

Management Skills of Iranians: a Comparison of Technical, Human and Conceptual Differences based on Gender, Age and Longevity in Management Ranks

Reza Tajaddini * Bahaudin G. Mujtaba**

Mahzad Bandenezhad ***

ABSTRACT

In Iran, management and leadership trends can be traced back for thousand of experience. This study focused on the management skills of respondents from Iran to see if gender, age and longevity in management can be significant factors in their technical, human and conceptual competencies. The results of 421 respondents show that there are significant differences linked to gender, age, and management experience. Age and management experience are positively related to better technical, human and conceptual scores. Implications for educators, managers, and human resource professionals are presented.

KEY WORDS: Age, experience, gender, Iran, Iranians, and management skills.

Introduction to Management

For thousands of years, it has been assumed that aging and experience can make people mature and wise. This is assumed in promotions in military organizations as well as in the government area and private organizations. The modern workplace is diverse, filled with men and women professionals from different generations and years of management experience. Workers bring different values and expectations; as such managers and organizational leaders must create an inclusive workplace and this necessity comes from the pluralization of society (Cooper, 1998, p. 51). Today's organizational leaders and managers must have good technical, human, and conceptual skills in order to build strong teams in these competitive times. Consequently, this study focuses on understanding the management skills (technical, human, and conceptual) of Iranian respondents based on gender, age and years of experience in the management ranks.

Older managers with more years of experience are likely to make good long-term strategic decisions. This is why organizations usually seek to hire experienced managers because the choices made by "management are influential on organizational outcomes" (Voges, Tworoger and Bendixen, 2009, p. 33). Of course, effective strategies require management teams that are diverse in terms of age, gender and overall experience. It has been documented that the "primary mover of the organization is its strategy, which details its purpose and direction...organizational strategy influences the effectiveness of diversity in the organization" (Knouse, 2009, p. 348). Some authors claim that using the talents

and skills of diverse individuals from different departments or organizations "often leads to opportunities for cost reduction that might not otherwise be considered" (Pudlowski, 2009, p. 39).

Tzabbar writes that "firms interested in exploring new knowledge boundaries and changing their capabilities should hire personnel whose knowledge is different from that already residing in the firms" (2009, p. 891). Diverse workers and managers are needed to successfully capitalize on different opinions, experiences, and talents that might exist in the organization as well as in the community. Having a diverse management team "is especially important when there are significant complementarities and spillovers between the actions of different individuals or groups" (Postrel, 2009, p. 273). Recent years have witnessed economic changes such as globalization and growth of the global market and multinational companies. Iranian society is also experiencing changes in the workplace similar to those experienced in Western societies. For example, competing in a global market and implementation of new methods for increasing the efficiency of workplace (Karimi and Nouri, 2009). Alavi, Yasin and Zimmerer (2004) investigated a sample of Iranian business executives and concluded that there are indications of a transition from a traditional and religiously based orientation toward more open, flexible and market-based policies in Iran.

Iran is a unique and complex country with a very rich and ancient cultural heritage which has strategic and economic importance in Persian Gulf and West Asia.

* University of Otago, School of Business, University of Otago, New Zealand, Email: taj.reza@gmail.com

** Nova Southeastern University, United States, Email: mujtaba@nova.edu

*** School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Email: mahzad.bandenezhad@gmail.com

However, Iran has not received the attention it deserves in many areas of managerial and academic research. Much of what is known about the country is based on superficial and biased image of media. Iran, with its large market (over 70 million), educated workforce, and tremendous natural resources such as oil and gas, and numerous manufacturing and petrochemical industries which require heavy investment and development, has a great potential for multinational enterprises, corporations, and international companies which are interested in working and/or investment in this country (Yeganeh and Su, 2007). However, in a study by Namazie and Frame (2007), it was indicated that although there is a great potential in the Iranian workforce which provides an educated and young workforce, Iranian labor force suffers with low productivity and performance. They commented that employees appear frustrated, unmotivated, and often do not show commitment to their jobs. Moreover, many employees lack the necessary skills and work ethics to work with multinational corporations (MNCs). Such perceptions tend to be widespread about people in the region, including Afghanistan and some middle eastern countries such as Oman, but research finds that they are, and they can be, effective managers and leaders (Kaifi and Mujtaba, 2010; Mujtaba, Khanfar, and Khanfar, 2010; Mujtaba and Kaifi, 2010; Mujtaba and Sadat, 2010). So, this study attempts to provide more information in regard to Iranian management skills with consideration of such variables as gender, age and longevity in management ranks.

