



Identification of the Indicators of Employee Career Path Development in a Health Organization

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Abstract

Introduction: Human resources are the strategic capital of any organization. In addition to employee training, human resource development includes career development considering appointment indicators. Therefore, the present study aimed to identify general and specific indicators of career path development for administrative staff of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences.

Methods: This descriptive-analytical study was performed in 2021. The study population consisted of managers, directors, and experts in administrative affairs of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences who were selected using the census method. A researcher-made questionnaire including demographic information, semi-open questions, and open-ended questions was used to collect data. Descriptive statistics on SPSS₂₃ as well as a five-step framework analysis were applied to analyze the data using MAX QDA10.

Results: A total of 107 questionnaires were completed and returned. Public Administration (Human Resource) field (53.27%), Bachelor's Degree (46.73%), 1-5 years' employment history (50.47%), and indigenouness (56.07%) were general indicators of the career path development among the individuals in administrative positions. Gender (86.92%) and employment status (56.07%) were not among the minimum qualifications for administrative career path development. Communication skills and familiarity with employment laws and regulations with 22 repetitions were the most important training needs of the administrative employees, and practical, experimental, and fieldwork with 27 repetitions was the most appropriate administration training method.

Conclusion: Particular attention should be paid to the indicators of staff appointment in any organization. Therefore, the indicators identified in this study can be used by human resource managers for career path development among administrative staff.

Keywords: Indicator, Career path development, Succession planning, Administrative staff, Health

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Introduction

Human resources are the vital and strategic capital of any organization. This is especially true in health organizations since they are highly dependent on their workforce (1, 2). Also, quantity, quality, speed, cost, and accuracy of health care depend critically on the human resources (3). Today, healthcare organizations are facing the challenges of workforce reduction, aging workforce, and retirement of experienced individuals (4). Therefore, succession planning is a key strategy to ensure leadership continuity and talent development in these organizations (5).

Succession planning is defined as “a planned and systematic effort by an organization to ensure continuity of leadership in key positions, and to preserve intellectual capital for the future” (6). One of the main elements and processes of succession planning is career path development (4, 7). In this process, people are identified, developed, and evaluated for future job positions (8). Career path development leads to financial stability, systematic transfer of knowledge and wisdom between the employees, increased innovation, higher organizational performance, and reduced recruitment costs (6, 9-11).

Various studies have identified indicators of employee career path development and succession planning. For example, Sibbald et al. (2017) in Ontario, Canada, mentioned work experience, specialized and inherent knowledge, training, and documentation as important factors in the career path development of hospital leaders (2). Weiss and Drake (2007) designed an electronic database for succession planning of nursing leaders in America. Demographic information, educational certifications, work experience, and completed training were the indicators of the form (12). Ghazanfari et al. (2020) demonstrated that effective components of appointing managers in Mazandaran higher education centers included diagnostic skills, decision-making skills, and professional skills, respectively (13). Albad et al. (2020), in a review study, identified effective verbal communication, persuasion and negotiation, professional experience and skills, creativity and innovation, conflict resolution, team building, and key management tasks as effective components and indicators of succession planning in the higher education system (14). Azar and Soliemani (2017) reported that policy setting, candidate development, and candidate evaluation were the components of succession planning in Ardabil Islamic Azad University (15).

While succession planning is recognized as an essential strategy, less than 10% of healthcare organizations have a formal career path development plan (16). Although most of the positions considered for organizational succession planning are at senior administrative levels, succession planning not only is useful for top executive positions, but also can be used to create personnel pools for any position in the organization (10). Therefore, health care managers should be aware of the importance of succession planning and actively participate in this process (4).

On the other hand, organizations implement succession plans by training employees and assessing them to identify the right people with the right skills for the right jobs at the right time (15). An effective employee performance appraisal system must have appropriate and accurate evaluation indicators to make a judgment or decision. Also, the existence of practical indicators is the first step in the evaluation and appointment of human resources (17). Due to the importance of career path development for administrative staff and since the researchers did not succeed in finding a study that identifies the indicators of the career path development of these employees in the health system, this study aimed to identify general and specific indicators of career

path development for administrative staff of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences.

Materials and methods

This descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study was performed (2021) at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. The study population consisted of 191 managers, directors, and experts in administrative affairs of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences who were selected using the census method. A total of 107 questionnaires were completed and returned. The response rate was 56%.

