Full paper

Important Human Resource Competence for HR Managers in Iranian Top Ranked Universities

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Abstract

Nowadays, the role of Human Resource (HR) managers in educational centers is very vital.[1] Undoubtedly, to achieve organizational goals, educational institutes such as colleges and universities are required to have well-structured strategic programs as well as qualified HR managers who are able to lead their departments in compliance with their university mission.[2] To achieve this goal, HR administrators and professionals should use a suitable and developed pattern of human resource competencies.[3] The following article, offers to investigate the important competencies for the HR administrators and professionals in the top ranked universities. Mixed method approach of both quantitative and qualitative was used. The HR competencies were identified by experts involved in an interview and Delphi study. Twenty seven competencies were identified for the HR managers and professionals in five groups of competencies.

Keywords: Human resource; competency; Iranian universities

■1.0 INTRODUCTION

The main task of HR managers is to help the organization in achieving organizational goals. HR managers are basically responsible to help organizations with performing strategic missions of organization and evaluation performance that provide managers' information about human resources needs, organizational culture and necessary activities so that they can work efficiently.[4] In a smaller scope or scale a plenty of employers work in universities as considered organizations. These people and reach the organization's goals. At a micro perspective, universities need employees who have the abilities to facilitate the organizational mission. As such, an attempt to employ efficient staff is one of the most important tasks of human resource departments of universities. According to Salim, a university must be staffed with high calibre academics to maintain a high standard of teaching and research. Universities around the world are highly heterogeneous in terms of organization and governance, including the status and conditions of recruitment and employment of academic staff. The human resource of universities is also characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity of experts and specialists to run the academic programs. Managing the academic human resources is therefore, a very challenging task.[5] Thus, the most significant task of human resource departments of universities is to employ efficient and competent staff. Based on the importance of HR managers' roles in organizations, identifying important competencies to perform jobs in HR

departments is the most important success key. In some literatures, competencies have been defined as the skills, knowledge, abilities, motivation, and other requirements, which are needed in order to perform the job successfully.[6] Identifying important HR competencies in Iranian top ranked universities can guide to achieve the organizational goals and improve the level of HR competencies.

1.1 Current Issues

In universities like other organizations, these questions have always been asked: Once competent, does this imply there is no further need for training or development? Which competencies should be rewarded and through which means? Which competent people are appropriate to be hired for work? According to Middlewood and Lumby, the success of educational organizations such as schools, colleges and universities depend on the quality, performance and commitment of employees who work there.[2] Administrators and Managers in universities always face the problem in order to promote current employees or hire new staffs regarding their competencies. At first, they must know what competencies are important for obtaining job and excellent performance. In other words, they should know what skills and competencies are needed for an employee to perform a job effectively.

■2.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this research was: identifying the important competencies of HR managers and professionals in Iranian top ranked universities in order to achieve organizational goals successfully. Based on this objective this study addressed this research question:

RQ1: What HR competencies are necessary for the HR administrators and professionals of top ranked universities to achieve organizational goals?

■3.0 METHODOLOGY

The purposes of this study were to identify the important competencies for the HR managers and professionals in Iranian top ranked universities. This research has been done in two phases. At the first step, the important competencies of universities' HR managers and professionals were identified base on the interview. At the second step, the Delphi study was used to prioritize the competencies which are required for HR managers and professionals in Iranian top ranked universities.

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3.1 Delphi Method

Delphi is a technique employed in order to perform a systematic judgment and making decision about a particular topic. A group of expert people called Delphi panels participate in it. They should have enough knowledge and experience about the subject. Furthermore, they must be willing and have enough time to participate in the research.[7] Participants of present research included twenty people who are HR managers and also have more than eight-years job experience in HR affairs. All the experts were professors or associate professors in HR subjects and related issues in Iranian top ranked universities. Based on the HR competencies identified in the interview the Delphi questionnaire for the first round was developed. In this round panels were asked to rate the importance of each competency, using a 7-point scale: from 1 rated as least important to 7 meanings very important. The data gathered from first round were analyzed through statistical methods.

