The association between leadership competency and the perception of career advancement was generally supported. Figure 1 shows the correlations among the component AHEAD items and Career Advancement. Overall, total AHEAD score was strongly associated with the rate of favourable responses (aRR for a 1-point increase, 1.36; 95% CI, 1.19 to 1.55). Specifically, a 1-point increase in overall AHEAD score was associated with 1.36 times higher favourable response rate on career advancement. Strong predictors of perception of career advancement included skills such as Writing Skills, Interpersonal Skills, and Domain Knowledge, and values such as Commitment, and Integrity.

Professional competencies and increasing one's knowledge, skills, and education is the strategy for success in advancement in healthcare organizations [3]. Domain knowledge is therefore a core component of an AHP's competency, which is intrinsically linked to job performance. This, in turn, is an essential factor in career advancement. That said, in our study, "domain knowledge" was not the only predictor. Nor was it the best predictor. Thus, our findings suggest that while hard skills are necessary, they are not sufficient.

Soft skills - in particular communication and interpersonal skills, had a significant impact on the perception of career advancement. Writing skills is the top AHEAD predictor, and the ability to analyze issues, write concisely and present ideas in a convincing manner are valued competencies in the public sector and healthcare organisations [4]. Furthermore, as this study was conducted with employees in an Academic Medical Centre where research, scholarly work and education are carried out, even greater importance may be placed on good writing skills.

Interpersonal skills are also found to be a good predictor. This supports studies which found interpersonal skills and leadership competencies are typical for leaders in academe and healthcare. Furthermore, empathy, a core component of interpersonal skills, is also associated with professional competence and patient outcomes.

Values

Values were also found to be among the predictors. Commitment and integrity associated with the perception of career advancement. While academic attainment and clinical skills are traditionally viewed as the primary predictors of career success, there has been a gradual shift in emphasis towards personal values, and these qualities are increasingly valued in careers, especially within healthcare. Values such as integrity and responsibility strongly correlated with AHEAD items. As regards Commitment, in this age of job-hopping, it is far less common for employees to stay in an organisation for an extended period of time. A 2017 report revealed 34% of Singapore professionals have no intention of staying with their current employers for more than five years, considerably higher than the global average of 26% [5]. A study has also shown that an employee's organisation in healthcare needs to do an impact on job satisfaction, and thereby their job performance and engagement level.

LIMITATIONS

Our study has limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of our study may establish an association but not necessarily causality. Furthermore, due to the ecological study design, we were limited to exploring associations at the group level rather than at the individual level. Hence, our findings can only be used to inform more general intervention efforts - and not individual-level interventions. This limitation must be balanced by the fact that due to the sensitive nature of the EES, the anonymity of respondents is crucial in maximising the likelihood of honest and reliable responses.

As this study was conducted on AHPs, future studies should be conducted to evaluate whether our results may also apply to other healthcare disciplines.

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