The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of three parts. The first part included demographic information of the study participants including age, gender, level of education, employment status, place of work, and employment history. The second part included 6 semi-open questions related to the field of study, degree and employment history required for the selection of administrative staff, importance of indigenous employment for optimal performance of administrative staff, importance of gender for the selection of administrative staff, and importance of employment status for optimal performance of administrative staff. The third part contained 2 open-ended questions about the training needs and appropriate training methods for career development among the administrative staff.

First, the draft questionnaire was designed by the manager of organizational development and administrative transformation of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences according to his field and work experience and based on the results of various studies (2, 4, 12, 16, 18-20). Then, this draft was reviewed in a scientific committee consisting of 10 managers and vice presidents of human resources of the university. The feedback of the committee members was collected, and their opinions were applied in the questionnaire. To confirm the face validity of the questionnaire, 11 human resource managers were interviewed face to face and the ambiguities of the instrument were evaluated. The content validity of the questionnaire was measured using two qualitative and quantitative approaches. In order to confirm the qualitative content validity, human resources experts (n=11) examined the questionnaire in terms of grammar, use of appropriate words, importance of questions, and placement of questions in the right place. Quantitative content validity was analyzed using Content Validity Index (CVI) and based on Waltz and Bausell's method (21). Experts (n=11) evaluated the relevance, fluency, and clarity

of each item based on a 4-point Likert scale. Hyrkas et al. suggested a score of 0.79 and above to accept the CVI of a question (22). Finally, the CVI values of all questionnaire items were above the minimum acceptable range. Therefore, the validity of the researcher-made questionnaire was confirmed.

The research proposal was approved and the code of ethics (IR.SUMS.REC.1399.1227) was obtained from Shiraz University of Medical Sciences and all the required permits were obtained. The participants who volunteered to take part in the study were provided with sufficiently detailed information on the objectives of the study. After obtaining informed consent and ensuring the confidentiality of their information, we asked the participants to fill out the questionnaire.

Descriptive statistics on SPSS₂₃, as well as a five-step framework analysis were applied to analyze the data using MAX QDA10. First, the descriptive answers and texts were read and re-read several times for data analysis. Then, for thematic framework analysis, the ideas that came up repeatedly were categorized into similar themes or codes. Next, data indexing was performed. The data were then summarized in a code table based on the thematic framework. The data were finally combined and the main themes, sub-themes, and codes were identified and presented. Guba and Lincoln's trustworthiness criteria including confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability were used to ensure the rigor and accuracy of data coding (23). Also, in order to establish the reliability of the results, two researchers performed the thematic analysis individually and then compared their findings, and disagreements were resolved via discussions to reach a consensus. Finally, indicators of career development among administrative staff were identified.

Results

The mean age of the participants was 41.62 ± 5.05 years. Also, most of the respondents were male (54.2%), with a master's degree (45.8%); they had 11-20 years of employment history (66.4%), permanent employment status (54.2%), and were working at the health headquarters of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences (46.73%) (Table 1).

The majority of the participants believed that the Public Administration (Human Resources) field (53.27%), Bachelor's degree (46.73%), and 1-5 years of employment history (50.47%) were required for career path development among the individuals who had begun their career in administrative positions. Also, most of the participants stated that gender (86.92%) and employment status (56.07%) were not among the minimum qualifications for administrative career path development; however, indigenouslyness (56.07%) was required for administrative career development (Table 2).

An analysis of the participants' responses showed that the training needs and essential skills for career path development among administrative staff included 6 main themes and 30 sub-themes as follows: Organizational behavior management (eight sub-themes), Human resource management (five sub-themes), Manager Responsibilities (six sub-themes), Public management (six sub-themes), General Administration Training program (three sub-themes), and Specific Administration Training program (two sub-themes). Also, communication skills and familiarity with employment laws and regulations with 22 repetitions were the most important training needs of the administrative staff in the process of career path development (Table 3).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the 107 study participants

