



Managerial skills needed for academic library managers: The case of Iran

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Abstract This survey investigates the extent to which Iranian academic library managers need managerial skills and the influence of their level of seniority on this need. The results revealed that, in general, managers' need for managerial skills is high especially "people related skills" over "analytical and self-related skills" and "task related skills". Analysis of the mean scores of skills across three levels of managers shows that the middle level managers' need for managerial skills is higher than top managers and supervisors. Overall, most respondents ranked "creating organizational climate" as the skill most needed while few said they needed development for "counseling subordinates."

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Introduction

Like many other organizations, libraries are committed to achieving their objectives and academic library managers play a key role in this process, and, they need certain qualities necessary the effective performance of their roles. Challenges like the constant changes in technology and environment, the sinking budget and the shortage of human resources obviate the importance of effective performance of academic library managers. One of the factors contributing to their effectiveness is developing their managerial skills. Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence points to the fact that in many cases there are no clear criteria for selecting academic library managers in Iran nor

is there any official skill-based program to help them develop such skills. Identifying the managerial skills necessary for the effective performance of Iranian academic library managers and measuring the extent to which they need these skills are the primary purposes of the present study. Moreover, the relationship between the position of seniority and the need for certain types of managerial skills was examined. Examining the theoretical background, and based on the data analysis, several implications and suggestions are made and relevant conclusions will be reached.

Theoretical background

It is a manager's leadership and management effectiveness that bring a significant impact to library achievement (Mugyabuso & Matovelo, 2000). According to Stewart, "All effective managers have a range of skills which are necessary because of the positions they find themselves in" (Stewart, 1981) and there is a direct relationship between

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the level of skills and the effectiveness of managers (Al-Madhoun & Analoui, 2002). Skills are necessary for effectively carrying out managerial functions that are in turn necessary for the effective and efficient functionality of the organizations (Peterson & Van Fleet, 2004).

Attempts have been made by several researchers to define and categorize managerial skills. Katz is one of the frontrunners, and his article, *Skills of an Effective Administrator*, has been influential in works addressing managerial skills. He defines skills as "an ability which can be developed, not necessarily inborn, and which is manifested in performance, not merely in potential" (Katz, 1974, p. 91). So, the principal criterion for skillfulness must be effective action under varying conditions. He identifies three clusters of managerial skills namely technical skills, human skills and conceptual skills. Technical skills imply an understanding of and proficiency in a specific kind of activity, particularly one involving methods, processes, procedures and techniques. Technical skill involves specialized knowledge and an analytical ability within that specialty and facility in the use of the tools and techniques of the specific discipline. Human skill is the ability to work effectively as a group member and to build a cooperative team. It also incorporates the way individuals perceive their subordinates and superiors and behave subsequently. While technical skill is primarily concerned with working with "things", human skill is concerned with working with "people". The third category, conceptual skills, involves the ability to see the organization as a whole, recognizing how its various functions depend on one another, and how changes in any one part affect all the others. It is also an ability to visualize the relationship of the organization to its external environment. Katz believes that there is a relationship between the level of seniority of managers and their need for each category of skills. That is, at lower levels of seniority, the principal need is for technical and human skill. At higher levels, technical skill becomes relatively less important while the need for conceptual skill increases rapidly. At the top level of an organization, conceptual skill becomes the most important skill of all for successful administration (Katz, 1955).

Another influential person in the field of managerial skills is Analoui. He has done many studies to identify the needed managerial skills of managers in different organizations, especially in developing countries (Al-Madhoun & Analoui, 2002; Analoui, 1995, 1997; Analoui & Hosseini, 2001; Labbaf, Analoui, & Cusworth, 1996). Based on his findings, Analoui identifies a missing link in Katz's three skill approach, that is, self management. According to Davis, this skill is perhaps the most overlooked area of management (Al-Madhoun & Analoui, 2002), and it is crucial to organizational success (Trinka, 2005). Analoui then labeled the three categories of skills as "analytic and self-related skills", "people related skills" and "task related skills". Analytic and task related skills include personal or self-related skill such as clear and creative thinking, continuous improvement, crisis management, problem solving and decision making. In his article, Harrison regards decision making as the most significant activity engaged in by managers in all types of organization and at any level (Harrison, 1996).

The second category of skills, "people related skills" is essential to managing people at work and includes skills such

as communication, the ability to lead, delegate, develop subordinates, coordinating and conflict management (Al-Madhoun & Analoui, 2002; Labbaf et al., 1996). Homer believes that people skills are fundamental for organizations because they impact every aspect of them and lead to profit (Homer, 2001). In addition, delegation, empowerment and good relationships between managers and subordinates are some of the most important aspects of management that influence productivity (Mugyabuso & Matovelo, 2000). Finally, task related skills include the development of one's own potential and the ability to manage the task in hand effectively by determining objectives, forecasting, planning and organizing the task involved. These may include a range of managerial skills and knowledge which are specific to the task performed by managers (Al-Madhoun & Analoui, 2002; Labbaf et al., 1996). In libraries, expertise in task related skills is of paramount importance because they result in client and employee satisfaction (Ivy, 1987). Another reason for the importance of technical skills for academic library managers is that proficiency in these skills allows the managers to train, direct and evaluate subordinates performing specialized tasks (Peterson & Van Fleet, 2004).

Library and information education in Iran mostly emphasizes technical skills while other managerial skills are overlooked and many librarians are promoted as managers mainly because of their proficiency in technical skills rather than other skills. Since people will not perform tasks or they do not perform them effectively (Peterson & Van Fleet, 2004), it is possible that at least some academic library managers avoid some managerial aspects of their jobs. This means that managers need to acquire a combination of skills to be effective. Another reason for this is that managerial skills frequently overlap, and it is hard to demarcate three categories of skill (McKenna, 2004). Therefore, managers need to use a combination of skills to be effective. The importance and the extent to which managers need each skill vary according to the level of seniority. It is mainly because managerial roles at every level of management differ significantly from each other (Basi, 1998).

Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical background of the study, a general hypothesis was made as follows:

At higher levels of seniority, managers' need for analytic and self-related skills and people related skills is higher than that of task related skills. In other words, managers at lower levels of the managerial hierarchy need task related skills more than the two other categories of skills.

Method

Sample

The present study targeted academic library managers from 110 governmental university central libraries in Iran, out of which 61 universities were related to The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 39 universities were related to The Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education and 10 universities were related to other ministries such as The

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