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## Investigating the Managers' Competency of Sports and Youth Offices in Alborz

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### ABSTRACT

Competency of managers plays a critical role in the success of the organizations. The aim of this study was to investigate the competency of managers of Sports and Youth Offices in Alborz, Iran. 134 managers and staff of Sport and youth offices completed the researcher-developed questionnaire. Two questionnaires with 50 questions were used to get the research data, one questionnaire completed by managers and the other completed by staff. For validity, the questionnaires' content were approved by 10 sports management experts, and their reliability were confirmed by Cronbach's alpha, respectively, 0.83 for the manager's questionnaire and 0.90 for the staff questionnaire. Friedman, Kolmogorov-Smirnov, and t-test were conducted to test the research hypotheses. Result of the study shows that there is a significant difference between managers and Staff concerning communication skills, decision-making, encouragement, business communication, leadership, team development, and deployment of positive feature of the managers.

### Introduction

One of the most important tasks in every organization is the selection of the most appropriate and qualified people in different positions, because the way of choosing the right people is quite effective in the success of the organization (Abtahi, 2012). Meritocracy at all levels should be extensively applied and it should not be restricted just to the managers, and the important issue is that this

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meritocracy should be started from the top level. To fulfill the organizational goals, selection of the deserving and competent people should be performed at the top of the affairs. The competent manager is the one who has both the management and the ability of proper use of the experiences (Bazyari and Amirtash, 2006). Meritocracy means that people wholeheartedly feel that according to their experience, expertise, management history and their education, they have been assigned into their right and deserving position, as well as other members of the organization, have the judgment that these people are in their right place regarding the experience, skills and expertise they have. As a result of proper assignment of members to their positions, the performance of individuals will improve and their effectiveness and efficiency will significantly increase. According to Reiger and Boucher (1990), the complexity and diversity of the recreational sport environment dictates that academic and professional preparation approaches are rooted in the competency areas specific to the field (Reiger and Boucher, 1990). This growing demand for competent sport managers has led to the proliferation of sport management academic preparation programs in colleges and universities. Analysis of professional competence serves as the link between professional preparation outcomes and educational processes. The more those academics and those involved with professional development understand about the desired competencies of professionals in the field, the more they can be informed when designing educational processes most appropriate for achieving competence (Stark et al., 1986). Merit and the assessment of the competency required by managers are from the fields of study in sports management, and these competencies should be identified and reviewed in order to prepare individuals for managerial positions (Chen, 2004). The survey shows that the most governmental organizations did not have satisfactory performance due to non-compliance with the system of meritocracy in the selection and appointment of managers and employees (Kebriyae et al., 2006)). Establishment of competency system has been emphasized as one of the macro and strategic policies of the country in the 20-year vision document and the fourth law (Rahimnia and Hooshyar, 2012). Identifying the competency of public sector managers according to new requirements and expectations derived from the vision document is an issue that can be considered as the foundation of public sector management action (Faraji and Latifi, 2011). One of the areas of study in sport management is competency and the determination of competencies required by managers (Farzalipour et al. 2012). Competency is meaningful when we try to find out the cause of others' better performance (Liikamaa, 2015). Charkviani and Chelidz (2012) believe that meritocracy is a form of government in which posts and responsibilities are granted to people according to their skills and abilities. In meritocracy, the society rewards (through wealth, rank and social status) those who demonstrate their skills and competence through their experience and succeed in competition. Mohan & Gomathi (2014) believe that meritocracy not only makes people competitive, but it also encourages people to behave well. Simon (2010) argues that competency management systems help to develop competencies by supporting processes such as identification of needs, intervention planning and implementation, and evaluation. In his research on sport managers, Jamieson (1980) measured 12 theoretical areas (management techniques, programming, legality, governance, philosophical foundations, business procedures, communications skills, leadership skills, safety/accident prevention, sport science, facility maintenance and research). Lambrecht (1987) also concluded that managers' competency is different depending on the size and type of organization; nevertheless, he recognized five competencies of managers (resource allocation, budgeting, decision-making, personnel management, and communication) in all organizations and considered them as the basis of other competencies. Researchers have also found that competencies expected from the sport managers comprise strong communicative and social aspects with an emphasis on the importance of interpersonal communication, public relations, advertising and techniques of personal management (Horch and Schutte, 2003). On the other hand, Quarterman et al. (2005) stated that a combination of personal, human, conceptual, technical and conjoined skills is necessary when working as a sport manager. Vosloo (2014) divided competencies into functional (sport finance management, human resource management, sport marketing, and operational management) and core competencies. Core competencies consist of fundamental and general management competencies, where fundamental competencies include those actions performed to achieve the organizational goals (planning, organizing, leading and control) and general management competencies relate to the basic day-to-day management competencies such as office

