Managerial Competencies for Chairpersons: A Delphi study

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Abstract

Competencies of chairpersons in the universities have become a concern because they are in the heart of an effective academic department and their competencies influences the reputation of the university. The purpose of this article is to identify and to develop competencies needed by chairpersons. This research used Delphi’s technique in three rounds of data gathering. The benefits of this research methodology are the use of experts in obtaining opinions and ideas without time and geographical limitations. The results demonstrated 30 generic competencies with combination of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies and 33 specific competencies including knowledge and skills needed by chairpersons.

Keywords: Chairpersons, competencies, Delphi’s technique.
Introduction

Universities are expecting their managers especially head of department heads or chairpersons to perform the assigned tasks at higher levels. To accomplish these tasks and duties; universities, faculty members and academic experts must help their chairpersons to identify and cultivate their competencies.

The department chairperson is the heart of an effective academic department, where most academic action takes place. The chairperson is a key figure in determining the educational success of the university and his/her performance, attitudes, skills, capabilities and competencies influences the reputation on which a university strongly depends. The chairperson is squeezed between the demands of upper administration and institutional expectations on the one side and the expectations of faculty, staff, students on the other, with both attempting to influence and shape the chair. The chairperson is caught in the middle, required to provide the most sophisticated leadership and management competencies and skills to avoid being crushed by these two opposing forces. Administering a university in accordance with its mission requires its administrators and chairpersons to have vision, knowledge, ability, and skills in management. Chairpersons are important people who help coordinate administration tasks and lead higher educational institutions to academic excellence and long-term self-reliance. Consequent on myriad changes, including the fundamental and core changes in the nature of work and work organization, the dynamic nature of the competitive environment, and the need to ensure a convergence of stakeholders’ interest in the way the organizations are run, a need for new approaches in human resource management has arisen. It can be seen the personnel who make up the group of university chairpersons need to undergo continuous development. One of these new and emerging themes is “competency”. The term of competency became increasingly fashionable in the late 1980s and in the 1990s to express what target of assessment and development initiatives should be, especially relevant to management (1). For a number of years, the term “competency” has been a catch phrase in organizational literature. The concept of competency has been developed by McClelland and the McBer and Company. McClelland (2) described “competency” as the characteristics underlying superior performance. There are at least two key meaning or uses of the term competency: Competency as behaviors that an individual demonstrates; and, Competencies as minimum standards of performance (3). The term was originally used in education to describe trainee teacher behaviors. Subsequently the term has been widely used and discussed in the management domain, initially in the United States and led by Boyatzis (4). Competency, preferred by the American school and promoted by Boyatzis(1982) is seen as underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective action and/or superior performance in a job. Competencies are not seen as the task of the job, but rather that which enables people to do the task. These can be described in term of essential personal traits, skills, knowledge and motives of the employee that leads to superior managerial performance. Competencies will be the common language of human resource systems in the future, and can be used to provide the necessary framework within which an organization can develop its personnel (5). As cited Chansiri (6), many universities still have problems to develop capable and competent chairpersons. Thus, it has shown many interests in conducting a study on developing chairpersons’ competencies.
Theoretical Framework for managerial competencies

All managers, irrespective of where and what they manage, perform four generic tasks. These include planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (7). Planning involves defining goals, and mapping out ways to reach them, organizing entails arranging and coordinating human, material and information resources aimed at achieving desired goals; leading involves motivating others to achieve organizational goals and controlling involves measuring performance and monitoring progress relative to objectives (8).

Competencies of chairpersons have become a recent and important concern because of the demands to meet challenges confronting the job tasks. This is argued that during this millennium has grown the chairpersons’ roles and competencies in size and complexity. This indicated that they need to identify the specific roles, behaviors and competencies necessitated to manage, motivate, communicate, monitor, maintain and develop employees as well as to accomplish the goals in consistent with other managers and administrators. The academic department is the setting for the primary business of the university. The department is not—as chairmen and their colleagues often feel it is viewed—the bottom administrative rung in the downward delegation of managerial, clerical, and other tasks and responsibilities. If academic and service administrators see and deal with departments and chairmen so, then there indeed lies the central problem.

