

## A SURVEY OF THE CURRENT AND DESIRED STATUS OF THE MANAGERIAL SKILLS OF UNIVERSITY MANAGERS\*

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### Summary

The study reported in this article aimed to examine 28 managerial skills proposed in the conceptual model of O\*NET. Specifically, the study tried to investigate whether there is any statistically significant relationship between the current and desired status of managerial skills in the Iranian capital's (Tehran) universities. Two questionnaires were administered to 146 university managers in Tehran. First application pertained to the desired status of managerial skills, and the other related to the current status of the managerial skills. The results of the analyses revealed that the difference (gap) between the desired and the current status is statistically significant.

**Key words:** Managerial Skills, O\*NET, University Management

### INTRODUCTION

University managers of different levels need to be skilled in various areas. Enhancing such skills could directly help realize the main objectives of higher educa-

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tion systems. Such objectives include increasing the degree of educational efficacy, achieving success in conducting scientific research and increasing motivation for better performance in managerial services.

The issue of managerial skills was first brought up by Robert Katz (1955). He categorized the requisite skills for managers to: (a) technical skills; (b) human skills; and (c) conceptual skills. Following Katz's categorization, other scholars have addressed this issue and have added new sets of skills to the aforementioned tripartite categorization. Given that all of the disciplines pursued in universities are, by their very nature, dynamic rather than static, formative assessment (and still better dynamic assessment) of the above-mentioned managerial skills as well as the reappraisal of the assessment criteria are of paramount importance in any higher education system.

Examination of the current management patterns and model used in the Iranian higher education system reveals that determining the required skills for the university managers rarely has taken place. Also, there is no elaborate and agreed-upon model for performing needs analysis or for appraising the managerial skills in the Iranian universities. The study reported in this article aimed to underscore the importance of assessing managerial skills in the universities and to make mention of some of the thorny issues which might be considered as serious challenges for the Iranian higher education system. Also, the study attempted to assess some of the most important managerial skills in a sample of Iranian university managers in Tehran. These assessments were anchored in the O\*NET model, which has been confirmed by the U.S department of Labor.

There are different definitions for the concept of skill. For example, Alaghe-Band (2011) identifies skill as an individual's ability to fulfill his/her potentials and responsibilities and believes that it is possible to foster such skill in different individuals. Ghafarian (2000) conceives of "skill" as the ability to implement science in practice and its development leads to performance quality improvement. A defining characteristic of being skilled is to be able to take appropriate and proportionate action on the basis of one's knowledge and experience when necessary. It is important to point out that skill is something which is observable in practice.

Donaldson (1991) has listed a number of characteristics and features which could enhance the quality of management in a university:

1. Understanding the specific aims of a group or institute.
2. Interpreting and transforming the goals to everyday work.
3. Guidance and inducing motivation and relating to the staff.

Donaldson also suggests that the following features are key to successful management in a university:

1. Self-confidence as a basis for consultation and making decisions adamantly.
2. Appreciating variety.
3. Enjoying contacts with students, faculty members and university professors.

In addition, the results of interviews with 20 top university managers in the world have yielded the following characteristics:

1. Being creative and ready to make change if necessary.
2. Transforming the department and the faculty to important powers.
3. Knowing how and when to compromise and how to adjust to adversaries.
4. Focusing on the students.
5. Questioning and challenging the traditional methods of teaching.
6. Performing things in different ways.
7. Letting people feel free to have their say and putting forth new ideas.
8. Being ready to change the managerial strategies if necessary.
9. Being a model for his/her coworkers.
10. Knowing where people have come from.
11. Receiving feedback.
12. Knowing the limits of what he/she can achieve.
13. Being open and flexible.
14. Being good at attracting resources and funds.
15. Being skilled at management and programming.
16. Being determined but not inflexible.
17. Being able to motivate people.
18. Being able to learn from his/her mistakes.
19. Helping his/her staff to learn and succeed.
20. Appreciating people's achievements (Ramsden, 2001).

#### O\*NET MODEL

The Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) is being developed under the sponsorship of the US Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration (USDOL/ETA) through a grant to the North Carolina Employment Security Commission. The O\*NET program is the nation's (US) primary source of occupational information. Central to the project is the O\*NET database, containing information on hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors. The skills used in this research are the ones included in the O\*NET model. Within this model, the following features could apply to university managers:

1. Active Listening – Paying full attention to what other people are saying, taking the time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
2. Critical Thinking – Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
3. Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.