administration tasks. In a study on North West South African sports managers, Eksteen et al. (2015) concluded that the main functional competencies are: (managing public relations, compiling a code of conduct, addressing legal issues, recruiting and administering coaches, compiling a sport constitution, and scheduling training time-tables) and core competencies are: (organizing sporting events, managing equipment, and conducting sport meetings). In addition, the results showed that sport managers need training in finance, sports facilities and human resources, public relations, and sports marketing. The competencies required for managers according to the level of managers; and the size of the organization are different. The most important competencies required for upper-level sport administrators include: communication and public relations, sport programming, management skills, business practices, risk management, computer skills, equipment management, evaluation, and research (Barcelona, 2010). In a study entitled “determining the competencies of sport event's managers”, by collecting data from 64 managers and 39 university professors with more than three years of experience in teaching in courses related to the management of sports events, Farzalipour et al. (2012) concluded that the most important competencies for sports events' managers include planning techniques, event management, sports sites and sport facilities management, and event's research & marketing management. Peng (2000) in his study concluded that the most important competency of managers is to effectively communicate with employees. Atafar & Azarbaijani (2001) found those managers who were selected based on inappropriate criteria applied the same method to select other individuals. In addition, also in the selection of private and public sector managers, there are a lot of proprietary and arbitrary criteria. Moreover, in the selection of private and public sector managers, there are many incompetent and inappropriate criteria. Also, the results of Bazyari and Amirtash's research indicate that the current and desirable competency of managers are significantly different; on the other hand, according to the criteria of meritocracy, managers are not qualified to manage (Bazyari and Amirtash, 2006). In choosing the qualified managers in educational group, the most important aspect is personality and the least important is the knowledge and information of individuals. Then, by calculating the negative gap, the most important dimension leading to inappropriate managers is the lack of attention to personality traits, while this is one of the most important dimensions in selecting competent managers (Bordbar and Shakri, 2011). In organizations with a competitive strategy, cooperation is their leadership style; the type of organizational culture is responsive; the purpose of their human resource management system is their organizational purpose and their decision-making style is semi-centralized. A more ideal environment is available for promoting meritocracy. Furthermore, organizations that consider competency as a criterion for selecting individuals, will promote meritocracy (Lamberchet, 1987). If the sport organizations in all aspects of physical education and sport are looking for excellence, they must optimally use the existing resource and show their abilities and excellence completely, which requires having competent managers. In the analysis of merit, considering factors such as decision-making, encouragement, innovation, work communication, communication skills, leadership skills, professional skills, utilization of the positive capabilities of oneself and others, and development of teamwork are necessary. According to all of the abovementioned research, it seems that there is still a shortage of competencies of managers in sporting shortages. Therefore, the researchers aimed to investigate and determine the gap between the views of managers and staff on the competency of managers. Consequently, it seems that there is a shortage in the field of investigation of competencies of sport organization managers. Therefore, this study was set up to investigate the gap between the point of view of managers and staff on the required competency of managers.

## **Methodology**

The present research is done based on a descriptive-survey method that means its data were collected by field study method. To get the required data, two questionnaires developed by the researchers. One of these questionnaires was made specifically for the managers and the other for the staff members. The research population consisted of all the staff and managers of the Sports and Youth Offices in Alborz Province (Karaj, Fardis, Savojbolagh, Taleqan, Eshtehard) (N= 134). Total sampling approach was conducted to select the research sample. 95 staff and 26 managers completed the research questionnaire. The research instrument was a researcher developed questionnaire that was prepared

according to the research objectives and derived from similar questionnaires in other researches. The reliability of the questionnaire were calculated by Cronbach's alpha method, that was  $\alpha = 0.83$  for managers questionnaire and  $\alpha = 0.90$  for staff questionnaire. The content validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by the experts of sport management. Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, Friedman and t-test were used for data analysis, and the data was analyzed using SPSS 20.