The academic department is the heart of the academic enterprise: the place where most teaching, service, and research activities go on, where faculty members pursue professional and disciplinary interests while at the same time serving the University, and where students pursue their education. It is at the department level that most of the direct and personal interaction occurs between the University and its faculty members and students. The University's success depends on the success of its academic departments, and the success of the departments depends on their respective capacities to define and achieve productive educational goals, maintain quality staff, establish effective academic programs and internal decision-making procedures, and cope with the constraints and seize the opportunities found in their environments (9).

Numerous theoretical frameworks were utilized by scholars in their attempt to further investigate this topic. In this research combination of some theories have been used as the underlying competency theories and the following section explain them in brief.

As mentioned previously, competency is defined as an underlying characteristic of a person, in that may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses, which is causally related to the achievement of effective or better work performances (4). He developed his model of managerial competency through a study of over two thousand managers and identified over one-hundred potential competencies. It is so important that aspect of his work have three levels of competencies that he proposed: motives and traits, social role, and self-concept; and; role transitions. This perspective results in effective action and/or superior performance in a job. Many other authors have built on Boyatzis's perspective such as Spencer and Spencer (10,11).

Sandwith (12) seminal work, the competency domain model, an extension of Katz’ (13) three-category managerial competency model. The model separates competencies into five distinctive domains: conceptual creative, leadership, interpersonal, administrative and
technical. Sandwith (12) provides the following definitions for the five competency categories:

1) Conceptual-creative: Cognitive skills associated with comprehending important elements of the job and creative thought.

2) Leadership: Ability to turn ideas into productive action.

3) Interpersonal: Skills for effective interaction with others.

4) Administrative: Personnel and financial aspects of organizational life.

5) Technical: Knowledge and skills associated with the actual work.

Spencer and Spencer (11) defined, "A competency is an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation. Spencer and Spencer’s Iceberg Model of competency conceptualized five types of competency characteristics: 1) Motive; 2) Traits; 3) Social role and self-concept; 4) knowledge; and 5) skills. Knowledge and skills competencies tend to be visible, measurable, and can be developed through training (11). Meanwhile, social role, self-concept, trait, and motive competencies are more hidden and they represent a person’s central personality. As the experts and scholars know, competencies are characteristics of people that differentiate performance in a specific job or role (2,14).

The definition of what a competency is has still not reached unanimity over years. Sinnott et al. (15) argued that competencies are different from knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Competencies encompass not only KSAs but also personal characteristics. Nowadays, competencies are commonly conceptualized as a measurable pattern of knowledge high from average performance (16,17).

Birdir and Pearson, (2000) identified chefs’ competencies by a Delphi method. The Research Chefs Association nominated 33 research chefs. Ten of these chefs contributed to the pilot round; 25 to the first round; and 22 to the second round. In the pilot round, the chefs identified the knowledge, skills and abilities that a successful research chef should have. In the first round, the chefs rated and analyzed the competencies identified in the pilot round. In the second round, competencies were identified. Even though these chefs share common competencies, they differ in their basic competencies. A total of 12 basic competencies (competencies rated four and over on the five-point Likert scale) were identified for research-focused research chefs, and eight basic competencies were identified for management-focused research chefs. A total of 19 basic competencies were also identified that applied to both research- and management-focused research chefs.

Verkerk and van Zelm (18) conducted to prioritize the competencies for the operational manager regarding the management of care pathways. A measurement instrument was developed to conduct a Delphi study. The competencies on which complete consensus has been reached were presented to a focus group in the second phase of the study. The Delphi was carried out with five experts in three rounds. Complete consensus on 30 competencies was reached. The focus group consisted of three participants and produced 10 core competencies. These belong to the level of operational management and the management style ‘task-centered leader/producer’ in the SNCM. The results demonstrated 10 competencies that the operational manager needs for coordinating care pathways.

Brill et al. (19) identified competencies required for a project manager to be effective in the workplace. They used a Web-based Delphi method to lead experienced project managers through an anonymous consensus-building process consisting of two rounds of surveys. The Round I analysis of 147 respondents yielded 117 project management success factors, 78 of
which were identified as “trainable” competencies. The Round II analysis confirmed 42 of the 78 competencies (53.8%) as “very important” to “extremely important” to project manager success. The results showed that Delphi technique is an efficient methodology for exploring manager’s competencies.