Demographic characteristics	Descriptive statistics	N (%)
Gender	Male	58 (54.2)
	Female	49 (45.8)
Level of education	Associate's degree	11 (10.28)
	Bachelor's degree	47 (43.92)
	Master's degree	49 (45.8)
Employment history	1-10 years	32 (29.9)
	11-20 years	71 (66.4)
	21-30 years	4 (3.7)
Employment status	Permanent	58 (54.2)
	Temporary-to- permanent	6 (5.61)
	Contractual	43 (40.19)
Place of work	Hospitals and health centers	40 (37.38)
	Health Headquarters and Universities	50 (46.73)
	Faculty	17 (15.89)

Table 2: The Participants' opinions about general indicators of career path development among the administrative staff

Variables	Descriptive statistics	N (%)
Required field of study	Health services management	14 (13.08)
	Human resources and public administration	57 (53.27)
	All management courses	36 (33.65)
Required degree	Bachelor's degree	50 (46.73)
	Master's degree	40 (37.38)
	Ph.D.	17 (15.89)
Required employment history	1-5 years	54 (50.47)
	6-10 years	42 (39.25)
	11-15 years	11 (10.28)
Importance of gender	Yes	14 (13.08)
	No	93 (86.92)
Importance of indigenusness	Yes	60 (56.07)
	No	47 (43.93)
Importance of employment status	Yes	47 (43.93)
	No	60 (56.07)

Table 3: Participants' opinions about the training needs and essential skills for career path development among the administrative staff

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency
Organizational behavior management	Communication skills	22
	Collaborative management and teamwork	15
	Emotional Intelligence	14
	Crisis Management	10
	The art of negotiation	6
	Conflict management and dispute resolution	2
	Stress management	2
	Client appreciation	1
Human resource management	Job analysis	13
	Employee performance assessment	13
	Employee recruiting	12
	Succession planning	12
	Meritocracy	9
Manager Responsibilities	Decision making skills	9
	Directing and Leading	6
	Strategic and operational planning	6
	Coordinating	2
	Organizing	2
	Controlling and monitoring	1
Public Management	Time Management	10
	Organizational and innovation creativity	4
	Systematic thinking	3
	Financial Management	3
	Quality improvement models	2
	Meeting management	1
General Administration Training program	ICDL (Information Technology)	7
	Documentation Principles	6
	Rules of administrative correspondence	5
Specific Administration Training program	Familiarity with employment laws and regulations	22
	Familiarity with administrative and recruitment affairs	9

Also, appropriate training methods for career advancement among administrative staff included 3 main themes and 10 sub-themes. In-person training, synchronous e-learning, and asynchronous

e-learning were the basic training methods. In addition, practical, experimental, and fieldwork with 27 repetitions was the most appropriate training method from the participants' perspective (Table 4).

Table 4: Participants' opinions on training methods for career path development among administrative staff

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency
In-person training	Practical, experimental and field work	27
	Workshops	17
	Teacher-pupil	5
	Role playing in small groups	3
	Team working and partnership working	2
Synchronous e-learning	In-service virtual training courses	13
	Video conferencing	5
	Webinar	2
Asynchronous e-learning	Multimedia courses	7
	Booklets	4

Discussion

Today, managers of organizations have realized that supporting human resources and identifying and recruiting experts and qualified people for critical jobs can lead to success and competitive advantage for the organization (14). Since one of the challenges with which organizations are faced is the lack of local indicators appropriate to the job and organizational needs, the present study aimed to identify general and specific indicators of career path development for administrative staff of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences.

Public Administration (Human Resource) field, Bachelor's degree, 1-5 years of employment history, and indigenouness were required for career path development among the individuals who had begun their career in administrative positions. It seems that graduates with a management degree have more ability and specialized knowledge to work in administrative positions. Of course, having a degree in Public Administration (Human Resource) better qualifies a person to serve in administrative positions since its courses are more closely related to the job duties. Also, Bachelor's degree may prove sufficient to move up an administration career ladder. On the other hand, work experience is one of the major factors affecting career development and talent selection for identifying new managers and appointing senior managers. Work experience helps to gain knowledge of the organizational and political climate and administrative law. Most of the participants in the present study pointed to the positive effects of indigenous employment on optimal performance of aboriginal administrative staff since they are fully acquainted with the regional circumstances, culture, and customs; are more accessible; put more effort into improving their hometown; have greater affective commitment, empathy and local bias, higher job satisfaction due to an ideal distance between workplace and home; enjoy acceptance in the

workplace, improved employee retention, full-time and permanent work; and also demonstrate better performance due to lack of transportation problems.