Management Levels and Ranks

Academics and practitioners see the term management as the achievement of organizational goals with and through people using available resources in the most efficient manner possible (Mujtaba, 2007). Generally, people use the four functions of management which are planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (POLC) to achieve their organizational objective. Planning means defining an organization's goals, establishing an overall strategy for achieving these goals, and developing comprehensive plans to integrate and coordinate activities. Making these management functions work well for the organization is a key function or responsibility of the managers. Management is divided into three levels: first-level supervisors (managers), middle managers and top management. The changing story in management today, of course, is that the layers and layers of middle managers that most large organizations used to have are giving way to self-

empowered teams and flatter organizations. In their interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles, managers try to balance efficiency (how things get done) with effectiveness (what gets done) depending on the situation, tasks, and people involved (Mujtaba, 2007, pp. 36-37). It should be noted that effectiveness and efficiency can only be achieved if the managers are working on implementing based on a long-term strategy. If a manager or leader has a sense of purpose and direction, this will become contagious among his/her peers, colleagues and employees. Effective leaders tend to set high standards to meet and exceed the stated goals and objectives. Furthermore, effective leaders are honest and truthful; they look reality in the eye and face the facts, while strategically planning to move forward. Of course, the three basic skills that managers use are technical, human, and conceptual and that the proportion of one's time spent in these areas may change as managers go up the hierarchy (Katz, 1955). For example, senior managers may not spend as much time in technical functions as those who are in first line management. Top managers tend to spend more time using their conceptual skills. Top management has been found to be an important component in enacting an organization's vision and ultimately its performance (Smircich and Stubbart, 1985; Voges et al., 2009).

As emphasized by most management scholars, research has shown that education and experience help managers acquire relevant managerial skills that let them perform their jobs effectively, especially conceptual, human, and technical. Authors Jones and George provide the following definitions for human, technical, and conceptual skills:

1. Technical skills are job-specific knowledge and techniques.
2. Human skills include the ability to understand, alter, lead, and control the behavior of people and groups.
3. Conceptual skills include the ability to analyze a situation and distinguish between cause and effect. Conceptual skills are often gained through formal education, reflection, and experience (Jones and George, 2009, pp. 17-18).

It should also be noted that promotion in management hierarchy is often linked to a manager's ability to acquire the management skills and competencies that a particular company believes are important. Of course, the variables of age, gender and management

experience might be factors for consideration in various positions in the firm.

The new generations of Iranian workers demand leaders and managers who have high humanistic attributes to help enhance morale and productivity in the workplace. Thus, it becomes important to learn what dominant skills (technical, human, or conceptual) Iranian men and women bring to the workforce.

Iranians in the Workplace

The culture of Iran is made up their traditions, norms and daily practices. Today, Iranian workers are made up of younger and older individuals, men and women, as well as professionals with some and many years of management experience. Iran was formerly known as Persia until 1935 and it is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations. Culturally speaking, based on Hofstede's findings (1980), Iran is classified in near Eastern cluster including Turkey and Greece (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985). However, in a more recent research conducted through GLOBE project, Iran is considered to be part of the South Asian cultural cluster consisting of such countries as India, Thailand and Malaysia (Javisan and Dastmalchian, 2003). These findings may seem very different from the image of Iran as a predominant Islamic/Middle-Eastern country which is often confused with its neighbors (Yeganeh and Su, 2007). Iran has many commonalities with neighboring Muslim countries; however, due to its unique historical, linguistic and racial identities it has a different and unique culture (Ali and Amirshahi, 2002). The nationalist aspect of Iranian culture is related to Ancient Persian civilization and Zoroastrianism heritage which date 3000-2000 BC and are still prevalent in the society. On the other hand, Islamic traditions also continue to play to their significant role in the Iranian society. Before the 1979 revolution, Iran underwent modernization as a direct consequence of the former Iranian monarch's policies. The ensuing Islamic revolution overthrew a 2,500-year-old history of monarchy and replaced it with an Islamic Republic. This revolution changed the entire structure of the country as well as that of workforces. Technocrats were replaced by ideologists, and a competent and skilled workforce was replaced with a loyal workforce. Therefore, competencies and management skills were not seen as a priority; rather, significance was paid to putting loyal and ideologically sound employees into key management and strategic positions.

