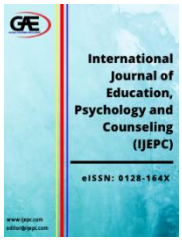
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FROM COUNSELLOR COMPETENCE TO ORGANISATIONAL GREATNESS: A GOOD-TO-GREAT FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITY COUNSELLING CENTRES

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Abstract:

University counselling centres are increasingly expected to address complex student concerns related to mental health, academic adjustment, personal development, crisis support, and institutional care. Although counsellor competence remains a foundation of quality service, professional skill alone does not explain how counselling centres sustain excellence across leadership, service culture, strategic direction, accessibility, and institutional trust. This conceptual paper develops a new framework by applying Jim Collins' *Good to Great* principles to university counselling centres. The framework integrates Level 5 Leadership, First Who Then What, Confronting the Brutal Facts, the Hedgehog Concept, Culture of Discipline, Technology Accelerators, and the Flywheel Effect with counselling competence, organisational psychology, service quality, and whole-university mental health perspectives. Individual counsellor competence is positioned as the foundation of service quality. At the same time, organisational drivers are conceptualised as the mechanisms that translate professional capacity into ethical, accessible, student-centred, and sustainable counselling services. The paper contributes to counselling, psychology, and higher education literature by offering a conceptual model for

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examining counselling centres as organisational systems rather than isolated service units. It also presents implications for counselling centre leadership, supervision, service planning, digital support, institutional policy, and future empirical validation within higher education mental health contexts.

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Keywords:

Counselling; Competence; Leadership; Excellence; Wellbeing

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Introduction

University counselling centres have grown more important in education. This is because universities are responding to increasing worries about student health. These concerns include difficulties with adjustment, personal growth, psychological stress, and barriers to seeking help. Research shows that students often struggle with their well-being, which can affect their studies, relationships and overall life. Still, many students do not reach out for support. Reasons include stigma, not knowing about services, thinking they are hard to access, cultural issues, and doubts about whether counselling helps (Cerolini et al., 2023; Pinho et al., 2025). As a result, the success of university counselling centres is not about the skills of the counsellors. In this context, the quality and effectiveness of university counselling centres depend not only on the competence of individual counsellors but also on the organisational capacity of the centre to provide accessible, ethical, responsive, and sustainable services.

The rising pressure to provide mental health services in higher education has led to the need to enhance the counselling centres' service model, staff structure, professional standards, and inter-institutional cooperation. According to Galán-Muros et al. (2024), mental health issues amongst higher education students need an institutional approach to combine psychological help with learning and student development. Simultaneously, the professional standards of counselling services show that staffing, service scope, supervision, ethics, and clinical capacity are the essential factors when it comes to assessing a counselling centre's ability to address student needs. For example, the International Association of Counselling Services recommends that counselling centres make reasonable attempts to have an appropriate staffing ratio considering the service demands, the new approaches to service provision, and the clinical capacity of the centre (IACS, 2025). The above changes point out that the counselling centres should be considered as institutional systems instead of mere service points which operate with the help of individual professional skills.

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Despite the fact that individual competence of the counsellor is the key element that defines the quality of the work in the sphere of counselling, individual competence is not enough to reach excellence in the organisation (Shet et al., 2019). For example, the centre can have competent and skilled counsellors but still have problems with lengthy waiting periods, referral processes, fragmented service planning, lack of visibility among students, poor documentation practices, lack of institutionalisation, and poor use of the information that could improve service delivery. All these problems generate the gap between the professional competence of the counsellor and the excellence in the organisation. The significance of the issue lies in the fact that the trust of the students in the services is defined by both the counsellor-client relationship and the general experience of the accessibility of the service, confidentiality, responsiveness, and institutional care.

The *Good to Great* approach by Jim Collins provides an excellent conceptual model to analyse this change. According to Collins (2001), good organizations can achieve great results by using disciplined people, disciplined thinking, and disciplined actions. Key elements of this theory are Level 5 Leadership, First Who Then What, Confronting the Brutal Facts, Hedgehog Concept, Culture of Discipline, Technology Accelerators, and Flywheel Effect. According to Collins, Level 5 Leadership is a fusion of personal humility and professional will, whereas the Hedgehog Concept stands for the strategy that was created through the intersection of passion, competence, and the organizational engine of resources. These concepts have been extensively used in various leadership studies, yet their significance for university counselling centres is still not well understood.

As for the university counselling centres, the *Good to Great* approach can be modified in order to explain how counselling centres progress from mere service providers to trusted, efficient, and sustainable mental health services. For instance, Level 5 Leadership may be observed in leaders of the counselling centres who demonstrate humility and strong responsibility towards students' welfare. ‘First Who Then What’ may refer to the process of selecting, recruiting, developing and supervising professional staff. ‘Confronting the Brutal Facts’ may include the objective analysis of service deficiencies, unmet needs, waiting lists, limited staffing resources and other factors which impede students' seeking help. ‘The Hedgehog Concept’ may help counselling centres to clarify their mission, strengths and values. ‘Culture of Discipline’ may enhance ethical practices, documentation, supervision, referrals and professional development. Technology Accelerators may help to develop an effective appointment system, monitoring of services, psychoeducation activities and evidence-based practice planning, yet preserving the human-oriented nature of counselling at all costs.

The problem addressed in this paper is the limited conceptual understanding of how university counselling centres can shift from individual counsellor competence towards organisational greatness. Much of the existing literature focuses on student mental health needs, help-seeking behaviour, counselling effectiveness, or barriers to service use. However, less attention has been given to the organisational principles that allow counselling centres to sustain excellence across leadership, staffing, service culture, institutional trust, and strategic development. This creates a theoretical and practical gap in counselling and psychology literature, particularly in relation to how counselling centres can be strengthened as organisational systems within higher education. Without such a framework, counselling centres may remain reactive, dependent on individual effort, and vulnerable to inconsistency in service delivery.

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This conceptual paper sets out to build a framework that brings the principles from *Good to Great* into university counselling centres. The goal is to help these centres move from having individual counsellors to becoming truly great organisations. This is done by combining ideas from counselling development, organisational psychology and how mental health services are managed in higher education. The paper looks at how key ideas from * to Great* can be adapted to fit the setting of a counselling centre. It also examines what organisational factors help maintain quality, lasting counselling services. Finally, the paper offers a framework that can guide research to support counselling centre leaders and inform policies about mental health in universities.

Based on this aim, the paper is guided by the following research questions:

1. How can *Good to Great* principles be conceptually applied to university counselling centres?
2. In what ways can individual counsellor competence be transformed into organisational greatness within university counselling centres?
3. What key organisational drivers should be included in a new framework for strengthening university counselling centre excellence?

University counselling-centred excellence transpires when the skills of each counsellor come together to build a unified organisation. This happens through leadership that guides the team, clear strategies that set direction, and professional systems that run with discipline. It also depends on using evidence to understand what services are needed, choosing the technology to support work, connecting the counselling centre with the wider institution, and always looking for ways to improve over time.

Literature Review

University Counselling Centres In Higher Education

University counselling centres sit in a key position in higher education because they link psychological support, student growth, staying on track with studies, handling crises, managing referrals, and caring for the institution. International research from 2018 to 2026 shows that student mental health support can no longer be seen as a side role. Osborn et al. (2022), in a review and meta-analysis, found that about one third of students who start university show signs of common mental disorders. Still, how much students use student mental health support differs a lot between countries, types of service, and different institutions. Their review added that most evidence comes from countries, especially the United States, leaving a gap in international knowledge about how university counselling and student mental health support are set up in different higher education systems.

