’s (1985) Transformational Leadership Theory, particularly the dimensions of intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence.

4. Build a sustainable Talent Management Committee

Starting with talent Mindset, the leader who has talent mindset They see talent management as a central and critical part of their own work as a leader (Ed Michaels et al., 2021). There is actually a kind of employee career consideration council in the organization, but its functions and activities do not run consistently and there is a need to strengthen its role, not limited to discussing the succession of strategic positions but should discuss comprehensive talent management starting from recruitment, development, talent selection, leadership succession and even up to employee retention. Referring to the feedback of one of the respondents, the concept of the size of the talent committee is as follows:



ROLES	RESPONSIBILITY
Head of talent function	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure the availability of technical and functional curriculum and update with the development of knowledge and technology. 2. Ensure the implementation of technical and functional capability development carried out by the Corporate university. 3. Evaluation of curriculum and process as well as learning outcomes of technical competencies and functions 4. Identifying the best talents per each function 5. Recommend career development of top talents and capability building to the Chief of talent pool.
Chief of talent Pool	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responsible for determining the list of talent pools per level from Mid level to top talent. 2. mapping and defining development programs, especially business capabilities and leadership for all talent pools per level. 3. Recommend to the talent committee on succession planning. 4. Discuss with HR Director regarding the determination of talent pool and succession plan 5. Establish leadership succession for executive level talent pool (PRL 19-24)
Talent Committee	<p>Consists of all Directors of the company, chaired directly by the President Director, whose duties are</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Periodically organizing the succession process at the executive level and above (especially the position of vice president and above). 2. Determining the talent pool every 6 months 3. Development plan for talent pool at VP level and above

In conclusion, the proposed framework reconceptualizes leadership development as a continuous, contextually grounded, and systemically integrated process, rather than a series of fragmented or one-off training initiatives. It underscores the critical importance of aligning developmental objectives with broader organizational strategy, embedding experiential and social learning pathways, and nurturing leadership capabilities progressively across all career stages. By synthesizing theoretical foundations with practical application, the model provides a scalable and sustainable approach to talent cultivation within complex and evolving organizational ecosystems. Furthermore, for such a program to be truly impactful, the organization must institutionalize its continuity through clear policies. Specifically, if the program proves successful, it is imperative that the company formalizes its outcomes such as through the allocation of a dedicated promotion or assignment quota for program alumni, to ensure long-term integration within the talent management and succession planning system.

CONSLUSION

This study offers critical insights into the leadership development challenges faced by state-owned energy enterprises amid the global energy transition, using Pertamina’s *Catalyser Program* as a case study. The research identifies a significant promotion gap—22% for program alumni versus 38% for external hires—highlighting how bureaucratic promotion

structures can undermine even well-designed leadership initiatives featuring *INSEAD* coursework, cross-functional collaboration, and executive mentorship. Analysis through paradox theory reveals that SOEs' dual commercial and national mandates create unique competency needs that conventional leadership programs often overlook. Most importantly, the study presents a practical framework to bridge the *knowing-doing gap* in SOE talent development, with implications for governance reform, HR strategy, and academic research in regulated industries. As a cautionary tale and practical guide, the findings underscore the necessity of aligning promotion systems with transformation goals to maximize program impact. For future research, it is recommended to develop robust metrics that quantify the actual impact of leadership development on energy transition outcomes in SOEs, thereby advancing both theory and practice in this critical field.

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