The Iran's economy faces many challenges and one of the biggest is the size and ownership of the public

sector, which controls roughly 80 per cent of the country's economic activity. The growth of the public sector began after the Islamic revolution, when many large industries were nationalized: private sector companies were confiscated and taken into government control (Khajepour, 2001). Nevertheless, at present, there is an emphasis on the transition to a market economy in Iran, including the encouragement of private sector development, privatization of state enterprises and cost recovery from beneficiaries, in order to increase rationalization and efficiency of the Iranian economy (Hamdheidari, Agahi and Papzan, 2008). Although this transformation is also highly controversial and there is widespread debate over the creation of a strong sub-governmental sector and interference of military forces in the Iran's economy.

The Iranian culture is deep rooted in traditions with a strong emphasis on cultural institutions such as religion and family (Yasin, Alavai and Zimmerer, 2002). In-group orientation is one of the distinguishing features of the Iranian culture, which suggests loyalty and cohesiveness towards small groups such as family and close friends (Javidan and Dastmalchian, 2003). For example, this influence of local culture on personnel practices, with its focus on pre-existing relationships and nepotism that take precedence over skills and competencies, can be seen especially in recruitment and selection, performance management and compensation. This is a more common and accepted practice in Iranian private sector companies and is especially seen in family-owned businesses and more traditional management structured companies. In the public sector, there are policies and formal channels; however, with the right contact person, more flexibility is shown (Namazie and Frame, 2007). Generally, when favoritism does not imply any bribe, it is not regarded as corruption (Schramm-Nielsen and Faradonbeh, 2002). Under some circumstances, favoritism may be regarded even as a positive or humane act toward friends, family and acquaintance.

In Iran, similar to other Middle Eastern countries, since business is personal and based on trust, developing relationships rather than exchanging facts and information is the main objective of communication (Hutchings and Weir, 2006). Iranians' respect for authority is evident in most business dealings. The relationship between subordinates and their superiors for example is distinct and highly official. Yeganeh and Su (2007) also found high degree of hierarchical distance among Iranian managers. The antecedents of this high hierarchical distance are deeply rooted in

many aspects of Iranian mythology, history, politics, religion and family structure. It causes a top-down management and authoritarian decision-making in the Iranian organizations (Javidan and Dastmalchian, 2003). Thus, it is not surprising that rewarding is based on ascription rather than achievement. As a matter of fact, professional titles are used to enhance power and status both inside and outside of organization.

Today, Iranian women are in the forefront of many changes in their country. The majority of Iranian women are primarily responsible for domestic tasks. Although the status of women at home depends on their social class, the majority of Iranian women are responsible for housekeeping, childcare, and all other aspects of running a home. Thus, employed women must bear much pressure from home and work responsibilities. Despite the existing role pressures that women confront in Iran, the number of women participating in the workplace is increasing steadily (O'Shea, 2003). The increase in women's economic activity in recent decades is related to the growing number of educated women, along with financial pressures and the increasing need for women's income-generating activities. Nowadays, Iranian women participate in most fields of work and education (Karimi, 2008). In addition, many women are determined to realize their talents and capabilities in line with new ideas of gender equality and women's rights (Ahmad-Nia, 2002). Nevertheless, there are still debates in Iran about the probable conflicts between women's traditional and modern roles and their consequences. Women's lives in Iran are still highly influenced by the behavior and attitudes of the men around them, like their fathers or husbands (Mehri, 1999). Furthermore, there are additional difficulties and barriers in the labor market at the wider societal level, such as employers' preferences for male employees and formal or informal job-segregation policies, which practically limit women's employment participation (Ahmad-Nia, 2002). It is anticipated that only 20-25% of Iranian college-educated women join the labor force (Shavarini, 2005) and their participation at the managerial level is just 13% (Jamali and Nejati, 2009).