4. Speaking – Talking to others to convey information effectively.
5. Judgment and Decision Making – Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one.
6. Monitoring – Monitoring/Assessing performance of oneself, other individuals or organizations to make improvements or take corrective action.
7. Writing – Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
8. Complex Problem Solving – Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions.
9. Coordination – Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.
10. Instructing – Teaching others how to do something.
11. Social Perceptiveness – Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.
12. Time Management – Managing one's own time and the time of others.
13. Active Learning – Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem-solving and decision-making.
14. Management of Personnel Resources – Motivating, developing, and directing people as they work, identifying the best people for the job.
15. Service Orientation – Actively looking for ways to help people.
16. Negotiation – Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences.
17. Learning Strategies – Selecting and using training/instructional methods and procedures appropriate for the situation when learning or teaching new things.
18. Persuasion – Persuading others to change their minds or behavior.
19. Systems Analysis – Determining how a system should work and how changes in conditions, operations and the environment will affect outcomes.
20. Systems Evaluation – Identifying measures or indicators of system performance and the actions needed to improve or correct performance, relative to the goals of the system.
21. Management of Financial Resources – Determining how money will be spent to get the work done and accounting for these expenditures.
22. Management of Material Resources – Obtaining and seeing to the appropriate use of equipment, facilities and materials needed to do certain work.
23. Mathematics – Using mathematics to solve problems.
24. Operation Monitoring – Watching gauges, dials or other indicators to make sure a machine is working properly.
25. Technology Design – Generating or adapting equipment and technology to serve user needs.
26. Programming – Writing computer programs for various purposes.
27. Science – Using scientific rules and methods to solve problems.

28. Operations Analysis – Analyzing needs and product requirements to create a design. (onetonline)

#### Previous studies and remaining issues

In this section some of the recent studies conducted in Iran will be reviewed. BoostanKar (2010), in a research under the rubric of analysing the relationship among triple skills of research manager and job satisfaction of scientific board members/experts research at Shahid Beheshti University supported that there is a positive and significant relationship among triple skills (technical, conceptual and human) of research managers and job satisfaction of scientific board members/experts. Ramazani (2006) investigated the managerial competencies of the managers of the universities in Tehran. She found that the level of managers' skill in terms of communication, planning and management, group-work ability, self-management, and international awareness and the ability to take strategic measures is higher than the population's average. Rafiee (2005) investigated the extent of female managers' managerial skills and explored its relationship with their functioning from the perspective of the faculty members in universities located in Tehran. She found that there was a significant relationship between female managers' tripartite skills and their functioning. Karimi (2005) supported the significant and positive relationship between technical and conceptual skills of group managers with qualitative enhancement of education in a research under the rubric of investigating the relationship between triple skills of managers in educational groups with qualitative enhancement of education in Tarbiat Moallem University of Tehran. AsefZadeh (2004) performing a research under the rubric of "Assessing the managerial skills of research managers in medical sciences universities" to determine educational goals, found that about 60% of managers evaluated their managerial skills as high and 40% as medium or less.

While managerial skills are necessary for performing management tasks, research managers and vice presidents haven't passed or don't pass a certain training for their job tenure. Considering these findings and the theoretical issues discussed above, it may be logical to claim that investigating managerial skill in the Iranian context could help create a better higher educational system. Therefore, the study reported in this article aimed to address the following research question: is there a statistically significant difference between the current and desired status of managerial skills in the Tehran universities? In fact the main objective of this study was twofold: to enhance the level of managerial skills of university managers and to investigate the current and desired status of managerial skills of university managers.

#### METHODOLOGY

Essentially this study could be considered as an applied research. The sample under study included all of the universities in Tehran including state-run and Azad

(private sector) and their managers. For the purpose of this study convenient sampling was utilized and two questionnaires developed by the researcher were used. The questionnaires were administered both in paper form and online via email. The questionnaire which addressed the current status included 56 items and the second questionnaire which aimed to examine the desired status had 28 items. In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaires the following measures were taken:

1. Expert judgments: the questionnaires were given to the university professors (5 university professors of related fields, 7 faculty members of the faculty of educational sciences and psychology at the University of Shahid Beheshti in Tehran) who were asked to comment on the questionnaires. The questionnaires were then revised according to their comments and suggestions.
2. Piloting: The questionnaires were piloted on a sample which had the same characteristics as those who were about to participate in the main study.

Two questionnaires were administered to 146 university managers in Tehran.