3.2 Defining Consensus

One of the most critical stages in Delphi study is defining consensus.[8] Some researchers have used standard division (SD) to assess the consensus.[9] Stronger consensus is shown with smaller SD, and scores will cluster more closely around the mean.[10] A commonly used method to determine consensus is Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) which is measured after finishing of each round of Delphi to evaluate the level of consensus among the Delphi panelists. A significant W (close to 1) and a low P-value (less than 0.05) implies the panelists are in consensus and used the same standards in determining the importance of factors.[11]

■4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Regarding the data which were gathered in interviews, 27 competencies were presented by the interviewees in five groups of competencies. Although all 27 competencies are important for the HR managers and professionals of Iranian top- ranked universities; the degrees of their importance are different. Some of them are more important than others. This means that to measure a person's competency level, the degree of competencies' importance must be considered. In this study, the level of competencies' importance was determined based on Delphi study methods. The competencies which were found in interview stage were used to conduct Delphi study. A questionnaire was developed based on results of interviews. Experts were asked to rate the importance of each competency, using a 7-point scale: from 1 which is rated as least important to 7, which is rated as very important. The data gathered from round one were analysed through statistical methods, and second round questionnaire was prepared based on the summarized results. In order to measure the level of consensus among the experts for the factors proposed, the Kendall's coefficient of Concordance (W) was measured based on the completion for first and second rounds of the Delphi study. In the first round, the Kendall's coefficient of Concordance and p-value for scored ranking was 0.318 and 0.00 (P-Value <=0) respectively (refer Table 1). Although the Kendall's coefficient in first round was significant, second round of Delphi was performed to achieve a stronger coefficient. In the second round, Kendall's Coefficient Concordance and p-value for scored ranking were measured 0.707 and 0.000 respectively (See Table 2). According to the value of Kendall's Coefficient Concordance (0.707) and the p value, the study was found to be statistically significant (p-value < 0.05) and consistent with an acceptable Kendall's Coefficient.

Table 1 Round 1 Delphi study results

Competencies	Experts																									Mean	Group Rank
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y		
Impact and Influence	3	7	6	3	6	6	4	6	7	5	6	6	5	7	6	6	6	6	5	5	7	7	6	7	7	5.80	23
Self management	5	5	5	3	5	6	5	5	6	4	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	5	6	5.48	22
building trust	5	5	5	4	5	5	3	5	5	4	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	7	5	5	5	5	5	6	5.00	21
Empowering and delegating	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	7	4	5	5	4	5	7	5	4	5	6	4	4.92	20
Team working and corporation	5	6	6	3	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	6	6	5	4	4	4	3	4.72	19
HR proficient knowledge	5	5	5	3	5	4	5	5	6	5	4	4	6	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	2	4.56	18
Change management	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	2	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	6	5	6	4	4	5	4	4.52	17
Conflict Management	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	3	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	7	5	4	5	5	5	4	4.52	16
Knowledge management	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	3	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	7	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.52	16
Negotiation	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	7	4	5	4	4	4	2	4.48	15
Sociability	5	5	3	2	5	3	5	5	4	4	4	5	6	5	4	5	4	4	6	4	5	5	4	5	4	4.44	14
Foresight	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	3	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	4.40	13
Confidence	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	6	4	5	4	5	5	4	4.40	13
Flexibility and adaptability	3	7	4	6	3	6	3	5	3	3	5	2	5	4	3	6	2	5	6	4	4	5	5	5	4	4.32	12
Strategic thinking	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	2	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	7	4	4	5	4	5	4	4.32	12
Oral expression ability	3	4	3	5	4	3	4	2	4	2	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	6	6	4	4	5	5	5	5	4.28	11
Judgment and decision making	4	4	3	2	4	4	5	5	4	2	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	5	7	4	4	5	5	5	4	4.24	10
Time management	6	2	2	3	3	5	3	4	6	3	4	3	5	6	4	2	4	3	7	5	4	4	5	6	6	4.20	9
Planning and organizing	6	3	5	4	3	5	2	6	3	3	4	3	5	3	6	3	2	3	7	6	5	5	4	5	3	4.16	8
Achievement orientation	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	7	4	4	4	4	5	4	4.16	8
Stress tolerance	2	3	5	3	5	4	4	5	5	3	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	6	4	4	5	4	4	2	4.04	7
Creativity and innovation	5	3	6	2	2	3	2	5	3	3	4	6	5	4	4	5	2	4	5	3	4	4	5	5	4	3.92	6
Computer Knowledge	3	3	6	3	3	4	6	3	7	1	3	4	2	4	3	4	3	4	7	3	4	3	4	4	3	3.76	5
Analysis of Complex systems	4	3	4	4	7	3	2	3	4	2	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	7	3	4	3	3	4	3	3.64	4
Risk taking	3	3	2	3	7	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	6	3	6	6	1	3	4	3.52	3
English Knowledge	2	3	2	2	1	3	2	5	2	4	2	4	5	6	3	1	2	2	6	3	5	5	1	2	1	2.96	2
General knowledge	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	4	2	3	3	3	2	7	3	2	5	1	3	1	2.92	1