On the other hand, various surprising transformations are undergoing in the Iranian society. Nowadays, the structure of 'the family' has changed radically in Iran. The men are not the only breadwinners anymore and women share the procurement of livelihood. This means that women actively pursue further education to lead to better career prospects. Furthermore, similar to many developed nations, Iranian women make up

more than 60 percent of university entrants. All these changes have led women to participate more in the public domain and progress into the managerial ranks. Nowadays, it is easy to find city and town councilwomen, even in the country's rural areas. Several members of parliament are selected among women and recently, a 50 year old gynecologist became Iran's first woman cabinet member since the Islamic revolution, as the health minister (Tajaddini and Mujtaba, 2010).

Study Methodology

Many instruments have been used by different researchers to assess an individual's skills for management and leadership (Katz 1955; Rahman and Yang, 2009; Garman, Burkhart and Strong, 2006; Buttner and Gyskiewicz, 1999; Egbu, 1999; Mumford, Zaccarro, Connelly and Marks, 2000).

This study used a translated version of The Style Inventory survey instrument provided by Northouse (2010, pp. 64-65) to study adults in Iran. The English version of the survey was translated by the first author, who is a native speaker, into Persian (Farsi) and then it was given to three university professors who spoke both languages fluently for checking the accuracy of the translated survey. Then the second and third authors back-translated the Persian survey into English to see if the meaning had stated the same. The authors and their colleagues agreed that the meaning of the survey had not changed in the Persian translated version.

It is important to recognize that research and data gathering remain challenging in Iran, this was just as true for the current researcher. Most Iranian organizations are sensitive to permitting any interviews and are wary towards research. Nevertheless, a total of 650 questionnaires were personally distributed in two cities of Kerman and Tehran, and 437 surveys were returned. Data from 421 acceptable and usable questionnaires were entered in the excel file (16 unacceptable) for analysis in this study. Tehran, which is the capital and the largest city of the country, is the most important economic center and populated city of Iran. Kerman is the center of the largest province of Iran and is located in south east of country. The convenience sample was obtained through educational institutions, businesses and entrepreneurs, private and public sector institutions. Respondents of this study cover a mixture of people in managerial positions, mid rank employees,

students and the jobless. A paragraph explaining the purpose of this research and guaranteeing total confidentiality was included with each survey. Of course, it should be mentioned that small population sample should be seen as a pilot study since it is based on a general sample in the population which cannot be generalized to an entire population of Iran who are diverse in term of their language, culture, faith, and physical attributes. So the reader should see the generalized statements as simply referring to the specific respondents sampled and not necessarily the entire cultural patterns of the Iranian people.

The skills inventory is designed to measure three broad types of management skills: technical, human, and conceptual. One can score the questionnaire by adding the scores for each category. First, sum the responses on items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 16. This is one's technical score. Second, sum the responses on items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, and 17. This is one's technical skill score. Third, sum the responses on items 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18. This is one's conceptual score. A highest score in each category would be a maximum of 30 for each skill area.

The research question for this study is: Do age, gender, and longevity in management experience make a significant difference in the technical, human and conceptual skills of Iranians? For this survey, the higher the overall sum of the scores, the more likely that the participant is better at that skill. The research hypotheses for this study are as follows:

✧ Hypothesis1 -Iranian respondents will have similar scores for technical, human and conceptual skills.

✧ Hypothesis2 -Iranian men and women will have similar scores for technical, human, and conceptual skills.

✧ Hypothesis3 -Younger and older Iranians will have similar scores for technical, human, and conceptual skills.

✧ Hypothesis4 -Iranians with five or less years of management experience will have similar scores for technical, human, and conceptual skills as those with six or more years of management experience.

In this study, 186 responses came from male and 235 were from females in Iran. In regards to age, 208 responses came from those are 17 to 25 years of age. Also, 152 responses were from those are 26 years of age and older (with 80 individuals being older than 31 years of age). For longevity in management rank, 360 respondents mentioned that they had none or less than

five years of management experience; however, 61 individuals did have at least six or more years of experience in management positions.