This evidence is very important for university counselling centres because it shows that how well the service works can't be understood by looking at individual counselling results. Things like how easy it is to get help, how well the centre is known, how students are referred to the service, the number of employees, how much students trust the service, and whether care continues over time all affect whether students get help in time. Cerolini and others (2023), in a review of counselling for university students, pointed out that more and more researchers are looking at university counselling, especially when it comes to student mental health, how students feel about counselling, and what stops them from getting help. This backs up the idea

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that counselling centres should be seen as systems within the university, not just places where people have counselling sessions.

From the point of view of the university, recent studies that focus on policy have started to look at mental health support that is spread across different parts of the university. For example, Foster (2026) studied how students' mental health can be tracked as part of a whole-university plan, showing how using data to plan services can help the university make choices. In Bannigan et al. (2025), the researchers looked at how to include this in the university curriculum, as part of a whole-university approach, saying that student well-being needs help from teachers, support services, and university policies, not just from one single program.

For the proposed conceptual paper, this body of literature supports one central argument, that is, the university counselling centres need to progress from individually competent practice towards organisational greatness. A centre may have qualified counsellors, but sustainable excellence requires leadership, service culture, strategic clarity, professional discipline, and institutional integration.

Student Mental Health, Help-Seeking, And Service Utilisation

International studies show that there is a continuing worry about the health of students and that they do not use support services enough. Osborn et al. (2022) discovered that there is a lot of difference in how students use health services. The numbers change depending on the type of service, the place where the student studies, and the group of students involved. Their results show that just because services are available does not mean students will use them. Students might not reach out for help because of stigma, as they prefer to handle things on their own due to financial problems, or because they do not know about the counselling services. The research further concluded that the students think the services are not easy to access or that they do not trust the help that is offered.

New research also shows that university counselling services can show good results if they have regular checks on how well they are working and if they evaluate their services in a proper way. Collins et al. (2025), in a review and analysis of CORE-OM data, found that university counselling services were effective. The results were better when the centres provided a variety of treatments rather than only one type of therapy. The review also found problems with the research, such as the number of people taking part, missing information, and not enough regular checks on how well the services are working. This result supports the idea that managing counselling centres, with data important.

At the same time, Malaysian literature provides a complementary viewpoint by focusing on the stigma associated with mental health, the obstacles to seeking help, and levels of mental health literacy among university students. Pheng et al. (2019) looked at the stigma and the attitudes of Malaysian university students towards obtaining counselling and regarded counselling services as an important means of supporting student well-being. Meanwhile, Arifin et al. (2022) found that research into the use of counselling services by Malaysian university students is still limited, which shows that there is a need for more studies concerning attitudes towards seeking counselling help.

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More up-to-date research carried out in Malaysia shows that there is still a major concern among institutions regarding student mental health. Muda et al. (2025) studied the patterns relating to mental health among university students in Malaysia and found that only about one-third of those students who have mental health problems go for professional assistance each year, even though counselling services are available. The study highlighted the way in which stigma has a negative effect on social support, delays recovery, and discourages people from accessing services.

Nuwawi et al. (2025) observed the obstacles faced by young adults in tertiary education when seeking professional mental health assistance, with a particular focus on those who showed depressive symptoms. The qualitative approach used by Nuwawi et al. (2025) is appropriate for this conceptual paper since it directs attention from the availability of services to the acceptability of those services. In Malaysia, counselling centres could benefit from improving their assurance of confidentiality, their level of mental health literacy, their culturally sensitive communication, and their student-centred engagement.

When observing the evidence from Malaysia and from around the world, it becomes clear that the problem is not simply whether or not counselling services are available. The real issue lies in the way counselling centres establish trust, lower barriers, organise the delivery of their services, communicate the value they provide, and maintain quality. This is in line with the Good-to-Great model since achieving organisational greatness depends on having disciplined systems that turn student needs into accessible, ethical, and trusted support.

Individual Competence In Counselling Practice

It is therefore essential to ensure individual counsellor competence as part of delivering high-quality services by universities' counselling centres. Individual counsellor competence refers to their level of counselling knowledge, ethical sensitivity, ability for case conceptualisation, multicultural responsiveness, communication skills, crisis assessment, referral decisions, documentation, reflective practices, and engagement in supervision.

In university contexts, counsellors will have multiple encounters with students who have different kinds of personal problems ranging from academic stress, anxiety, depression, adjustment issues, family conflicts, concerns about one's own identities, experiences related to trauma, and interpersonal challenges. They need more than just good counselling skills, instead, they require making professional judgements given the complexity of working in an institution (Collins et al., 2025).

Reviewing the literature concerning the extent to which counsellors provide effective assistance reveals links between the need for counsellor competence assurance and system structures at the service level (Collins et al., 2025). More specifically, it indicates that those counsellors offering more effective university counselling services have access to several different types of therapeutic approaches. This situation may indicate they possess several counsellors who are able to bring together skills related to specific therapy forms, achieved by continually enhancing each member's professional competencies via processes including supervision, peer consultation, continuous professional development, and case reviews.

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The framework proposed would consider individual competence to represent an initial consideration rather than necessarily indicating achievement of excellent practice per se. We would argue that if a university counselling centre employs a group of skilful counsellors, then one could argue that service quality will suffer due to poor appointment organisation, lack of management over waiting lists, unclear referral pathways, inconsistent documentation, or failure to integrate counselling work into wider student-support mechanisms – situations where organisational psychology considerations apply.

Applying the perspective provided by the 'Good-to-Great' theory, the principle of "First Who Then What" implies considering the recruitment of appropriately qualified counsellors, their competency enhancement through supervisory arrangements, aligning the particular strengths of staff members with students' needs, and cultivating a team environment characterised by collective responsibility towards maintaining high-quality service provision through ethical practice. While certainly important, the focus on the counsellor themselves alone cannot determine organisational success. Instead, achieving greatness requires placing capable professionals within a robust, values-based and well-managed service system.

Organisational Greatness In University Counselling Centres

A conceptual understanding of organisational greatness in this context would focus on the ability of the centre to deliver accessible, ethical, responsive, evidence-informed, and sustainable mental health support to students over time. This might include considerations around student trust, service continuity, staff competence, leadership clarity, professional accountability, institutional collaboration, and capacity for improvement.

The current literature highlights a movement away from isolated intervention approaches toward integrated support systems. Vincze et al. (2026) proposed "an integrated multilevel mental health support system for university students," which aligns closely with the concept developed here for organisational greatness, particularly when considering the integration of digital and personal services with time-specific data to inform university leadership.

International literature also demonstrates fragmentation and underutilisation of mental health services at universities (Osborn et al., 2022), which calls for increased consideration of organisational greatness and the impact of service utilisation. While focusing primarily on interventions and therapies offered by counsellors, Vincze et al. (2026) also included considerations around pathways, triage, data, leadership decision-making, and service development. These elements make their proposal directly relevant to the discussion above regarding organisational greatness, since one cannot expect a counselling centre to be organisationally great if students do not understand, access, or place trust in their services.

The studies about Malaysian universities' students reveal that stigmatization, low awareness of mental health issues, uncertainty, and culture affect help-seeking behaviors. According to Muda et al. (2025), counselling centres have to adopt organizational strategies that will enhance their capacity to reduce these barriers while simultaneously enhancing the communication of confidentiality and increasing students' confidence regarding the availability of professional support.