Kendall's W = 0.318, p-value = 0.000

Table 2 Round 2 Delphi study results

Competencies	Experts																				Mean	Group Rank
	A	B	C	E	F	G	H	I	K	L	N	O	P	Q	R	T	U	V	X	Y		
Impact and Influence	7	7	6	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	6.80	21
Empowering and delegating	5	5	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	5.30	20
building trust	5	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	5.10	19
HR proficient knowledge	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.00	18
Team working and corporation	5	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	6	5	4	4	4	4.85	17
Planning and organizing	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.65	16
Willingness to change	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	6	4	5	4	4.60	15
Sociability	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	4.55	14
Conflict Management	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	4.50	13
Negotiation	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4.45	12
Knowledge management	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	4.40	11
Flexibility and adaptability	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	4.35	10
Foresight	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	4.35	10
Confidence	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	4.35	10
Judgment and decision making	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	4.35	10
Strategic thinking	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	4.35	10
Creativity and innovation	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4.25	9
Stress tolerance	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4.20	8
Self management	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	4	4.15	7
Time management	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4.10	6
Achievement orientation	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4.05	5
Oral expression ability	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.05	5
Computer Knowledge	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	3.80	4
Analysis of Complex systems	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	3.40	3
Risk Taking	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.00	2
English Knowledge	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.00	2
General knowledge	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2.95	1

Kendall's W = 0.707, p-value = 0.000

■5.0 DISCUSSION

Based on the data gathered from the interviews and Delphi study, 27 important competencies were identified in five HR competency groups including: "Individual competencies", "Communication and Social competencies", "Management and Leadership competencies", "Strategic Competencies", and "Complementary Competencies". Individual competencies group includes risk taking, Self-management, Stress tolerance, Creativity-innovation, Flexibility-adaptability and Willingness to change. Communication and social competencies group includes Oral expression ability, Negotiation, Conflict management, Sociability, Team working-corporation and finally building trust.

Management and leadership competencies group includes Judgment and decision making, Planning-organizing, HR proficient knowledge, Empowering-delegating and Impact-influence. Strategic competencies group includes analysis of complicated system, Strategic thinking, Time management, Foresight, Achievement orientation and Knowledge management. Finally, the last group of competencies is called Complementary competencies, which includes General knowledge, English language knowledge, and Computer and IT knowledge. Table 3 shows the competencies found in these five groups of competencies based on their rank.

Table 3 HR competencies in Iranian top rank university

Competencies						
Individual Competencies	Risk Taking	Self Management	Stress Tolerance	Creativity and Innovation	Self-Confidence	Flexibility and adaptability	Willingness to Change
Coefficient of importance	3.00	4.15	4.20	4.25	4.35	4.35	4.60
Communication and Social Competencies	Oral expression ability	Negotiation	Conflict management	Sociability	Team working and corporation	Building trust	*****
Coefficient of importance	4.05	4.45	4.50	4.55	4.85	5.10	
Management and Leadership Competencies	Judgment and decision making	Planning and organizing	HR proficient Knowledge	Empowering and delegating	Impact and influence	*****	*****
Coefficient of importance	4.35	4.65	5.00	5.30	6.80		
Strategic Competencies	Analyzing of Complicated systems	Achievement Orientation	Time Management	Foresight	Strategic Thinking	Knowledge Management	*****
Coefficient of importance	3.40	4.05	4.10	4.35	4.35	4.40	
Complimentary Competencies	General Knowledge	English language knowledge	Computer and IT Knowledge	*****	*****	*****	*****
Coefficient of importance	2.95	3.00	3.80				

Order of Importance ⟶ **The most important**
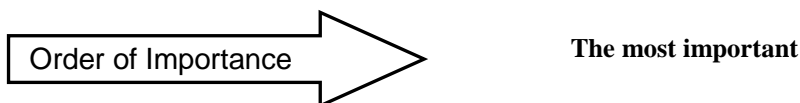
The coefficient of importance for each competency explains which competencies have to be stressed more in HR affairs. Job training programme can be organized for the HR managers and professional based on these emphasized competencies.[1] These competencies can help universities to prosper, thus, there should be more effective job training programmes to equip staff with relevant competencies. Recognizing HR managers and professionals' strengths and weaknesses can be clearer and more understandable under the consideration of these 27 competencies.