Results

The overall results demonstrate that Iranians have fairly high scores in all three areas of management skills. In this research, Iranians studied have their highest score on technical, followed by human and conceptual skills.

The first hypothesis, "Iranian respondents will have similar scores for technical, human and conceptual skills", as can be seen in Table I, cannot be supported as there are significant differences. Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected.

Table I - Iranian Management Skill Scores (St. Deviations)

	Number	Technical	Human	Conceptual
Iranians	421	23.84 (3.25)	23.36 (3.37)	22.66 (3.62)
		Vs. Human*	Vs. Conceptual*	Vs. Technical*
		*t= 2.10; p=0.036	*t= -2.9; p= 0.004	*t= -4.98; p= 0.001

The second hypothesis, "Iranian men and women will have similar scores for technical, human and conceptual skills," cannot be fully supported as men have a significantly different scores on technical and conceptual skills, but not for human skills. As presented in Table II, the human relation scores of male and female Iranians appear to be similar. However, males have significantly higher scores on the technical and conceptual skills. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially supported.

Table II - Iranian Men and Women Management Skill Scores (St. Deviations)

	Number	Technical	Human	Conceptual
Women	235	23.49 (3.23)	23.32 (3.37)	22.17 (3.53)
Men	186	24.28 (3.24)*	23.41 (3.37)	23.28 (3.64)*
TOTAL	421	*t= -2.49; p=0.0132	*t= -0.27; p= 0.8	*t= -3.16; p= 0.002

The third hypothesis, "Younger and older Iranians will have similar scores for technical, human, and conceptual skills," cannot be supported as older respondents (those are 31 years of age and higher) have significantly higher scores for all three skills. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Table III - Iranian Management Skills and Age (St. Deviations)

	Number	Technical	Human	Conceptual
25 Years and Younger	208	23.17 (3.29)	22.41 (2.99)	21.7 (3.3)
31 Years and Older	80	24.63 (2.78)	24.23 (3.23)	23.51 (3.85)
TOTAL	421	*t= -3.51; p= 0.0005	*t= -4.5; p< 0.001	*t= -3.98; p= 0.0001

The fourth hypothesis, as can be seen from Table IV, "Iranians with five or less years of management experience will have similar scores for technical, human, and conceptual skills as those with six or more years of management experience," cannot be supported as those with six or more years of management experience have significantly higher scores for all the skills. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected because more years of experience in management certainly appears to increase a person's scores on the technical, human and conceptual skills.

Table IV - Iranian Management Skills and Longevity in Management (St. Deviations)

	Number	Technical	Human	Conceptual
Mgmt Exp. < 5 Years	360	23.58 (3.15)	22.94 (3.15)	22.26 (3.5)
Mgmt Exp. > 6 Years	61	25.39 (3.43)	25.87 (3.54)	25.07 (3.41)
TOTAL	421	*t = -4.1; p < 0.0001	*t = -6.59; p < 0.001	*t = -5.82; p < 0.001

This study has demonstrated that there are statistically significant differences in the technical, human and conceptual skills of Iranian respondents. A comparison of the gender variable has shown that Iranian men and women have similar scores for human relations but not for technical and conceptual skills. In regards to age, those who are 31 years of age and older appear to have significantly higher scores than those who are 25 years of age and younger. This means that age makes a difference in having better management skills. Finally, this study has also supported the fact that management experience does help individuals have higher scores on the technical, human and conceptual skills. While younger people often complain that they do not appear to be qualified for most management positions, how are they ever going to become qualified if nobody ever hires them? Perhaps moving through the lower ranks of management position is a best way to gain more experience. At the mean time, natural progression of age can also be a positive factor in making better decisions in higher level management positions.

Pragmatic Implications and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that Iranian participants in this research scored highest on the technical skills, followed by human skills and then conceptual skills. Iranian men in this study gained higher scores in technical and conceptual skills than women. These results are consistent with the finding of Ziefle, Ku'nzer and Bodendieck (2004) who claimed that women usually report lower subjective technical scores.

