Talent Optimization in Faculty Recruitment in the Post-COVID-19 Era

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Abstract—**This paper aims to present a multiple criteria decision model that supports faculty recruitment for business schools in the post-COVID-19 era. The greatest challenge that business schools are facing is to identify relevant criteria for faculty recruitment that can help to sustain their activities in today's highly competitive and international market. Also, these criteria should be in line with the increased focus on faculty qualification by the 2020 Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) standards.**

Keywords—Faculty Equity Framework, Recruitment, Multiple Criteria Decision Model, COVID-19.

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Higher Education Institutions (HEI) globally, enforcing changes in the traditional operations used to be carried by those institutions. The pandemic has shifted many institutions toward adopting technology in order to sustain the educational process, however, this shift from face-to-face and physical classrooms to virtual learning requires introducing new policies and practices coping with the digital era demands [1]. Furthermore, this shift has exposed the need for a new set of skills such as soft skills and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills with the increase use of technological solutions for teaching and knowledge transfer [2].

Clearly HEI became international service providers, their services and resources are no longer restricted within the borders they operate in. Internationalization for those institutions opens many doors of opportunities in terms of having access to talented faculty and students all around the globe, but at the same time, it raises a challenge in competing with other national and international institutions to attract and retain those talents [3]. Competition for resources is one of many rationales for HEI internationalization such as gaining reputation, increase faculty networking, enhance international institutional cooperation, and strengthen research capabilities [4]. The competition for academic talents requires updating and enhancing recruitment practices especially for small HEI that are competing with larger and resourceful competitors globally.

The pandemic has disrupted many functional areas in organizations forcing them to re-define processes. Among those, is the recruitment process. Countries all over the globe have imposed travel restrictions which make the traditional way of hiring difficult and not efficient in many ways. Similarly, organizations are considering new work arrangements where employees are longer required to be physically present [5]. Moreover, the virus spread has led to downsizing in budgets for organizations, including HEI,

which by itself entails re-formulate policies related to spending, recruitment, accreditation, and course delivery [6].

COVID-19 has made it even more important than ever to hire and retain top talents, in order to sustain organizational success and to increase organizational readiness for unexpected future disruptions.

While considering the professional qualification as a typical requirement for faculty hiring, recent studies have emphasized the importance of research outputs in terms of quality in differentiating among the prospect faculty during the recruitment process. Research output was found to influence the institutional educational quality and funds collection [7]. Nowadays, talented academics are recognized by their research quality and productivity, their research performance is considered an essential factor in hiring [8].

According to Hanappi-Egger [9], evaluating the research activity in accordance with the Academic Age of candidates is an important factor for evaluating the qualifications of faculty members as it helps in ensuring diversity, and most importantly it helps HEI to attract and retain the best talent.

Asides of teaching and research capabilities, HEI are moving toward emphasizing the third mission activities to evaluate faculty. Those activities include social engagement, innovation, and knowledge transfer [10]. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of third mission activities in enabling universities to be key actors in society and economy through creating, sharing, and diffusing its research and knowledge.

II. FACULTY EUITY FRAMEWORK

The Faculty Equity Framework which was introduced earlier by the authors [11] represents a tool for measuring and optimizing faculty performance in HEI. The framework provides insight into faculty performance in regard to three main pillars and nine criteria (see figure 1), in order to identify current performance levels and development opportunities. The three main pillars of the framework are: Alignment, Capabilities, and Engagement.

A. Alignment

Alignment in HEI reflects the extent to which faculty are in line with the school mission and goals for meeting its financial targets, achieve globalization, attain the institutional goals, and to provide a better educational experience. The process of alignment requires a well-formulated mission that is communicated with faculty members to align them with the brand promise that is being communicated to customers. The

Alignment pillar consists of three criteria: brand alignment, alignment with customers' needs, and goal alignment.
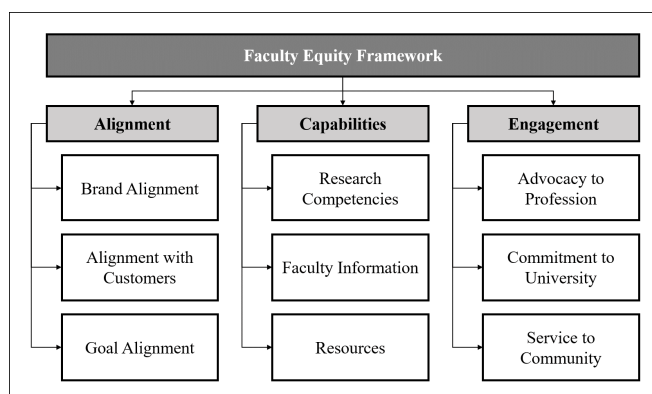

Figure 1. Faculty Equity Framework [11]

B. Capabilities

Academic capabilities in HEI reflects the faculty ability to create knowledge out of knowledge. Teaching and research are identified as the two main capabilities of faculty, which enable the HEI to achieve first its educational role through teaching activities – reflected in faculty skills and information - and, secondly its knowledge generation role that is attained through the research activity. Academic research plays a major role in the process of creating knowledge and adding value for society and it requires a good amount of resources and funds. This pillar "capabilities" consists of three criteria: research competencies, faculty information represented by their academic qualification, and financial funds collected by faculty.