■6.0 CONCLUSION

Individual competencies include the skills, abilities and personal characteristics of a person that can create believable and convincing impression in job places. According to data gathered through the interviews done with HR experts, seven important competencies were recognized in this competency group for the universities' HR managers and professionals.[12] Willingness to change as well as Flexibility and adaptability were the most important competencies.

Another group of competencies which HR experts mentioned its competencies was Communication and social competencies group. Communication and social competencies are a relative and dynamic, interpersonal construct based on functionality of communication, adequacy of communication, and sufficiency of knowledge and judgment in interaction to make effective communications. [13]

Six important competencies of universities' HR managers and professionals were identified through interviews with HR experts. They include: Building trust, Team working and corporation, Sociability, Conflict management and finally Negotiation. Based on the results of the second round of Delphi; Building trust as well as team working and corporation were the most important of HR competencies in Iranian top-ranked universities.

Five specific competencies which HR experts in the top-ranked universities mentioned in the interview for the management and leadership competencies group were Impact and influence, Empowering and delegating, HR proficient

knowledge, Planning and organizing as well as Judgment and decision making. "Impact and influence" was the most important competency for the HR managers. Impact and influence help HR professionals to convince decision-makers to consider alternatives or change position of the HR affairs. They can be partnered with other managers to influence the organizations' direction.[14] Strategic competencies include ability and skills that integrate rationality with intuition in order to bring about faster strategic reactions and responses that are required if organizations are to survive these turbulent and complex periods.[15] Based on the result of interviews and two rounds of Delphi study, Knowledge management was determined as the most important strategic competency for the HR managers in Iranian top-ranked universities. In line with the development of technology and application of the modern technology in different departments of universities and also the elimination of the boundaries between universities in order to enhance cooperation; managers need to have some new competencies, which can empower the other competencies in order to achieve success in the most effective way. These new competencies are categorized as the Complementary competencies. Computer and IT knowledge, English language knowledge as well as General knowledge were three complimentary competencies which HR experts illustrated as the Complementary competencies. The most important competency in this groups was the "Computer and IT knowledge". Nowadays, due to the improved networks and IT systems in the organizational process, all the managers and staff should have enough skills and knowledge to work with IT systems and networks. IT systems support HR managers and professionals to perform their duties better and more effectively.

■7.0 RECOMMENDATION

Nowadays, in Iranian top-ranked universities, changes in administrative structures, especially in personnel affairs are vital in order to achieve more efficiency.[12] HR managers and professionals as the executers of these changes should feel the need to change on time. HR managers should act as the heart of changes and transformation. They must manage strategic changes in universities. Willingness to change helps them to perform effective changes.

HR managers in Iranian top-ranked universities should not be afraid of the risks. They must consider various aspects of changes and accept the responsibility without fear for changes. Stress affects employees negatively, thus drastically impede managers' impressive behaviors such as self-management, risk taking, solving problems, making effective decisions, etc..[6] University HR managers and professionals do not only have to control their stress but also must attempt to reduce the stress in other employees. HR managers and professionals always have good interaction with other employees. In top-ranked universities, it is important for the HR managers and professionals to make effective communication not only with other departments' employees but also among themselves. HR managers need to convey and receive messages. Information and ideas from individuals or groups can help them to

understand as well as permit them to give responses and feedback.[13] HR managers should understand the basic concepts of team development because teams in organization activities produce synergic effects, which are necessary to reach organizational goals.[12] One of the most important roles of HR managers and professionals in universities is connecting employees to employees and employees to information and knowledge to perform organizational duties along with creating competitive advantages. According to Sparrow and Hodgkinson [16] HR managers are expected to be able to use management knowledge to transfer tacit knowledge between individuals, collectives and systems. Strategic thinking was another competency mentioned by universities' HR experts.

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