Although according to Ghorbani and Tung (2007),

Iranian women have access to most fields of study at university and can work in most occupations of their choice and they also appear to be fairly well represented, as compared to other Islamic nations, in the workplace, at managerial/professional positions, and in the legislature, they are often the victims of gender discrimination in the workplace, and receive unfair and biased treatments from their supervisors, colleagues, and/or other organizational members.

Compared with Iranian women, Iranian men have enjoyed much higher status and access to authority, rights, and privileges. Men took public leadership and decision making positions and control of group and family. Moreover, female employees are often considered to be costly and expendable (Currier, 2007) and employers have a preference for male workers, who receive higher pay and more developmental opportunities than their female counterparts. Thus, facing the unemployment crisis in the male-oriented market of Iran is a major issue of concern for women.

As Baron (2007) argued, although personal qualities have a strong influence on the management skills, they can be acquired and taught through appropriate training and guidance (Baum, Locke and Smith, 2001). As top management has long been dominated by men who tend to hire and promote men, it is difficult for women to break through the glass ceiling even though they have achieved a high level of job performance (Peng, Ngo, Shi and Wong, 2009). Therefore, lack of resources, less family, organizational and governmental support beside less social acceptance for development of women's careers may be some explanatory factors for the lower scores of Iranian women in technical and conceptual skills. For development of management skills, robust training, career and workforce planning are absolutely essential (Sanchez, 1994), so as Iranian women have lower privilege to enjoy such kind of programs at their workplaces, it may be explicable why they score lower than their male counterparts.

Research has proved that when female executives receive appropriate support from their organizations and not be discriminated against on the basis of their gender, they outperform their male colleagues in managerial activities, such as motivating subordinates, promoting communication, turning out high-quality work, and being good listeners (Sharpe, 2000). According to Mumford, Peterson, and Childs (1999), skills are trainable or changeable and are not necessarily stable, therefore, implementing training

programs, career development plans and fair treatment toward Iranian female employees would be utilized for both employee self-development in technical and conceptual skills and also career progression within the organization.

As previously stated, skills are not necessarily enduring characteristics of the individual, but rather depend on experience and practice, and therefore may be more adaptable (Reiter-Palmon, Young, Strange, Manning and James, 2006). It may justify the other outcome of this study that why older Iranian and also those who have longer years of management experience score higher than their younger and less experienced counterparts, respectively, in all three areas of management skills. It may be argued that as events emerge over time, and interaction takes place with the consequences that those events bring about, learning takes place. Therefore, the person's accumulated experience from other or similar situations, is likely to have an impact on the interpretation of the anticipated problem. These all can help to describe why a person with older age and longer years of management experience perform well in all three segments of management skills: technical, conceptual and human skills.

The other illumination factor may be the interest of employees to invest most in older, more skilled and experienced workers where the immediate return on their investment is perhaps higher (Bills, 2005). It provides them a superior chance to enjoy better training programs alongside the more comprehensive supports from their superiors to confront challenging situations. This would lead to a positive association among age, years of management experience and greater technical, conceptual and human skills performance of older and more experienced employees.

On the other hand, older workers may feel more threatened by economic or technological change than do younger workers. If so, their perceived need to defend their own tenuous positions might increase their rates of job-related instruction. On this argument, a positive relationship between age and participation in training and educational programs and as the result, a better performance in management skills can be anticipated from the older workers.

Cognitive skills, which themselves are part of conceptual skills, are the most fundamental of the leadership skills (Mumford, Campion and Morgeson, 2007). They are comprised of those skills related to capacities, such as collecting, processing, learning,

disseminating information, and oral and written communication. These primary skills required for a large portion of the activities in which leaders are engaged such as critical thinking ability and the ability to learn and adapt (Carroll and Gillen, 1987).

Leadership research that has examined activities of managers suggests that the majority of their time is spent performing tasks that draw upon conceptual skills and thus, it is proposed that conceptual skills will be required in greater amounts than the other two skill categories across all levels in the organization (Gillen and Carroll, 1985) and specifically, at higher organizational levels as the environment in which they are used grows more complex, novel, and ill-defined (Mumford and Connelly, 1991).