C. Engagement

Faculty Engagement in HEI reflects third mission activities that focus on sharing faculty's knowledge and resources with the public to enrich and develop the society. The faculty engagement pillar consists of three criteria: advocacy to the profession which reflects innovative activities, commitment to university through in-campus activity participation, and service to the community.

III. FACULTY RECRUITMENT IN HEIs

Recruitment policies in HEI are regulated and maintained in order to make the recruitment process transparent and efficient. Verhaegen [12] conducted a study among deans and faculty from private and public HEI to identify factors affecting faculty recruitment and retention. These factors are the recognition of research achievements, innovativeness and progressiveness of the school, academic community, and academic freedom. Pathak & Pathak [13] assimilated faculty recruitment to a value chain where teaching and research performance are the main factors of faculty recruitment. Van den Brink et al. [8] highlighted that the main challenge faced in the faculty recruitment is the incomplete information about the talent pool, which restrict the capabilities of decision-maker to select the best candidate and makes the selection process less objective.

One of the ways used in the process of matching talents for a job is a ranking order, which is deemed to be adequate evaluating relative talent. Balakrishnan et al. [14] argued that ranking based systems may increase chances of manipulation of candidates for their performance when they know that they are being evaluated in comparison with others, however for faculty hiring, ranking candidates seems to be appropriate taking into consideration that the cost of incorrect classification is low and that all of those candidates are meeting the initial job requirements [14].

In the process of faculty hiring, candidates are being evaluated based on multiple unrelated attributes, which requires having a multiple criteria model that supports decision-makers in selecting the best available talents. In the following, we propose to adopt Faculty Equity Framework (figure 1) to design criteria for faculty recruitment. We suppose that applicants have been identified through a search committee and their resume will be screened by the screening committee. The screening committee conducts an interview to evaluate applicant's skills, knowledge and behaviour.

For the alignment pillar, faculty are assessed through a set of predefined questions during a job interview. In the following, we provide a sample of these questions:

- Why do you want to work here? (brand)
- What courses could you be able to teach? (customers)
- How would you contribute to the administration of the department? (goals)

The applicant response lead to the assessment on a scale from 1 to 5, with higher numbers indicating better performance, to the criteria, brand, customers, and goals.

For the capabilities pillar, faculty are evaluated based on data submitted in the recruitment system and validated by the interview committee. This data is related to their intellectual contributions and is used to evaluate applicants regarding the criteria research competencies:

- Weighted sum of the number of the applicant's intellectuals during a predefined period.
- The total number of citations during a predefined period based on Scopus Records.

The screening committee evaluates the applicant's regarding the criteria "faculty information" based on the resume. Van den Brink et al. [8] noted that incomplete information on faculty information may lead to a wrong assessment. Therefore, the screening committee should ask additional questions during the interview to make an assessment on a scale from 1 to 5, with higher numbers indicating better performance, to the following issues:

- Applicant research productivity compared to experience
- ICT knowledge

Applicants are required to provide information regarding financial funds obtained during a predefined period. That amount is used to assess faculty performance regarding the criteria "resources".

For the engagement pillar, applicants are assessed for their advocacy to the profession, commitment to University activities and ability to deliver services to the community. The advocacy criteria should involve any initiative that Faculty developed or can develop in the future that demonstrates his readiness to promote his/her field of teaching and research. Again, this could be difficult to judge through applicant's accomplishments, and we propose that the screening committee to judge applicants during the interview on a scale from 1 to 5, with higher numbers indicating better performance based on questions related to the ability of the applicant to develop course syllabus / curriculum, degree

programs, joint collaboration with other HEI. The commitment to the University is assessed through the number of applicant's participation in committees, conferences, workshops, seminars, and cultural activities in his/her previous institution during a predefined period. Serving the community is assessed by the number of applicant's community service activities accomplished in his/her previous job during a predefined period.

IV. ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

To illustrate the proposed model for faculty recruitment, we conduct an empirical study using secondary anonymous information available in the recruitment system from a college of business in Europe. The study includes 42 faculty who applied for the same job announcement (Table I) and we aim to outrank these applicants using the ELECTRE IV model [11].

