






The competency pattern of faculty deans with emphasis on Academic governance

Mohammad Jamshid. Khazaei ¹, Ali. Khorsandi Taskoh ^{2*}, Samad. Borzoyan ², Enayatollah. Zamanpour ³, Hosein. Abdolahi ²

¹ Ph.D. student in Higher Education Management, Department of Educational Management and Planning, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

² Associate Professor, Department of Educational Management and Planning, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Measurement and Measurement, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: ali.khorsandi@atu.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the aim of designing a competency model for faculty deans based on academic governance. Using an exploratory research approach, the components and subcomponents of the model were identified based on the opinions of higher education experts and scholars. The method of this study is qualitative in terms of data collection, exploratory in terms of purpose, and developmental in terms of results. A data-driven strategy and semi-structured interview tool were used to collect data and information in the qualitative section. The participants in the field study were faculty deans in specialized universities and higher education experts in the country. Twelve participants were interviewed using purposive and snowball sampling methods and with a theoretical saturation criterion. Data and information analysis in the qualitative section was conducted through three-stage coding: "open", "axial", and "selective" using the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (1997) for theory building. By studying the extracted data and information, 462 open codes (initial concepts), 267 concepts, and 30 categories were identified, and these categories and concepts were schematically designed in the form of six main dimensions. The findings of this study showed that, given the centralized policy-making structure of higher education in Iran and the lack of organizational independence of specialized universities, the scientific governance of faculties faces a special situation. As a result, to facilitate the scientific governance of faculties, it is necessary to assign responsibility to faculty deans based on the competencies extracted from this study, such as "policy-making skills", "political skills", "improving educational quality indicators", "soft skills", "system thinking", "responsibility and accountability", "awareness of global governance", "decision-making skills", "interaction with stakeholders", "ethical governance", "academic knowledge and expertise", and "commitment to academic values".

Keywords: Competency model, academic governance, university governance, soft skills, stakeholder engagement, faculty deans

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, significant changes have occurred in higher education around the world, and these changes have had a major impact on educational and research activities (Hwang, Choi, & Shin, 2020). In many countries, higher education governance has become a top priority. Implementing good governance in the country's higher education system will not be possible without expert and creative human resources at all levels of university management, including faculty management, as a subset of university management that is responsible for training expert human resources and developing science and technology needed by society (Munawir et al., 2019). The role of faculty deans in shaping the academic management of universities is very important. Their competence in leadership, decision-making, and collaboration directly affects the success of the institution and the quality of education provided. Studies show that there is no specific model for identifying and determining the qualifications of deans of faculties in Iranian universities, and the individual and professional qualifications of individuals are not given due attention in selecting deans of faculties. Given that identifying abilities, talent management, scientific competencies, and meritocracy play a fundamental role in selecting university management, there is a lack of an appropriate framework based on academic governance for evaluating and determining the qualifications of deans of faculties in order to provide the possibility of their selection and appointment. Accordingly, the main question of the research is how to design a competency model for deans of faculties of universities based on academic governance through planned processes?

Methodology

The present study is a qualitative study, and the strategy used in this research is grounded theory conceptualization. For the systematic design, Strauss and Corbin presented the general outline of this design in 1990 and elaborated on it in detail and practically in 1998. In the first stage of qualitative research, in selecting the sample for in-depth interviews, an attempt was made to use both individuals with university education (faculty members) and individuals with managerial experience in the university field, and sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. In the qualitative stage of research, purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used to select samples for in-depth interviews. The participants in the qualitative part of the research were higher education experts and professors of higher education management and educational management with at least 5 years of service experience and a minimum rank of assistant professor in the field of teaching and research (article, book, thesis, ...), and faculty deans and vice-deans of faculty. Given the limited time and resources, 12 interviews were conducted. Test-retest reliability and intra-subject agreement methods were used to calculate the reliability of the interviews.

Findings

Finally, by studying the extracted data and information, 487 open codes (primary concepts), 292 concepts, and 31 categories were identified. These categories and concepts were mainly obtained from the interviews. These concepts were reviewed and modified by the researcher many times, and similar and identical concepts were placed in the same category.