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Therefore, one cannot conclude that greatness means big size, popularity, or efficient administration but rather the centre's capability to provide quality counseling support constantly despite its scale of operation, ensure responsiveness to the specific needs of students, collaborate effectively with other academic and administrative departments within the institution, maintain proper ethical practices, and make use of relevant evidence to drive the provision of services continuously (Pheng et al., 2019).

Leadership And Service Culture In University Counselling Centres

Leadership has emerged as a key ingredient in the transformation process from delivering services to becoming strategically important student-supporting entities. Recently, organisational and healthcare leadership studies have indicated the influence of leadership quality on enhancing service delivery, employee engagement, quality management and organisational outcomes (Restivo et al., 2022). The authors did a systematic review and meta-analysis of the effectiveness of leadership interventions on healthcare settings' performance and organisational outcomes, finding that leadership interventions could impact positive changes in performance and organisational outcomes. Although there are differences between these healthcare environments and university counselling centres, there is evidence for the general idea that leadership plays an influencing role in shaping culture and quality of services. Leadership in counselling centres goes far beyond administrative coordination. Ethical governance, clinical supervision, staff development, crisis readiness, referral relationships, service evaluation, and advocacy within the university all fall under the purview of leadership. Furthermore, leaders must balance professional autonomy against institutional accountability. Leaders who are not self-promotional but demonstrate deep commitment towards ensuring high-quality service delivery, promoting student well-being, and maintaining professional standards could become role models for other staff members.

Moreover, leadership influences the establishment of a culture of discipline within the organisation itself. While a disciplined organisation does not necessarily mean one that operates through punishment or harshness, having well-defined ethical procedures and documenting them appropriately would provide clarity around how services are provided ethically at counselling centres. Establishing clear supervisory processes, defining organisational boundaries regarding what kind of services an institution provides, establishing proper referral protocols, and creating feedback channels ensure both internal consistency on how services should be delivered while still allowing flexibility depending upon local context – particularly relevant if working with diverse student populations found throughout Malaysia's universities today.

The literature suggests that having fragmented support systems weakens accessibility amongst students due largely to their lack thereof when trying to navigate complex systems designed purely to serve administrators rather than actual clientele directly affected by these policies' implementations. Thus, highlighting the necessity of integrating plans across various campus departments, including academics and student affairs, as noted above when discussing the studies conducted by Foster (2026) and Bannigan et al. (2025), respectively.

Technology And Data-Informed Counselling Services

At the same time, technology is paramount important across all domains of university mental health services. From online booking systems to digital mental health interventions and

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psychoeducation platforms, from screening tools and data dashboards to hybrid counselling delivery, universities are adopting novel ways of integrating technology into the lives of their students who experience mental health problems.

According to the Good-to-Great framework, "technology can act as an accelerator" but not necessarily the main engine driving organisational success (Goodtoegreat.com, n.d.). For counselling centres, this notion that 'digital' solutions must augment but not supplant human-centred counselling offers considerable value given the evidence around the effectiveness of digital mental health interventions. Madrid-Cagigal et al note that while there is evidence supporting the potential for these interventions to enhance access, the data do not demonstrate the independence of technology as a factor determining counsellor excellence (Madrid-Cagigal et al., 2025).

Digital provision could help improve the reach of counselling centres, but it would be naive to assume such provision would automatically resolve shortcomings in areas of professional practice such as clinical judgements or referrals made, breaches of confidentiality or challenges with ensuring continuity of care. In short, in our proposed model, we intend for technology to operate as an accelerator, albeit one where its organisational contribution is conditional upon both professional competencies and ethical governance structures.

According to recent studies, there has been an increasing demand for regular outcome measurement and data-driven service assessments. For example, Collins et al. (2025) stated that while using CORE-OM data provides empirical backing for the effectiveness of a university's counselling service, routine outcome measurement remains scarce. This statement can be considered extremely important from the perspective of counselling centres aiming at achieving organizational excellence, since it shows that they should look beyond anecdotes concerning their activity to provide solid data about the effectiveness of the service offered.

Moreover, as indicated by the research conducted by Muda et al. (2025), "professional help-seeking remains relatively low among students with mental health concerns" in Malaysia. To ensure this problem gets resolved, counselling centres should focus on gathering and analysing data concerning counselling sessions provided, student awareness of these centres' existence, challenges experienced when trying to access such services, and sources through which people get referrals to counselling centres

Application Of Good-To-Great Principles To University Counselling Centres

To develop this conceptual framework, the researchers use the Good-to-Great model as an organisational lens which, although originating from business research by Collins (2001), provides us with valuable concepts that may be utilised within our discipline areas of counselling and psychology. These include principles relating to leadership at all levels, strategic thinking, competent team members, and organisational sustainability.

Level 5 Leadership – This concept could translate directly into a consideration of counselling centre heads, supervisors and institutional level leaders, whose role would reflect both humble acceptance and unwavering commitment to student mental health.

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First Who Then What – As we consider the human element within staff selection processes, counsellor training, counsellor supervision and professional fit, this approach reinforces the idea that people must come before policy and practice decisions are made.

Confronting the Brutal Facts – We need to assess honestly current issues affecting services such as service barriers, student underutilisation, stigmatisation, waiting time concerns, gaps in documentation and understaffing situations.
The Hedgehog Concept – When considering how we want to be known, we can apply this concept to identify what we can do best, what students need most, and what will sustain institutional values over time.

Culture of Discipline – Concerning building on existing strengths within organisations, a focus on ethics, referrals, documentation and service standards could help create a culture of discipline in some universities.

Technology Accelerators – In the area of appointment management, online counselling and data systems, there exist opportunities to utilise technology as accelerators for good outcomes.
The Flywheel Effect – Repeated attempts to make improvements in terms of trust, visibility, accessibility, collaboration and outcomes have the potential to accelerate organisational growth through positive flywheel effects.

The literature from 2018 to 2026 supports each of these principles indirectly. Studies on student mental health service use show the need for better access and integration (Osborn et al., 2022). Studies on Malaysian help-seeking show the need to address stigma and underutilisation (Muda et al., 2025; Pheng et al., 2019). Studies on counselling effectiveness show the need for outcome monitoring and diverse therapeutic provision (Collins et al., 2025). Studies on digital mental health interventions show that technology can support access and scalability when ethically used (Madrid-Cagigal et al., 2025). Studies on whole-university approaches also show that counselling centres should be embedded within wider institutional systems rather than operating in isolation (Bannigan et al., 2025; Foster, 2026).

This review discloses that the gap is not the absence of literature on student mental health or counselling services. The gap lies in the lack of a clear conceptual framework explaining how individual counsellor competence can be converted into organisational greatness in university counselling centres. This gap justifies the development of a new framework grounded in counselling, psychology, higher education, mental health, and organisational leadership.