Boyd (20) conducted a nation-wide Delphi study to identify the competencies that will be required by volunteer administrators (VAs) during the next decade. Thirty-three competencies were identified by a panel of 13 experts in the field of volunteer administration and categorized into the following five constructs: organizational leadership, systems leadership, organizational culture, personal skills, and management skills.

Hudak et al (21) have conducted a research titled “Identifying management competencies for health care executives: review of a series of Delphi studies”. Their analysis has identified a number of management competencies, i.e., managerial capabilities. In addition, this review identifies the skills (technical expertise), knowledge (facts and principles) and abilities (physical, mental or legal power) required to support achievement of these competencies. Leadership and resource management, including cost and finance dimensions, are the highest-rated requisite management competencies. The dominant skills, knowledge and abilities (SKAs) are related to interpersonal skills. The lowest-rated SKAs are related to job-specific, technical skills. Their study results showed that Delphi technique, as a valid and replicable methodology, be applied toward the study of non-executive health care managers, e.g., students, clinicians, mid-level managers and integrated systems administrators, to determine their requisite management competencies and SKAs.

Why Delphi Technique as a choice of method?

The Delphi method has been used in predicting future educational trends and identifying the competencies (10,22–24) The Delphi method is based on a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group of experts by means of a series of questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback (25). The Delphi technique uses panel experts to examine a particular subject. The panel is brought together by written communication only. There are no face-to-face meetings, and no panel member knows the identities of other panel members. Studies comparing the Delphi’s results with other methods confirmed the effectiveness of the method related to generating ideas and the use of participants’ time (26).

Lang (27) described the Delphi method as the best known qualitative, structured, and indirect interaction research method to study the future. In view of Helmer (28) as cited by Daud et al(29), The Delphi technique consists of four main characteristics: a) it is an iterative or repetitive process which requires the experts to be consulted at least twice on the same question; b) it maintains the anonymity of the participants or at least of their answers. c) It takes place in a controlled feedback to reduce noise or information that distorts the data or deals with group interest rather than focusing on problem solving) it allows for group statistical response. All the opinions form part of the final answer. The questions are designed so that the answers can be analyzed statistically. The validity and reliability of the Delphi technique as an acceptable method of data collection from an identified group has been supported. The scientific merit of this technique had been proven by the credibility in selection of panel experts, procedures of data gathering, justifiable consensus and explanation on its implementation (30).
Methodology

This research used a Delphi technique to identify competencies for chairpersons in the universities because this technique offers efficiency in decision-making where order of magnitude estimates are required. Generally it is fast, cost effective, easy-to-understand and versatile approach that can be applied wherever an expert is believed to exist (31). Rapid consensus can be expected with no face-to-face discussion since participants can be located anywhere provided there are competent. Panel experts, therefore, can express opinions freely and have flexibility in responding to the questionnaire and adequate time to think and respond (29).

Thus, the Delphi technique met our goal to collect data from individuals with competencies of chairpersons’ expertise across schools, departments and disciplines. 10-15 participants is an appropriate number for a Delphi method where the participant are similar in background and in view of Hennessy and Hicks, (32) 15 expert panels is enough for performing a study through Delphi technique.

The study included three rounds to achieve consensus among 19 experts in Educational administration (three persons), curriculum (three people), human resource management (three persons) quality management (two persons), Education (two persons), chairpersons (four persons) and an expert in higher education studies and an expert in industrial psychology. The panel of experts was selected purposefully from different schools such as education, psychology and management. These experts were identified by their reputation among faculty member, their involvement in the profession as consultants and conference speakers, or their research and publication record in the field. Powel (33) notes that the success of a Delphi technique depends on a combination of participants who make up the panel experts, the number of panel experts and their qualifications.

Round 1

The initial round required the jury of experts asked to respond to identify competencies for chairpersons in the universities, including cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies that represent each area of work functions. It is mentioned that the panel expert were free to include any other competencies.

This question was asked: what generic competencies do you feel that a chairperson needs in order to provide excellent performance?

In each round of the Delphi technique, a consensus level of 75% agreement was accepted since limiting the round could the total (29). The competencies listed and suggested by panel members were then rated using a likert-sclae: 0= not important, 1= slightly important, 2=moderately important, 3= important, 4= critical. The mean and median were calculated based on the scale of 0 to five. It was then decided that a mean 3 or greater and a median of 3 and greater suggested that the panelist rated the competency items as important. A competency item with standard deviation of 1.00 or less would indicate the percent consensus on a given competencies item rating.