In this regard, leadership competencies in succession planning are divided into three areas: science, art, and leader-within. The science area deals with financial management, human resource management, and practical knowledge. The art area consists of human resource leadership skills and shared decision making. The leader-within area focuses on personal and professional accountability through reflection (19). Sibbald et al. (2017) acknowledged the importance of past experience in succession planning and argued that less than 5 years of work experience was insufficient for healthcare leaders in Ontario, Canada (2). Nogueira et al. (2019), in Brazil, stated that nursing leaders should be selected from nurses with at least 5 years of work experience (8). Jalali et al. (2019) stated that indigenouness was one of the effective components in the appointment of health network managers (20). The results of these studies were consistent with those of the present study.

In addition, the results showed that gender and employment status did not affect the employee career development. Although gender equality includes fairness in all aspects of life for women and men, evidence showed that in many countries gender norms in leadership positions were at the disadvantage of women. For example, Muktar et al. (2021) pointed out the weak career development path of women in the Ethiopian health sector, and the individual, social and organizational challenges of developing their career path (24). Also, the career path of female health workers in Nigeria and Egypt has been disrupted due to family duties and in the United Kingdom and the United States due to unfavorable and inflexible work environments (25, 26). In this regard, organizational support in the form of succession planning, training and development, and recognition of women's role, family members supporting women, and breaking

social stereotypes and institutionalized norms related to the leadership positions to men will be effective in women's career development (24, 27). Unlike the present study, Jalali et al. (2019) (20) and Mehtarak et al. (2017) (5) believed that the type of employment status and job security were important in succession planning.

Moreover, communication skills and familiarity with employment laws and regulations were found to be the most important training themes administrative staff need for career path development. Human resource planning and training are the critical levers of human resource development. Training programs should be aligned with organizational goals and employee skill development. Also, employee training and development is one of the effective employee retention strategies (28). Karimi et al. (2021) introduced the ability of communicating effectively with colleagues, building and strengthening organizational relationships, strengthening the art of expression, and sharing information as the communication skills needed for succession planning (29). Etemadian et al. (2020) defined effective communication as one of the critical factors for succession planning (27). Foster (2019) stated that strong interpersonal communication skills and effective problem solving were the factors influencing the career path development of administrators in US hospitals (4). The results of these studies were consistent with those of the present study.

In this regard, practical, experimental, and field work was the most appropriate training method from the participants' point of view. LaCross et al. (2019) confirmed the effectiveness of a 3-month experiential and practical training course for nursing leadership in a succession planning program (16). Sibbald et al. (2017) described mentoring, collaborative teams, and networking with other hospital managers as the methods of knowledge transfer during succession planning (2). Therefore, identifying the required competencies, as well as training methods, was the most important dimension of implementation of the career path development. In the same line with the results of this study, Dawson and Phillips confirmed the role of knowledge development and training in career development (30). According to the obtained results, it is suggested that managers and policy makers in the field of health human resources should pay attention to the indicators of employee career path development. In this case, career development in health organizations will probably be implemented better.

One of the most important limitations of this study was the limited access to human resource managers and the low response rate to the questionnaires. The generalizability to a wider population is unclear and further studies may be needed.

Conclusion

The selection and appointment of administrative staff require careful attention. Public Administration (Human Resource) field, Bachelor's degree, 1-5 years of employment history, and indigenouness were general indicators of the career path development among the individuals who had begun their career in administrative positions. Also, communication skills, familiarity with employment laws and regulations, and participation in practical and experimental training courses were specific indicators of career development among these employees. Therefore, particular attention should be paid to these indicators for career path development among administrative staff.

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Authors' Contribution

NN and NB designed the study and its overall methodology; they also finalized the data synthesis and the article itself. NN, NB and AY searched all the databases, retrieved the sources, and prepared the initial draft of the article. NN, NB and MV contributed to data analysis and edited the article. The study was supervised and finalized by NN and NB. All authors have read and approved the manuscript.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was approved by Shiraz University of Medical Sciences ethics committee with the ID number of IR.SUMS.REC.1399.1227. We obtained consent from the study participants.

Consent for publication

There is no problem in publishing the results. All the included databases and materials are available for public use.

Conflict of Interest: None declared.

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