Table 1: Synthesis of Selected Articles from 2018–2026

Author(s) / Year	Context	Main Focus	Key Contribution to the Proposed Framework
Pheng et al. (2019)	Malaysia	Stigma and attitudes towards seeking counselling among university students	Shows that counselling centres must address stigma and student attitudes, not only provide services
Osborn et al. (2022)	International	Systematic review and meta-analysis on	Demonstrates wide variation in service

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		university students' use of mental health services	utilisation and the need for integrated service systems
Arifin et al. (2022)	Malaysia	Attitudes towards seeking counselling help among Malaysian university students	Indicates limited research on counselling service utilisation in Malaysia
Cerolini et al. (2023)	International	Systematic review on psychological counselling among university students	Supports the growing relevance of counselling services in higher education
AthinarayananRao et al. (2024/2025)	Malaysia	Public stigma, self-stigma, and help-seeking among international university students in Malaysia	Suggests that stigma should be addressed through culturally sensitive counselling centre strategies
Collins et al. (2025)	International	Effectiveness of university counselling services using CORE-OM	Supports outcome monitoring and service evaluation as indicators of organisational quality
Madrid-Cagigal et al. (2025)	International	Digital mental health interventions for university students	Positions technology as an accelerator for access and support, rather than a replacement for counselling
Muda et al. (2025)	Malaysia	Mental health concerns and help-seeking among Malaysian students	Shows low professional help-seeking despite available counselling services
Nuwawi et al. (2025)	Malaysia	Barriers to mental help-seeking among young adults in tertiary education	Highlights acceptability, stigma, and service trust as key organisational issues
Bannigan et al. (2025)	International	Whole-university approach to embedding well-being in higher education	Supports institutional integration of counselling and well-being services
Foster (2026)	International	Student mental health profiling and whole-university service planning	Supports data-informed counselling centre leadership and institutional decision-making
Vincze et al. (2026)	International	Integrated multilevel mental health support system for university students	Supports a systems-based model linking digital tools, personal services, and university leadership

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Literature Review Gap

Based on the reviewed literature, it is evident that counselling services are highly demanded by university students, while the provision of these services is considered vital to students' mental health. Several international studies have investigated counselling service utilization, effectiveness, technological interventions, and university-wide mental health service improvement. At the same time, several pieces of research explore counselling service utilization and barriers in Malaysian universities and contribute valuable insights into stigma, help-seeking behaviours, and student needs. However, a separate issue is counselling centres' ability to capitalize on their individual counselling service excellence to transform the entire organization into a high-performance entity.

While there is a body of knowledge addressing counselling centres' role in students' well-being, there is a gap in understanding how counselling centres can integrate their excellent individual counsellor performances into the broader perspective to become great themselves. Great counselling centres are those that have comprehensive but straightforward strategies, utilize disciplined approaches to practice counselling, embrace technology-enabled processes, and constantly improve their services according to students' needs. This conceptual framework aims to fill this gap by applying the Good-to-Great principles and transforming them into ideas specific to counselling centres.

The theoretical positioning of this paper is based on the notion that university counselling centres must be regarded as professional service systems instead of single areas of individual counselling practice. The *Good to Great* concept offers a primary conceptual framework that can be used to understand how a counselling centre can evolve from being a good to an outstanding organisation. The concepts of disciplined people, thought, and action proposed by Collins can be applied in a university counselling centre because the entity requires competent professionals, service clarity, and ethical processes to achieve organisational enhancement. The organisational psychology perspective supports the main argument of this paper because it explains how service quality can be enhanced through leadership, culture, teamwork, motivation, communication, and organisational behaviour. In other words, it is not enough to have qualified counsellors in a university setting. The quality of services depends on how leadership is done, work roles are defined, supervision is delivered, and institutional and student needs are addressed.

Professional competence theory is the second theoretical basis of this paper because counselling service quality is realised through individual competence, which is demonstrated by counsellors who have professional expertise, counselling skills, ethical conduct, multicultural awareness, reflection, and the ability to respond to student needs in a university context. Systems theory is the third theoretical framework for this paper because a counselling centre is a system that operates in a university setting that includes students, academic staff, student affairs, health services, referral agencies, and leadership. Transformational and ethical leadership theories are applicable in a counselling centre context because leaders play a transformative role by influencing professional organisational culture, maintaining client confidentiality, enhancing staff competence, and building trust between the counselling centre and the university. The service quality perspective is applicable because it involves dimensions of organisational goodness or excellence, such as accessibility, responsiveness, reliability, trustworthiness, professionalism, and student satisfaction. The whole-university mental health

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approach applies because it expands the role of a counselling centre from addressing individual needs to tending to the mental health needs of the entire university.

Conceptual Contribution and Theoretical Novelty

The theoretical contribution of this paper goes beyond applying the Collins Good-to-Great framework to university counselling centres. The framework changes the way we think about counselling-centre effectiveness. It sees it as an organisational phenomenon. Here, professional competence is a base but does not alone lead to long-term service excellence. The framework shows a process that connects professional ability with organisational processes and the results that come from them. In this way, counsellor competence is the ability of an individual. Leadership, organisation, clear service strategy, disciplined professional culture, systems supported by technology, and the integration of the institution are the organisational processes. Organisational greatness is the long-term service result.

This difference helps the counselling field by addressing a gap between what practitioners are good at and what the organisation achieves. Current counselling research has mostly looked at skills, ethics, the therapy process, seeking help using services, and the results for clients. These views give a lot of knowledge about the quality of counselling. They do not explain much about how good practitioners work together to create a strong and lasting service. The new framework fills this gap by adding a level of study between counsellor competence and the results that serve students.

The framework takes the Good-to-Great ideas and changes them a bit. It looks at what it means to be great in an organisation. Through the lens of counselling practice. In business, greatness often means performance over time. In a university counselling centre, greatness means something different. It means being ethical, easy to access, professional, trustworthy, responsive, able to keep helping students over time, working well with parts of the university, and always trying to improve the service. Therefore, this framework is not just copying a business model. It is rebuilding the idea for a setting.

Another important part is how the framework brings together ideas. It combines skills, organisational psychology, systems thinking, service quality, and the idea of mental health across the whole university. These topics are usually talked about on their own. This framework links them. It does so through a process model that shows how strong professional skills can become organisational strength and, over time, lead to long-term value for the institution. The key point here is not that the Good-to-Great rules will make counselling services better on their own. Instead, it suggests that some parts of those rules. When adapted. Can help explain how skilled professionals turn their abilities into a high-quality counselling service.

Why Good-to-Great Provides the Primary Organisational Lens

The choice to use Good-to-Great as the main belief for looking at the organisation must be checked against useful ideas. Transformational leadership gives a picture of vision, motivation and big changes, but it mainly focuses on how leaders act. Ethical leadership brings in ideas about responsibility, fairness and trust. It does not give a full step-by-step way to mix staffing, strategy, strict systems, technology and long-term growth. Systems theory is helpful to show how counselling centres link with the university, but it is less detailed about the internal mechanisms that can keep improvement going. Service-quality perspectives point out that

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being easy to reach, quick to answer, reliable, and making users happy are signs of good service, but they look mainly at the traits and results of service quality, not at the deep transformation that creates them.

Good-to-Great was chosen as the organising framework because it offers a process-oriented architecture that links people, leadership self-assessment, strategic clarity, disciplined execution, technology and cumulative improvement. I feel that Good-to-Great connects neatly with the challenges found in university counselling literature, such as staffing capacity, supervision, help-seeking barriers, service accessibility, fragmented referral systems, outcome monitoring, institutional integration and sustainable service development. Good-to-Great is not used as a counselling theory nor as the explanation of organisational effectiveness. Instead, Good-to-Great acts as an organising structure that ties together insights from counselling competence, organisational psychology, systems theory, service quality and whole-university mental health approaches.

The proposed model also significantly differs from the Good-to-Great framework. I think that commercial performance is replaced by bounded service excellence as the main outcome. Technology is considered valuable when it supports accessibility, professional judgement and human-centred counselling. Organisational discipline is interpreted through governance, supervision, documentation and continuity of care, not just managerial control. Good-to-Great keeps its transformation logic. Rebuilds its parts to fit the ethical, relational and institutional nature of university counselling services.