Researchers delivered the questionnaires to the panel expert. In round 1, the response rate was %100. All participants agreed that the nine competencies were needed according to the main task and activities of chairpersons: planning, organizing, human resource management,
communication, leadership, decision making, teamwork, controlling, ICT which they identified through 89 subscales.

**Round 11**
Panel experts examined the statements identified in Round 1 to find commonalities among them and to combine similar statements. The original language of the experts' jury members was retained without trying to clarify or interpret meaning. Combining similar statements resulted in 89 competency statements. These statements were used to create the instrument for round II. In Round 11, the jury was asked to rate their strength of agreement for each statement on a five-point likert-type scale with 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree. All 19 members of the jury who responded in Round 1 also responded to Round 11.

**Round 111**
The purpose of Round 111 was to begin the process of developing consensus among the jury. Those statements that received a five (agree to disagree) from at least two-thirds of the jury responding in Round 11 were kept for the third round. Jury members were sent a third revised instrument and asked to re-evaluate each statement retained from the scale. Fifteen of the 19 Jury members responded to this Round. Efforts were made to secure responses from these individuals. Frequency responses based on a two-thirds majority.

**Results**
In Round 1, the expert jury originated 89 competency statements. Combining similar statements resulted in the formation of nine competencies required by chairpersons. Group consensus was reached by third round and all 33 competency statements were retained.

The resulting statements were subjected to an unstructured Q-sorting procedure. Kerlinger (34) describes an unstructured Q-sorting as "a set of items assembled without specific regard to the variables or factors underlying the items"(p. 511). Three chairpersons sorted the statements into categories or constructs. The chairpersons then met to compare the constructs and reach consensus on the categorization of each item. The Q-sorting procedure resulted in the development of nine structures. The constructs and their accompanying statements may be found in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Managerial competencies required by chairpersons in the university</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competencies cluster</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Organizing</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Human Resource Management</td>
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<td>4 Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Leadership</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The mean for competencies ranged from 3.17 to 4.33. The highest rated competency was teamwork (4.33) which it is an interpersonal competency. The second highest rated competency was leadership with a mean of 4.23 which it is an intrapersonal competency. The lowest rated competency was communication with an mean score of 3.01 which it is an intrapersonal competency and ICT with a mean score of 3.02 which it was a cognitive competency. It has seen that all of nine competencies identified important because the panel expert rated the competencies upper 3.

On round 111, the third revised instrument delivered to Jury members by researchers and asked to re-evaluate each statement retained from the scale. Fifteen of the 19 Jury members responded to this Round. They re-assessed the instrument and rated the competency from highest rated to lowest rated accordingly (see the table 2).

Table 2 Managerial competencies for chairpersons in the university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency cluster</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Note. Competency accepted as needed is rated with means of 3.00 or higher and SD&lt; 1.00.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource management</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Conclusion and Implications
This research identified nine competencies needed by chairpersons in the universities: Planning, leadership, decision making, teamwork, ICT, controlling, human resource management, organizing and communication based on three round of Delphi technique. The results showed that all of nine competencies are important competency needed by the chairpersons. As the literature indicted, managers such as chairpersons in the universities are
expected to have knowledge, skills and skills of mentioned competencies. This finding supports Daud et al. (29) and Leemann’s (35) argument about the need for these competencies. Another finding which was consistent with Blair (36) is communication. Blair (36) reported that effective communication is vital for upper managers and employees. However, chairpersons must master many more competencies to be excellent in their tasks and jobs because of the position’s broad range, importance and complexity. The results of this study could provide a basis of develop a comprehensive competency model for chairpersons in the universities that would be continued in Round 11 and 111 of the Delphi technique. The researchers also concluded that further competencies studies should be carried out periodically to provide managers especially chairpersons to work in the current global environment full of challenges.

The results of this research could use:
1. To guide decisions about selecting and appointing the chairpersons in this position
2. To direct decisions about academic curricula.
3. To prepare organizational training programs for managers and chairpersons in the universities.
4. To help human resource management unit in recruiting and in identifying appropriate functions chairpersons based on their competencies.

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