## Findings

The findings of the descriptive statistics indicated that the majority of managers (50%) and staff (41.1%) aged between 31-40 years. Given the work experience, fifty percent of the managers had a work experience of over 15 years and forty-one percent of the staff had a work experience of less than five years. 57.7% of managers and 29.5% of staff had education related to physical education. Besides, 76.9% of managers and 48.4% of staff were male. 42.3% of the managers of the Sports and Youth Department of Alborz Province had a master's degree and 43.2% of the staff had a bachelor's degree.

**Table 1.** Demographic data of the sample

Variables	Managers		Staff		
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Experience	Under 5 years	0	0	39	41.1
	5-10 years	5	19.2	19	20.0
	11-15 years	8	30.8	12	12.6
	Over 15 years	13	50.0	25	26.3
Degree	Associate degree	3	11.5	31	32.6
	Bachelor	10	38.5	41	43.2
	M.A	11	42.3	22	23.2
	PH.D	2	7.7	1	1.1
Field of Study	physical education	15	57.7	28	29.5
	Non-physical education	11	42.3	67	70.5
Gender	Female	6	23.1	49	51.6
	Male	20	76.9	46	48.4
Age	Under 30	0	0	36	37.9
	31 to 40	13	50.0	39	41.1
	41 to 50	7	26.9	16	16.8
	Above 50	6	23.1	4	4.2

Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to evaluate the normality of the data distribution. All distributions were statistically normal due to normal data distribution that led us to use parametrical tests for analysis. This should be noted that in order to save space and reduce the multiplicity of tables, the analysis with the same run and output process are presented in one table. The results of one-sample t-test of the competency of managers in the two groups of staff and managers were separately evaluated and presented in Table (2). With a mean of 2.93, the level of managers' competence from the perspective of staff is lower than the average (Table 2). The staff of the Sports and Youth Department of Alborz Province believe that meritocracy system is not implemented in the organization and managers are not qualified. The level of managers' competence from the perspective of managers with a mean of 4.19 is higher than average. The managers of the Sports and Youth Department of the Alborz Province believe that meritocracy system is implemented in the organization and managers are qualified.

**Table 2.** single- sample t-test for assessing the level of competence of managers in two groups of staff and managers

Group	Variables	Mean	S.D	Std. Error Mean
Staff	8	2.93	0.150	0.053
Managers	8	4.19	0.157	0.055

To compare the variables of competency from the perspective of staff and managers, the results of independent t-test are presented in Table (3)

The results showed that:

- There was a significant difference between managers and staff regarding the “communication skills of managers” ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $t = -8.03$ ). Managers, more than staff, believe that communication skills of managers are desirable (the first level of table 3).
- There was a significant difference between decision-making skills of managers from the perspective of managers and that of staff ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $t = -6.72$ ). Managers, more than staff, believe that decision-making skills of managers are desirable (the second level of table 3).
- There was a significant difference between managers and staff regarding “the encouraging skills of managers” ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $t = -8.84$ ). The results showed that managers, more than staff, believed in the desirability of encouraging skills of sport managers (Level 3 of Table 3).
- There was a significant difference between work communication skills of managers from the perspective of managers and that of staff ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $t = -8.01$ ). Managers, more than staff, believed in the desirability of communication capabilities of the managers (Level 3 of Table 3).
- There was a significant difference between leadership skills of managers from the perspective of managers and that of staff ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $t = -10.32$ ). Managers, more than staff, believe that there are desirable leadership skills among the leaders (Level 5 of Table 3).
- There was a significant difference between managers and staff regarding “the professional skills” of managers from the perspective of managers and that of staff ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $t = -5.82$ ). This means that managers, more than staff, believed in the desirability of professional skills of managers (Level 6 of Table 3).
- There was a significant difference between skills of managers in using positive capabilities of themselves and the others’ from the perspective of managers and that of staff ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $t = -8.06$ ). Managers, more than staff, believe that the directors of the Department are doing well in using their own capabilities and the others’ (level 7 of Table 3).
- There was a significant difference between development of group activity skills of managers from the perspective of managers and that of staff ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $t = -9.11$ ).