Limitations of the Proposed Conceptual Framework

Several limitations need to be considered when looking at the framework that is being proposed. The framework is more of an idea. Has not been tested with real data yet. The links between the skills of each counsellor, the reasons why an organisation pushes forward, and the great things an organisation achieves should be seen as ideas rather than proven facts. The exact role each part of the organisation plays is still not clear. For example, we can't say for sure that a Level 5 counselling leader helps the service be better than the way the organisation works together or the way professionals act or the way the service is planned out.

Another problem is where the Good-to-Great framework came from. It was created for businesses that work in the sector. University counselling offices are very different from these businesses. They have goals, different rules about how to act, different people who are in charge, different people they work with, and different ways of measuring success. Therefore, ideas from the Good-to-Great framework need to be looked at before they can be used. The current framework tries to do this by changing what it means to be an organisation. It talks about being fair, easy to use, trusted, and focused on students. More research is needed to see if these ideas work the same way in counselling places.

Third, university counselling centres work in national, cultural, regulatory and institutional settings. The way services are set up in universities can be different from how they are set up in other higher education systems. Differences in how counsellor regulated, how staff are arranged, who the students are, mental health policies, the resources available at the institutions, and the way people think about asking for help can change how useful or strong certain parts of the framework are.

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Fourth, the framework focuses a lot on the way organisations work. Does not try to show every factor that affects the results of counselling. Things like the students themselves, how serious their problems are, the type of therapy used, the relationship between the counsellor and the client, the economic situation of the student, and other mental health systems outside the university can all have an effect on the results. The framework should therefore be seen as a way to build counselling centres within an organisation, not as a model for how well counselling works.

A final problem is the way the research was put together to create the framework. An integrative review helps bring different areas of study, but it is more about what people think than what can be proved. The ideas in this paper therefore need to be checked by people who know a lot about the subject and tested with research.

A Staged Agenda for Empirical Validation

Future research should move past requests for empirical testing and instead focus on a step-by-step validation of the framework. The first stage might involve using panels or the Delphi method, bringing together counselling academics, registered counsellors, university counselling centre leaders and higher education administrators. This phase could assess how clear the concepts are, whether the content fits real-world needs, and if the proposed organisational dimensions make sense.

The second stage would turn the framework into parts. Specific indicators could be built for things like counsellor competence, Level 5 counselling leadership, clear strategic service goals, a disciplined professional culture, technology-driven service systems, institutional integration, and organisational greatness. After that, studies could test content validity, construct validity, and reliability to ensure the tools developed are accurate and consistent.

A third phase could use cross-sectional multi-institutional research to examine associations between the proposed organisational drivers and outcomes such as perceived service quality, student trust, service accessibility, help-seeking intention, and counselling centre effectiveness. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling could assess the measurement structure and hypothesised relationships within the framework.

A fourth phase should employ comparative designs. Longitudinal research would permit assessment of whether improvements in mechanisms precede changes in service indicators over time. Comparative studies involving private universities, conventional and open and distance learning institutions, and counselling centres operating across different national settings could establish the contextual boundaries of the framework.

Mixed-method case studies could complement validation by examining how organisational transformation occurs within functioning counselling centres. Interviews with counsellors, centre leaders, students and university administrators combined with service indicators such as waiting time, utilisation, non-attendance, referral patterns, student satisfaction and routine outcome data could provide an assessment of how the proposed mechanisms operate in practice.

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Table 2: Comparative Positioning of the Proposed Framework

Perspective	Primary contribution	Strength	Limitation for present problem	Added value of proposed framework
Professional competence perspective	Explains practitioner capability	Strong professional and ethical focus	Mainly individual-level	Links competence to organisational mechanisms
Transformational/Ethical Leadership	Explains leadership, vision, trust and ethical behaviour	Strong leadership explanation	Leadership-centred rather than whole-system	Places leadership within a larger transformation process
Systems Theory	Explains interdependence	Captures university-wide relationships	Does not specify a developmental sequence	Identifies mechanisms through which system improvement may accumulate
Service Quality Perspective	Defines accessibility, responsiveness and satisfaction	Strong outcome/service focus	Less explanatory regarding organisational transformation	Links organisational processes with service-quality outcomes
Whole-University Mental Health Approach	Positions mental health as institutional responsibility	Strong institutional integration	Broad institutional framework rather than counselling-centre development model	Specifies counselling-centre mechanisms within the whole-university system
IACS Standards	Provides professional and operational service standards	Strong normative and practice guidance	Standards indicate what a centre should provide rather than how organisational	Provides a developmental logic linking capacity, organisational processes and sustained excellence

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			transformation occurs	
Proposed Good-to-Great Counselling Centre Framework	Explains transition from professional competence to sustained organisational excellence	Integrates people, leadership, strategy, systems, technology and cumulative improvement	Requires empirical validation	Provides an integrative process model specific to university counselling-centre development

The idea presented in this paper, as shown in Table 2 above, is based on the belief that university counselling centres should be looked at as service systems instead of just places where individual counselling happens. The Good to framework is the main way to understand how a counselling centre can move from just meeting basic needs to achieving long-term success. The ideas from Collins about having disciplined people, disciplined thinking, and disciplined actions are important for university counselling centres because they need professionals, clear strategies, ethical guidelines, and ways to keep improving. Organisational psychology adds to this by showing that the quality of service depends on leadership, the way people work together, how a team functions, what motivates staff, how they communicate, and the overall behaviour of the organisation. In this situation, the quality of the counselling services is not about the skills of the counsellors. It is also about how the centre is managed, how the roles of the staff are set up, how supervision is done, and how the centre deals with the needs of the institution and the students.

Professional competence theory in counselling remains central because individual counsellor competence forms the foundation of a quality counselling service. Counsellors need knowledge, counselling skills, ethical judgement, multicultural sensitivity, reflective capacity and the ability to respond to student concerns within a university environment. At the same time, systems theory positions the counselling centre as part of a wider university support structure involving students, academic staff, student affairs, health services, referral agencies and institutional leaders. Transformational and ethical leadership perspectives further support the role of counselling centre leaders in guiding culture, protecting confidentiality, encouraging staff development and promoting institutional trust. The service quality perspective helps define greatness through accessibility, responsiveness, reliability, trust, professionalism, and student satisfaction. The university mental health approach extends the counselling centre's role beyond individual intervention by recognising student mental health as a shared institutional responsibility.

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Table 3: Proposed Conceptual Framework for the Paper

Framework Component	Conceptual Meaning	Good-to-Great Link	Counselling Centre Application	Expected Outcome
Individual counsellor competence	The professional ability of counsellors to provide ethical, effective, reflective, and student-centred counselling services.	First Who Then What	Recruitment and development of qualified counsellors with strong counselling skills, ethical awareness, multicultural competence, crisis response ability, and reflective practice.	Strong professional foundation for service quality.
Level 5 counselling leadership	Leadership that combines humility, ethical responsibility, professional will, and commitment to student well-being.	Level 5 Leadership	Counselling centre heads and supervisors lead through service, integrity, evidence-informed decisions, and long-term commitment rather than personal visibility.	Strong leadership, trust, and professional direction.
Organisational honesty and service awareness	The ability of the centre to examine service realities honestly, including weaknesses and unmet needs.	Confront the Brutal Facts	Review waiting times, service demand, student feedback, stigma, underutilisation, referral gaps, staffing issues, and crisis response capacity.	Clear understanding of service gaps and improvement priorities.
Strategic service clarity	The centre's clear understanding of its core role, professional strength, and institutional value.	Hedgehog Concept	Define what the centre can do best, what students need most, and what sustains the centre's contribution to the university.	Focused and meaningful counselling centre direction.