TABLE I. Applicants' assessment

	Alignment			Capabilities					Engagement		
1	1	4	3	9.2	51	3	2	24000	2	2	7
2	1	2	4	6.3	41	4	3	8000	5	3	5
3	1	2	4	4.3	7	5	4	2000	1	9	10
4	4	5	2	6.1	18	5	5	28000	1	12	1
5	3	2	2	10.9	47	2	3	24000	2	8	8
6	5	1	1	9.3	59	4	5	22000	3	9	8
7	3	2	1	7.6	18	3	5	8000	4	20	7
8	3	5	3	13	55	2	2	22000	2	17	10
9	4	1	1	2.5	53	4	3	21000	1	17	8
10	3	1	2	13.4	55	5	1	13000	1	4	8
11	2	3	2	8.1	23	3	4	22000	5	1	3
12	5	5	2	10.7	9	2	5	9000	5	6	8
13	5	3	3	7.8	21	4	5	4000	1	18	1
14	3	3	3	10.5	59	3	4	27000	5	13	4
15	1	4	3	8.9	60	4	4	21000	4	4	1
16	1	4	1	13.9	17	3	1	25000	4	17	5
17	5	2	1	10.6	36	3	3	6000	5	6	1
18	5	1	2	13.7	36	2	5	17000	2	15	2
19	1	3	5	11.6	31	2	2	8000	4	10	8
20	4	2	5	8.3	10	3	3	16000	4	5	5
21	3	3	3	8.4	37	4	4	15000	2	2	10
22	1	3	3	8.3	40	2	2	29000	2	15	7
23	4	2	1	14.3	56	5	3	1000	1	14	1
24	2	3	4	9.7	51	4	5	10000	4	9	2
25	5	4	4	6.1	45	5	2	25000	5	3	8
26	5	4	5	8.8	14	1	5	16000	3	1	4
27	2	1	3	10.6	13	1	2	30000	5	4	2
28	1	1	1	5.7	41	5	3	8000	1	3	10
29	1	4	4	10.6	48	1	4	2000	4	20	9
30	1	2	4	7.3	36	1	2	11000	5	18	10
31	5	4	3	6.3	13	4	5	28000	3	13	8
32	1	5	3	13.7	54	5	2	1000	4	1	5
33	4	2	5	10.9	10	3	1	18000	4	10	3
34	1	3	4	12.2	31	1	1	17000	4	4	3
35	5	4	2	10.7	8	2	2	25000	4	6	1
36	2	1	1	11.8	30	5	5	6000	4	13	10
37	3	2	1	6.8	44	5	4	29000	5	10	6
38	2	1	2	10.7	49	2	5	23000	1	14	3
39	5	3	3	5.8	50	5	5	27000	4	2	7
40	3	4	1	12	20	4	2	18000	4	7	10
41	4	2	5	6.6	56	3	3	6000	1	7	5
42	2	2	5	4.5	47	3	1	6000	4	11	6

The ELECTRE IV thresholds of strict, partial, and veto preferences for each of the model's criteria are determined by the college representatives and are given in Table II.

TABLE II. Thresholds of strict, partial, and veto preferences

Criteria (i)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
q_j	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	2,000	0	5	2
p_j	1	1	1	2	10	1	1	3,000	1	7	3
v_j	2	2	2	3	15	2	2	5,000	2	10	5

The J-ELECTE computer code [15] is used for processing the collected data and obtaining an upward and a downward ranking for the 42 applicants and the rankings are given in Table III.

TABLE III. Downward and Upward ranking

Rank	Downward Ranking	Upward Ranking
1	14	6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42
2	39	25
3	8, 31	13, 34
4	15	7
5	6, 21, 24, 25, 37	4, 5, 9, 15, 22, 27, 38
6	36	24
7	4	1, 3
8	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 40, 41, 42	28
9		2
10		11

Figure 2 illustrates the final ranking based on the average downward and upward ranking. The ranking shows that applicants 14 was ranked first despite that he has never performed best in any of the framework criteria which indicates that in such ranking the most important is the overall performance rather than being a super star in one of them.
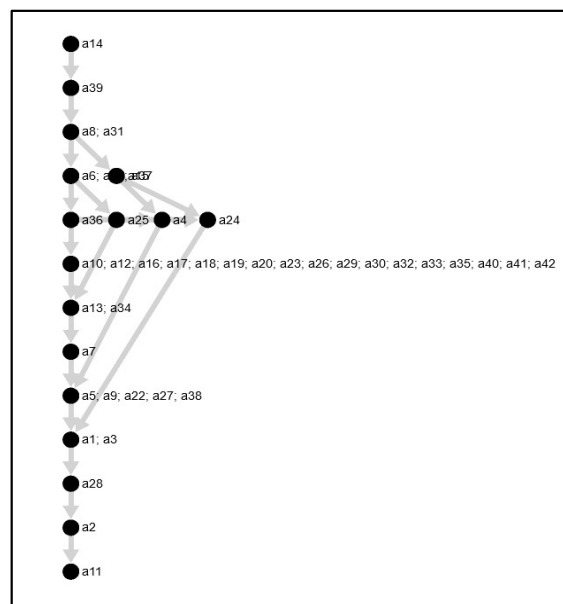

Figure 2. *Final rank and dominance relation*

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we adapted the Faculty Equity Framework to faculty recruitment taking into consideration the special circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed multiple criteria decision model supports faculty recruitment through identifying relevant performance criteria in line with national and international standards which aims to support HEI to sustain their competitiveness in the international market through hiring talented faculty. The model also presents an effective and user-friendly tool for recruitment decision making for post-the COVID-19 era.

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