**Table 3.** Independent t-test compared groups of staff and managers in competency components

Variable	Group	Mean	Levene's Test		df	t	sig
			Sig	F			
Communication skills	Staff	3.11	0.001	11.26	78.81	-8.03	0.001
	Managers	4.29					
Decision-making skills	Staff	3.08	0.001	11.05	80.27	-6.72	0.001
	Managers	3.95					
Encouraging skills	Staff	2.70	0.001	13.52	73.71	-8.84	0.001
	Managers	3.98					
Work communication skills	Staff	3.12	0.001	16.18	90.81	-8.01	0.001
	Managers	4.35					
Leadership Skills	Staff	2.90	0.001	15.05	104.51	-10.32	0.001
	Managers	4.12					
Professional skills	Staff	2.85	0.16	1.96	119	-5.82	0.001
	Managers	4.30					
Applying Positive capabilities	Staff	2.85	0.001	13.29	119	-8.06	0.001
	Managers	4.30					
Development of team activities	Staff	2.90	0.001	22.38	95.98	-9.11	0.001
	Managers	4.27					

## Discussion and Conclusion

Organizations are mere tools for the achievement of predetermined goals and it is apparent that "people" are the core of any organization regardless of its goal, nature, or affiliation. Therefore, achieving the goal is depended on the nature and quality of human assets in each organization (Awamleh, 2013). If human resources want to have the effectiveness and efficiency in the organization, they should be in their proper position. The discussion about the competencies of managers is very important because of its position, effects, and consequences in the success or failure of each organization. In this research, criteria for suitable managers include communication skills, decision-making skills, encouraging skills, work communication skills, professional skills, applying positive capabilities, and development of team activities. Therefore, in this study, regarding the importance and necessity of the managers' competence, the researchers investigated the competency of managers of Sport and Youth General Office of Alborz Province. The results of this research showed that there was a significant difference between managers and Staff in all dimensions of managers' competence including communication skills, decision-making skills, encouraging skills, work communication skills, professional skills, applying positive capabilities, and development of team activities. Our results did not support the findings of Peng (2000). Our results showed that factors such as communication skills, decision-making skills, encouraging skills, work communication skills, professional skills, applying positive capabilities, and development of team activities play an important role in the competence of managers, which are in line with the results of Jamieson (1980), Lamberchet (1987), Barcelona (2010), Peng (2000), Eksteen et al. (2015). Therefore, the mentioned organization needs to pay a special attention to these dimensions, in order to increase the level of competence of its managers; and using effective approaches such as training increase manager's capabilities. Other findings in this study indicate that Staff believe that the system of meritocracy to acquire management positions does not run. Atafar & Azarbaijani (2001) and Bazyari & Amirtash (2006) also achieved to similar results; they stated that in the

selection of managers, there are largely inappropriate standards; and based on the competency criteria, these managers are not qualified to manage. The Sport and Youth Department should pay more attention to these factors and select people who have the desired criteria for the management positions. This work proposed some criteria for good managers; people who meet these criteria are more appropriate than the others in obtaining managerial positions. The competent manager needs all the criteria and having just one or a few features does not seem enough. The principle of meritocracy should be emphasized, including compliance with the principle of meritocracy in appointing managers, preventing inappropriate replacement of managers and Staff, avoiding personal and political lobbying and relationship orientation (bias) in this field. To comply with this principle, standard systems and rules should be designed to select and promote managers and experts. We also suggest that methods and procedures for finding appropriate human resource, recruitment and selection to be done according to the individual competencies. From the findings of the research, managers can ask Staff's opinions about the competencies required by managers, and this is a way to improve their own competence level and make the required changes to improve the organization's status. Using the results of the research, we must try to provide the necessary training for those who demand managerial positions and have the ability to do so. It is suggested that the culture of competence in the organization to be institutionalized and educational substructure and learning systems to be improved. Since meritocracy is a complex and important process in organizations, in addition to the variables studied in this research, there are still various other variables involved in it; therefore, the interested researchers are suggested to study these factors and their relationship and impact on the implementation of the meritocracy system. More investigations about the causes and roots of problems in the implementation of meritocracy in organizations are also suggested. Besides, competency studies can take place at different levels of management and in separate parts of the organization.

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