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Disciplined professional culture	Shared professional standards that guide ethical practice, supervision, documentation, referral, case management, and continuous development.	Culture of Discipline	Establish clear service protocols, supervision schedules, documentation standards, referral pathways, confidentiality procedures, and professional learning plans.	Consistent service quality and accountability.
Technology-supported service system	Use of appropriate technology to support access, monitoring, communication, psychoeducation, and service planning.	Technology Accelerators	Digital booking systems, online counselling options, student mental health screening, data dashboards, feedback systems, and online mental health resources.	Improved access, service efficiency, and evidence-informed planning.
Cumulative service improvement	Continuous small improvements that build long-term trust, visibility, and service strength.	Flywheel Effect	Improve outreach, reduce waiting time, strengthen referral systems, collect feedback, increase collaboration, conduct psychoeducation, and monitor outcomes.	Sustainable counselling centre excellence.
Institutional integration	The centre's connection with the wider university system and external support networks.	Disciplined Action and Flywheel Effect	Collaboration with academic faculties, student affairs, health units, disability services, residential colleges, crisis teams, and external mental health agencies.	Stronger institutional support for student mental health.
Organisational greatness	The centre's sustained ability to provide ethical, accessible, trusted, student-	Outcome of Good-to-Great transformation	Counselling centres become recognised as strategic contributors to	

	centred, and institutionally valued counselling services.	student well-being, academic success, psychological safety, and institutional care.

The conceptual framework presented in Table 3 places individual counsellor competence at the heart of university counselling centre excellence. Competent counsellors are essential for delivering effective support, especially when dealing with student issues such as stress, anxiety, academic adjustment, interpersonal difficulties, crises, and personal growth. This idea connects to the Good to principle of First Who Then What, which says that organisations must first have the right people before deciding their direction. In a counselling centre, greatness starts with hiring, training, supervising, and keeping counsellors who show professional skills, ethical maturity, reflective practice, and cultural awareness.

Level 5 counselling leadership is the force driving this framework. Counselling centre leaders must balance responsibilities, which include administrative demands, clinical standards, staff wellbeing, reporting to the institution, and meeting student needs. These leaders shape the environment where quality care can thrive.

The other parts of the framework show how individual competence leads to greatness. Honesty and service awareness push centres to look closely at waiting times, student feedback, low usage rates, stigma around counselling, accessibility problems, crisis cases, referral gaps, and high workloads. Strategic service clarity helps the centre define its role within the university. This includes offering student-centred counselling, early intervention, psychoeducation, coordination of referrals, and quick responses during crises.

A disciplined professional culture ensures consistency in ethics, documentation, supervision, confidentiality, referral methods, and ongoing learning. Technology-supported service systems make it easier to manage appointments, track services, collect feedback, screen students, deliver psychoeducation, and offer support. Over time, these improvements add up, and the counselling centre builds trust, becomes more visible, works better with departments, and earns credibility across the university. Greatness is achieved when the counselling centre delivers accessible, trusted, student-focused, and institutionally respected services in a way that lasts.

Methodology

The conceptual research design was adopted in this study to develop a new conceptual model that explains the transformation processes of university counselling centres' personnel competence from individual to organisational greatness. The study used a conceptual research design because it pursues a theoretical objective. This means that its main goal is not to generate quantitative results from collected data and make statistical inferences about a population based on the sample. Instead, conceptual research aims to synthesise and systematise existing knowledge from different areas, including counselling, to build a logically consistent theoretical framework. In this study, the conceptual model underpins the research question and guides the entire investigation, aiming to operationally define university counselling centres' personnel competence as a professional service system whose components, such as individual,

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leadership, organisational culture, service structure, technology, and institutionalisation, are linked.

The conceptual background of this paper was formed by means of a literature search. Specifically, there are four areas of literature that were reviewed in order to devise the framework for this paper. These areas were university counselling centres, student mental health and help-seeking behaviour, counsellor professional competence, and organisational excellence. As an organisational frame, the paper relies on Jim Collins' *Good to Great* concept. The theoretical basis stems from his book, in which he identified principles for building great organisations. The principles of *Good to Great* used in this paper include Level 5 Leadership, First Who Then What, Confronting the Brutal Facts, Hedgehog Concept, Culture of Discipline, Technology Accelerators, and Flywheel Effect. These principles were examined in relation to counselling centres in universities in order to explore their potential as frameworks for counselling centres' organisational excellence and professional counselling. It is important to note that *Good to Great* principles were regarded as organisational concepts rather than counselling theories.

The conceptual framework was developed through an integrative review of the literature aimed at synthesizing knowledge in the fields of counselling, higher education mental health, organizational psychology, and organizational excellence. The integrative approach was chosen because the research question called for the combination of the diverse literature rather than estimating the effect of a single intervention.

The literature searches were done using Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and the university library's database. Each search used combinations of terms related to these four conceptual areas: (1) university counselling services, (2) student mental health and help-seeking, (3) counsellor competence and practice, and (4) organizational leadership and excellence. Some of the combinations used were "university counselling centre" OR "university counselling centre", "student mental health" AND "help-seeking", "counsellor competence" OR "counsellor competency", and "organisational excellence" OR "organizational leadership" AND "higher education". The searches were supplemented by the manual approach to check the relevant reviews and key publications. The review prioritised literature published between 2018 and 2026 to represent contemporary developments in university mental health services, digital support, help-seeking, service evaluation and higher education policy. Earlier seminal publications were retained where required for theoretical grounding, particularly on Collins' original Good-to-Great framework. Studies were considered for inclusion when they: (a) addressed university or tertiary-education populations or counselling-service systems; (b) examined counsellor competence, service accessibility, help-seeking, leadership, organisational systems, service quality or institutional mental health support; (c) provided empirical, conceptual or systematic-review evidence relevant to framework development; and (d) were available in English. Studies were excluded when their primary focus did not relate to higher education, counselling or relevant organisational processes, or when they offered insufficient conceptual relevance to the proposed framework.

The literature selection process started with 20,694 records retrieved through the initial search. After removing duplicates and screening the titles and abstracts, 1,548 publications were selected for full-text review. Eventually, 12 sources were included in the conceptual analysis. Malaysian literature was deliberately selected to provide an in-depth understanding of the topic, particularly with regard to stigma, cultural peculiarities, professional help-seeking, and

counselling service use. International literature was used to explore the trends in the sphere of services for addressing psychological problems, as well as university mental health, online mental health services, and leadership and organisational behaviours. The analysis was conducted through four stages. The first stage involved identifying the key theoretical concepts relevant to the study, including individual counsellor competence, organisational excellence, service quality, systems thinking, ethical leadership, and whole-university mental health support. The second stage involved mapping each *Good to Great* principle onto the functions and challenges of university counselling centres. For example, First Who Then What was linked to counsellor recruitment, supervision, and professional development, while Confronting the Brutal Facts was linked to service evaluation, waiting time, stigma, underutilisation, and referral gaps. The third stage involved synthesising the mapped concepts into broader organisational drivers that may explain counselling centre excellence. The final stage involved developing the proposed conceptual framework by positioning individual counsellor competence as the foundation, Good-to-Great organisational drivers as the transformation mechanism, and organisational greatness as the desired outcome.