## RESULTS

As the results of the analyses displayed in Table 1. indicate, in all skills (except for financial resource management, technical design, material management, active listening and speaking) there is no statistically significant gap between the current and desired status. However, there is a significant difference between the desired and current status of the above mentioned exceptions ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Therefore, as the results of this study reveal, the current state of the universities in terms of these skills is acceptable. On the other hand, as for the other skills shown in the Table 1., the current status of the universities is not desirable. In other words, in terms of the variables of management of personnel resources and instructing the status is quite balanced and acceptable while the current status is not acceptable for the remaining variables.

*Table 1.* Paired Sample T-tests for current and desired managerial skills

Variables	Mean		Gap	t value	Significance
	current	desired			
1 Time Management	3.53	3.78	-0.25	-3.17	0.002
2 Management of Personnel Resources	3.66	2.99	0.67	7.90	0.000
3 Management of Financial Resources	3.39	3.30	0.086	1.01	0.314
4 Management of Material Resources	3.27	3.33	-0.06	-0.87	0.387
5 Judgment and Decision Making	3.44	3.77	-0.34	-4.78	0.000
6 Systems Analysis	3.19	3.62	-0.42	-6.11	0.000
7 Systems Evaluation	3.15	3.59	-0.43	-6.10	0.000
8 Operation Monitoring	3.18	3.37	-0.19	-2.48	0.014

Variables	Mean		Gap	t value	Significance
	current	desired			
9 Technology Design	3.07	3.14	-0.07	-0.82	0.412
10 Programming	2.45	3.21	-0.77	-8.16	0.000
11 Operations Analysis	3.08	3.87	-0.79	-9.29	0.000
12 Complex Problem Solving	3.21	3.98	-0.78	-11.82	0.000
13 Social Perceptiveness	3.41	3.62	-0.26	-3.26	0.001
14 Coordination	3.29	3.57	-0.28	-4.05	0.000
15 Persuasion	2.97	3.44	-0.47	-6.35	0.000
16 Negotiation	3.27	3.92	-0.70	-10.95	0.000
17 Instructing	3.38	3.15	0.22	2.87	0.005
18 Service Orientation	3.55	3.77	-0.23	-4.16	0.000
19 Critical Thinking	3.42	3.62	-0.19	-2.52	0.013
20 Active Learning	3.25	3.55	-0.30	-4.36	0.000
21 Learning Strategies	3.17	3.79	-0.62	-9.15	0.000
22 Monitoring	3.28	3.43	-0.15	-2.10	0.038
23 Reading Comprehension	3.25	3.93	-0.68	-8.19	0.000
24 Active Listening	3.52	3.51	0.01	0.09	0.929
25 Writing	3.14	3.93	-0.80	-9.06	0.000
26 Speaking	3.39	3.52	-0.13	-1.96	0.052
27 Mathematics	2.40	3.29	-0.89	-10.67	0.000
28 Science	3.02	3.59	-0.57	-7.56	0.000

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research sample a significant difference is statistically observed between current and desired status in all skills except material and financial resources management, technical design, active listening and speaking. Managers emphasized least for human resources management and emphasized most for the skill of complex problem solving. They evaluated the skill of human resources management as better than other skills, and they also evaluated mathematics skill as weakest. Among these, the highest difference between current and desired status can be attributed to mathematics skill, and the lowest to monitoring skills.

It is suggested that required courses should be designed and held in order to improve the quality of higher education managers and to remove or reduce the difference between current and desired status. In addition, a system should be designed for the recognition of potential managers and the promotion of their managerial power through identifying educational needs. While the majority of college managers are appointed from the members of faculty and they do not necessarily have managerial skills for administrating the college, it is necessary to hold some courses

appropriate to their managerial tasks before starting work in the management position. It is clear that systematic annual evaluation of managers' performance is also a means for improving the current status.

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## PREGLED AKTUALNOG I ŽELJENOG STATUSA MENADŽERSKIH VJEŠTINA SVEUČILIŠNIH MENADŽERA

### Sažetak

U radu je prikazano istraživanje čiji je cilj bio ispitati 28 menadžerskih vještina po konceptualnom modelu O\*NET-a. Istraživanjem se pokušao otkriti statistički zna-

čajan odnos između aktualnog i željenog statusa menadžerskih vještina na iranskim sveučilištima u Teheranu. Dva su upitnika primijenjena na 146 sveučilišnih menadžera u Iranu. Prva primjena odnosila se na željeni status menadžerskih vještina, a druga na njihov aktualni status. Rezultati analize pokazali su da je razlika između željenog i aktualnog statusa statistički značajna.

**Ključne riječi:** menadžerske vještine, O\*NET, sveučilišni menadžment

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