In this study, the causal factors include: policy-making skills, management skills, background and experience, human resource management, social factors, and personality traits. These factors are the infrastructure and requirements for designing and developing a competency model for faculty deans. The competency model, both in personal and professional fields, provides conditions to create fairer and better conditions for the academic environment and pave the way for the university to progress.

Therefore, it can be said that the competency model of deans of faculties in Iranian universities based on academic governance is the main category of this research; in other words, in order to design and develop the competency model of deans of faculties, special attention should be paid to the performance and specialized and general skills of managers in this category. These skills and capabilities play a pivotal role in the development of this model in societies and universities.

Strategic factors include: strategic planning, soft skills, monitoring and evaluation, specialization and constructive interactions, and national and international communications. The six main categories of this research are selected as the main strategies for designing and developing a competency model for deans of faculties; in other words, in order to design, develop,

and implement the competency model of deans in the academic environment, special attention should be paid to these factors because choosing appropriate strategic principles can accompany individuals in the development of this important matter.

Political interventions, transparency, and benchmarking are three categories that influence strategies as moderators. Moderating conditions are factors that facilitate or interfere with causal conditions; in other words, intervening conditions do not by themselves lead to the creation of a competency pattern, but can affect it through causal conditions. Contextual/environmental conditions are the set of conditions that provide the context for the phenomenon in question and affect behaviors and actions. Contextual conditions affect the focal category and the resulting outcomes; in other words, the series of specific conditions in which strategies and interactions are developed to manage, control, and respond to the phenomenon. It is difficult to distinguish contextual conditions from causal conditions because a series of factors can play two roles; training and empowerment of managers, environmental factors, modern technology, and knowledge management affect the competency pattern of managers.

The outcomes are the output of applying appropriate strategies in developing and implementing the competency model for deans of faculties in Iranian universities based on academic governance. In this study, the categories of: participation and cooperation, efficiency and effectiveness, promotion of specialized indicators, meritocracy, creativity and innovation, responsibility and accountability, and systemic thinking are among the outcomes of applying appropriate strategies in developing and implementing the competency model for deans of faculties.

Conclusion

The competency of deans and academic leadership is essential for effective governance in higher education institutions. University deans are expected to solve complex challenges while creating a suitable environment for academic excellence. Their leadership style significantly affects organizational performance and stakeholder participation, which can be examined through several key aspects. Political interventions in the selection of deans of faculty can significantly affect the governance and management of higher education institutions. These interventions often manifest themselves through political appointments, which can lead to inefficiency and lack of independence in educational management. The impact of such interventions is multifaceted and affects not only administrative processes but also the wider educational environment. Political interference in the appointment of educational managers, including deans, can lead to inefficiency in management. Such appointments often prioritize political loyalty over competence, which can undermine the independence and merit-based selection processes that are essential for effective educational governance. Finally, practical suggestions are provided in line with the research findings: There is a need for university presidents to analyze and examine each of the competencies on the academic governance agenda so that by better understanding each of these competencies, they can be more effective and acceptable in achieving goals in the university environment; Prioritizing six factors, causal, pivotal, strategic, environmental, mediating, and consequential, should be emphasized; Relevant officials should discuss the specific prioritization presented in this study for different dimensions of competence and pay attention to it when selecting university leaders in the Iranian educational system. Since the effectiveness of leaders' actions includes the leaders' abilities to coach, inspire, and motivate followers, as well as increase their participation in leadership decisions. The main weakness in the quality of leadership at this university is due to the shortcomings of leadership competencies. For example, many faculty members indicated in their interviews in this study that their leaders should take leadership courses to improve their leadership competencies. Other shortcomings identified by the faculty were the lack of sufficient innovation and creativity potential of managers, discrimination between faculty members, and being more like managers than leaders; Therefore, these shortcomings in principal leadership from faculty perceptions in their interviews could be the main reason for the effectiveness of administrators at the mid-level but not higher.

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