The researchers pointed out that it is important to note that the framework was developed based on conceptual criteria rather than statistical analysis. Each element was included based on its theoretical relevance to counselling centre excellence and supported by the review of existing literature on various aspects of student mental health services, counselling service quality, and organisational development. Individual counsellor competence was identified as the core component because professional proficiency, ethical judgement, cultural competence, reflective practice, and crisis management skills are integral to counselling effectiveness. Counselling leadership at level 5 was included as a key influence due to the role of counselling leaders in driving strategic approaches to service delivery, supervision, professional development, and organisational credibility. Strategic service clarity, disciplined professional culture, technology-enabled service systems, organisational embedding, and cumulative service improvement were incorporated as organisational influences that could drive counselling centre excellence.

Since this paper is conceptual in nature, no human participants, survey instruments, interviews, or statistical procedures were involved. The study does not aim to assess student outcomes or test causal relationships. Instead, it proposes a theoretical framework to be tested in future studies. The suggested framework could be evaluated using a qualitative case study, expert judgment, a Delphi study, survey research, structural equation modelling, or a mixed-methods study involving counsellors, counselling centre leaders, students, and/or university administrators. Future studies could explore whether the proposed organisational drivers predicted counselling centre effectiveness, student satisfaction, intention to seek help, trust in the institution, and perceived service quality.

The methodological contribution of this paper emerges from its attempt to adapt a successful organisational framework to counselling and higher education mental health contexts. By combining *Good to Great* principles, counselling competence, organisational psychology, systems thinking, service quality, and whole-university mental health approaches, the study provides a conceptual basis for understanding how university counselling centres could evolve from competent to great. The proposed framework can be used as a scholarly and practice-oriented contribution to the counselling centre development field.

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Discussion

Transforming Individual Competence Into Organisational Greatness

The proposed framework's position is an improvement compared to the initial argument because it acknowledges that individual counsellor competence is not sufficient to provide quality counselling services. It recognises that although competent counsellors can implement ethical, sensitive, and responsible services, the effectiveness of such services also depends on the strategic direction, procedures, leadership, outcome evaluation, and linkages of the wider system. The position is compelling because the evidence highlights the potential of counselling services in universities while acknowledging the limitations of the current state of research. Although counselling services in universities can be effective, the data are inconclusive due to the small sample size, absence of relevant data, and lack of widespread adoption of outcome monitoring at many institutions (Collins et al., 2025). Therefore, the effectiveness of a counselling centre should not be reduced to a function of individual counsellors' competence levels but should consider additional contributing factors.

This discussion reflects the *Good to Great* principle of "First Who Then What", which prioritises the attraction of high-quality people as the catalyst for organisational improvement. In the context of university counselling centres, this might take the form of selective recruitment, investment in professional development and supervision, reflective practice, and role-specific development. However, the principle should be applied further, and attracting the 'right people' must be coupled with investment in the 'right system'. Counselling professionals operating without appropriate support structures may find themselves in a reactive, crisis-management role, unable to develop broader preventative strategies or innovative approaches to counselling, psychoeducation, or mental health strategy development at institutional levels.

Leadership As The Centre Of Counselling Service Transformation

The proposed framework aims for Level 5 counselling leadership, which plays a critical role in transforming counselling centres within a university environment. Leadership is not only about management but also about ethics, supervision, personnel training, outreach, consultation, crisis management, and service planning. The *Good to Great* concept of Level 5 Leadership is appropriate for counselling centres because it combines humility and professional will. Leaders in counselling centres should strive to meet standards while being careful about students' confidentiality, offering support to peers, and providing counselling services. Level 5 Leadership is important to make sure that the counselling centre is not personalized and remains objective.

Several recent studies on higher education mental health have demonstrated the importance of strategic leadership and counselling services in university settings. For example, Foster (2026) stated that student mental health profiling can contribute to personalised, timely, and proactive help within a whole-university approach. Similarly, Bannigan et al. (2025) concluded that student well-being should be integral to strategies for improving higher education, with appropriate services and structures. It demonstrates that counselling centre leaders should go beyond individual counselling services and impact the entire university educational system. Great leadership can be seen in the ability to build institutional relationships, encourage referrals, engage with academic partners, consult the faculty, and impact change through research.

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Confronting Service Realities And Help-Seeking Barriers

A significant contribution of the proposed framework lies in the fact that it incorporates organisational honesty and service awareness into consideration. This component is highly related to Collins' "Confront the Brutal Facts" principle, which implies that universities' counselling centres should honestly assess their service strengths and weaknesses in terms of waitlists, understaffing, student stigma, awareness, lack of referrals, crisis management, and diversity-related issues. The research by Osborn et al. (2022) revealed that "university students' use of mental health services varied by type of service and country, and the findings do not support the assumption that access to care is universal across all students in all high-income countries". Such evidence demonstrates that it is not enough to provide students with the necessary services; rather, it is essential to ensure that they are aware of and able to use the existing resources.

The article by Pheng et al. (2019) provides similar insights about the prevalence of stigma and attitudes towards counselling services among Malaysian students. It demonstrates that this population's demand for services is influenced by their perceptions of mental health problems and counselling services. This information has been supported by an article by Muda et al. (2025), which shows that Malaysian students tend to refrain from seeking professional help when such a decision is hindered by stigma. Therefore, universities must address the issue of barriers to counselling services honestly and openly. Otherwise, an organisation might mistakenly consider its services to be in demand and accessible when, in fact, there is a certain level of preventable difficulty with engagement.

Strategic Clarity And The Counselling Centre's Core Contribution

The Hedgehog Concept provides a useful framework, highlighting the need for strategic service clarity. As such, the first area to consider in the offered framework is strategic service clarity, which concerns 'what the counselling centre does best, what students need most, and what will keep the door open' (Bannigan et al., 2025). This consideration is of paramount importance, primarily because university counselling centres are often expected to address a wide range of student needs, from emotional problems to relational difficulties, academic concerns, adjustment issues, crises, and referrals. The absence of strategic clarity may undermine the counselling centre's capacity, render it overextended, and compromise its identity within the broader university community.

To be clear, strategic clarity should not be conflated with the counsellors' scope of practice limitations. Instead, strategic clarity should be used to offset the counsellors' unique role within the larger context of student support services. In essence, university counselling centres are not hospitals, psychiatric institutions, or welfare departments. As such, their strategic service role should be based on the notion of ethical counselling, early intervention, psychoeducation, developmental guidance, appropriate referrals, and consultation in the context of post-secondary education (Bannigan et al., 2025).

The concept of the whole-university approach fits within this strategic service role, given that it recognizes institutional mental health and well-being responsibilities while also avoiding the dangers of professionalization and depersonalization (Foster, 2026). The whole-university philosophy holds that every relevant unit within a university must take ownership of its role and responsibility in contributing to positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes for students

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and staff. In other words, it rejects the notion of counsellors as the only mental health support resource within a university.

Disciplined Professional Culture And Service Quality

A proposed framework for counselling centre quality management requires a disciplinary culture to be established to sustain it. By discipline is meant a commitment to general professional standards of the service system within which counselling takes place. This includes ethical principles, record keeping, appropriate supervision and consultation, clear referral practices, systematic case review, confidentiality procedures, crisis intervention, professional development, and evaluation of services in terms of established evidence. This is to be contrasted with the notion that counselling services should be a loose collection of individual practitioners answering only to their professional judgment and personal responsibility.

Collins et al. (2025) found that routine outcome measurements are of value in assessing therapeutic effectiveness, yet these were not widely adopted in the surveyed university counselling services. Their systematic review and meta-analysis also indicated that offering a variety of therapeutic approaches was more effective than relying on single methodologies. These findings confirm the importance of adopting a disciplined approach to service management while at the same time retaining professional flexibility. The counselling centre needs to ensure that a common standard is delivered against appropriate professional benchmarks, while retaining the professional flexibility necessary to address the diverse needs of its student clients. A disciplinary professional culture will help such centres to meet their aims by providing an ethical framework within which counsellors can operate, while ensuring that appropriate standards of record-keeping and supervision are in place and that the service has appropriate procedures for evaluating its own effectiveness.