It is also proved that more educated and skilled workers are more likely to work in occupations with greater cognitive/ conceptual skill demands (Farkas, England, Vicknair, and Kilbourne, 1997). In contrast, human capital theory suggests higher levels of education and cognitive skill may enhance worker performance on the job, and lead to higher earnings through higher compensation as a reward for higher productivity among workers holding the same job (Murnane and Levy, 1996). Thus, cognitive skill are valuable as they allow individuals to make substantial vertical "jumps" in the occupational hierarchy rather than small moves that are largely "horizontal" in nature. Based on this argument, the positive relation between more years of management experience and higher scores in conceptual skills of Iranian employees can be explained.

The next category of leadership skill requirements, which has the second level of importance, is referred to as Interpersonal/Human skill requirements because they involve the interpersonal and social skills relating to interacting with and influencing others (Mumford, Marks, Connelly, Zaccaro and Reiter-Palmon, 2000). The result of this study illustrates that, Iranian men and women of this sample have an equal and acceptable performance on this task, although still older Iranians and those with longer years of management experience perform better than their counterparts.

Nevertheless, this research has shown that Iranian respondents score fairly high in all three groups of management skills; therefore, it may be possible to conclude that managers and supervisors should feel comfortable in knowing that most of the Iranian employees are able to perform their tasks based on an acceptable level of managerial skills. Furthermore, this

fact is more valid for male and older groups of employees and also those who have longer years of management experience.

What is more, it can be suggested that training programs be designed to facilitate skill acquisition instead of learning a specific task for Iranians. Skill training, as contrasted to training of tasks allows for more flexible application (Mumford et al., 2007; Sanchez, 1994). Rapid changes in technology, organizational structures, and jobs, require workers to adapt more quickly to the changing requirements of the job. Tasks may change more rapidly than skill requirements. Skills, even occupationally-specific skills, allow for the learning and application of the skill in a different context. There is also considerable evidence for substantial economic returns to skill enhancement (Bassi, Ludwig, McMurrer, and Buren, 2000). Therefore, skill development programs can be designed in the Iranian context with further emphasis on conceptual skills which has the greatest importance among management skills and also is the weakest skills among Iranian respondents of this study.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to this study and one is the limited amount of responses from cities in Iran. The fact that this study was conducted with a small sample population living in just two cities was a further limitation. Future studies might control this variable by expanding the research population to include more respondents from various locations and provinces in Iran. Perhaps different ethnicities, population groups and people working in various industries can be studied separately to see if culture is truly a factor in the management skills of women (and men) professionals. It is also acknowledged that the convenient sample collected by the authors without any funding is small for a big country like Iran which is very diverse and widespread. The authors would like to clarify that this is rather an initial pilot study, not necessarily representative of an entire country or the culture in Iran since Iranians have years of history and socialization among different people groups living there.

Moreover, the study used a self-report measure (questionnaire) that entails the problems of common method variance and consistency bias. For less biased conclusions, further research is required using alternative methods for data collection, such as interviews combined with self-reported data.

In addition, the study was cross-sectional and, therefore, difficult to empirically validate the causal effects. A longitudinal study and in-depth interviews with the participants can better explain the relationships between the various aspects of management skills and age, gender and years of management experience.

It is also worth mentioning that, future studies can focus on other aspects of managerial science in the Iranian context, for example, what management means in Iran as opposed to the U.S. or European conceptions.

Conclusion

This study focused on the technical, human and conceptual skills of men and women respondents in Iran. The results show that there are statistically significant differences in the technical, human and conceptual skills of Iranian respondents based on age, gender and years of management experience. While gender was only partially supported, age and management experience are positively related to higher scores on the management skills. Those who would like to be effective leaders in climbing the ladder of leadership should gain as much management experience as possible. This study has also demonstrated that older people tend to get higher scores on the management skills, and, therefore, might make better managers. This study supports the common sense aspect of believing that age and experience can help enhance a person's level maturity in making better managerial decisions. It is also suggested that skill enhancement programs be designed in the Iranian context with further emphasis on conceptual skills in order to improve Iranians' managerial capabilities.

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