Technology As An Accelerator Rather Than A Replacement

Technology-driven service systems are incorporated into the framework as an enabler of counselling centre excellence. Digital appointment systems, online psycho-education, mental health screening, feedback tools, outcome monitoring, service dashboards, and hybrid counselling arrangements may enhance access and service planning. However, technology should not be prioritized as the enabler of counselling excellence. In accordance with Good to Great principles, technology becomes valuable when it drives a clear service mission, enhances student access, and supports student-related decision-making without compromising the human-centric nature of counselling.

Recent research highlights the rising interest in digital mental health technologies for university students. Digital technologies may assist universities in engaging students who are hesitant to attend face-to-face appointments, seek early self-serve interventions, and require more flexible access to services. However, human judgment is crucial to risk assessment, counselling interventions, ethical decision-making, and referral management. Gholami et al. (2025) advocated for a human-centric approach to student mental health technologies, arguing that digital technologies should be designed around student-related factors rather than focus on technology availability. For university counselling centres, this implies that technology should drive increased access, outcome monitoring, and communication, with counsellors remaining the focus of the treatment.

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The Flywheel Effect And Sustainable Counselling Centre Excellence

The Flywheel Effect is the process through which the counselling centre's excellence may be introduced. It is not necessarily the case that a counsellor, a particular program, or a whole new counselling policy, when implemented, will lead to excellence. Greatness might accrue through a series of small steps and incremental improvement in multiple areas. These include service access, student awareness, referrals, supervision, documentation, psychoeducation, collaboration, feedback use, and service outcome evaluation. All contribute to making the counselling centre more attractive to students by building their trust in the service. The flywheel effect is a gradual process that must be promoted within an organisation to yield results.

It is especially relevant in the context of universities that wish to promote and develop their counselling centres but have limited resources. Organisational greatness can be acquired by making the existing processes slightly easier, faster, fairer, or more consistent. There is a need to start with a few simple changes and flywheel principles. For instance, reducing appointment waiting time, enhancing confidentiality awareness, providing treatment information to teachers and students, offering feedback, increasing psychoeducational programming, building peer helpers, and expanding referral connections. The flywheel approach to organisational development views these processes as part of a continuing cycle.

Implications Of The Study

Theoretical Implications

The study makes a significant contribution to counselling and psychology literature by attempting to shift the focus from counsellor competencies to organisational greatness. Indeed, the majority of scholarly works and industry notes concentrate on counselling-related characteristics, such as counsellor qualifications, ethical concerns, supervision, and therapeutic outcomes. However, the article claims that centre-level excellence requires active leadership, effective systems, focused service culture, strategic thinking, technology integration, and other factors. Overall, the paper provides a novel viewpoint on counselling centres' effectiveness, which may be used for further research and improvement.

Furthermore, the study also contributes to organisational psychology literature by adapting the principles of Good-to-Great to a specific setting and, thus, providing fresh insight into the field. According to the article, centres' excellence outcomes can be associated with Good-to-Great concepts of Level 5 Leadership, Hedgehog Concept, Culture of Discipline, Technology Accelerators, and Flywheel Effect. Therefore, the work integrates counselling centres' peculiarities into a broader understanding of organisational effectiveness, offering a new framework for analysis. Besides, while Collins' research predominantly focuses on corporate performance, his theories can also be applied to different spheres, including non-profit organisations and counselling centres.

Practical Implications For University Counselling Centres

For counselling centre practice, the framework recommends initiating improvements through a thorough examination of people and systems. It is recommended that counselling centres focus on recruitment, training, and supervision, as well as ethical practice, improved appointment systems, better management of referrals and visibility of services, and

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documentation and feedback systems. This will ensure that counsellors' competence translates into uniform service delivery.

The framework will also encourage counselling centres to perform honest service audits to determine the number of clients they serve, assess the appropriateness of waiting periods, ascertain the level of satisfaction among students, evaluate repeated visits and reasons, referrals and their sources, crisis interventions and students' responses to them, calculate absences, and measure psychoeducational outreach and barriers to service use. The framework can also assist counselling centres in ceasing speculation and developing evidence-based service improvement strategies.

Leadership Implications

For Counselling Centre leaders, this study emphasizes the need for humble, ethical, and determined leadership. Leaders must not only be focused on managing the day-to-day but should also invest in cultivating professional centre culture, advocating for the centre's needs, ensuring counsellor well-being and supervision, maintaining confidentiality, and communicating the centre's value to the university administration.

Level 5 counselling leadership means fostering the necessary organizational conditions for the centre to thrive beyond the leadership capabilities of a single individual or a small group of motivated counsellors. Ideally, the procedures, values, partnerships, and systems should be strong enough to maintain the quality of services without the direct involvement of the centre's leaders in every aspect of their operations.

Policy Implications For Higher Education Institutions

In the recommendations to university administrators, the researcher suggests that they consider counselling centres as strategic units for supporting students' needs, not as auxiliary services. Policies should foster staffing practices, supervisory methods, crisis management approaches, confidentiality procedures, planning strategies based on aggregated data, and interdisciplinary collaboration for referrals.

The holistic approach to student wellness encompasses various areas within a campus community. As such, universities need to develop policies that encourage cross-disciplinary cooperation among faculty members, student affairs professionals, residence life staff, disability service providers, health service educators, security personnel, and external agencies. These institutional entities need to design operational guidelines and standards of confidentiality while establishing referral practices and crisis management policies.

Implications For Counsellor Education And Supervision

The framework is proposing that in addition to counselling theories and practices, counsellor education should include organizational awareness. It entails understanding the service system, collaboration, documentation, crisis referral, ethical governance, and evidence-based practice. Moreover, supervision should also involve reflections on professional identity, service and quality of service, ethical issues, balancing professional and academic workloads, and managing referrals. In addition, it should also focus on the counsellor's role in the university

organizational system to enhance their contribution to organizational effectiveness in addition to providing personal counselling services.

Research Implications

Future research may validate the proposed framework through empirical studies. Qualitative studies can explore how counselling centre leaders, counsellors, and students understand organisational greatness. Delphi studies can be used to obtain expert consensus on the framework components. Quantitative studies can test relationships among leadership, service culture, counsellor competence, technology use, institutional integration, and perceived counselling centre effectiveness.

Mixed-method studies may be especially useful because they can examine both measurable service indicators and lived experiences. Future research may also compare public and private universities, Malaysian and international counselling centres, or conventional and open-distance learning universities. Such studies can refine the framework and identify which organisational drivers are most influential in different higher education contexts.

Conclusions

This conceptual study concluded that it is critical to invest in processes beyond individual counsellor competencies to actualize the notion of counselling centres' excellence. Using the *Good to Great* principles, the author proposed developing organisational greatness through cultivating Level 5 counselling leadership, service clarity, disciplined professional culture, honest service evaluation, systems thinking, institutional integration, and continuous service improvement strategies. The proposed framework theorized that counsellor competencies should be considered as the independent variable while organisational drivers are dependent variables. The variables are linked by the fact that organisations need to invest in counsellors' expertise to achieve excellent and trustworthy services. This conclusion added value to counselling, psychology, and higher education literature by providing a new theoretical model for understanding how universities' counselling centres can become great and contribute to students' mental health and wellbeing.

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