Investigating Soft Skills among Information Technology Managers in Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines

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Abstract. Soft skills are among the many skills that managers should possess in managing an ever changing and dynamic working environment. This paper investigates the rating of the soft skills among IT managers in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines. A total of 95 IT managers in Philippine HEIs were evaluated in the study. The study reveals an aggregate mean of 4.46 which has a description of strongly agree is reflected in the respondent's rating of the soft skills. The study further reveals that soft skill has no significant relationship with gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, employment status, teaching load assignment, and type of the institution. On the other hand, soft skill is statistically significant at .05 level of confidence with the immediate supervisor of the IT managers.

Keywords: Information Technology Management, Soft Skills, Information Technology in Education

1. Background of the Study

Studies show that having an IT management in school helps improve in the centralization of information and communication technologies. The management of IT department refers to the office that takes charge of all aspects of IT in the institution and is typically headed by a manager or a director. "The IT leadership team typically includes IT managers accountable for data centers, phone lines, new application solutions, and the human resources needed to perform all of these IT responsibilities. IT managers responsible for planning, delivering, and implementing new strategic IT solutions are often physically located alongside the business managers they support." [1]. Due to the complex tasks in IT management, effective and efficient management of the firm's IT resources has become essential and crucial in the business. For IT to play a strategic role, IT managers must focus on managing three types of IT assets: technology, relationship, and human assets [1] [2] [3]. According to Mann, an analyst in Gartner cited by [3], the best practice in any IT organization is to focus first on people before technology introduction and implementation. In an article "The Hard Facts about Soft Skills" mentioned that "Computerworld's 2007 hiring and skills survey reported that IT executives are increasingly looking for staffs who demonstrate a broad range of soft skills in addition to their technical abilities" [4].

Soft skill is a sociological term relating to a person's emotional intelligence quotient, the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people [5]. It is defined as personal characteristics that improve an individual's interpersonal relations, job performance and career prospects [6]. They often associated soft skills with personality traits, such as: optimism, common sense, responsibility, a sense of humor, integrity. Accordingly, it can be associated also with the abilities that can be practiced but require the individual to genuinely like other people such as: empathy, teamwork, leadership, communication, good manners, negotiation, sociability, and the ability to teach. It's often said that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get and keep the job. Studies reveal that a majority of entry- level jobs required these types of social and interpersonal skills, and in one study, more than 85 percent of employers' ranked soft skills among their most important hiring criteria. National inventories consistently find that employers list skills in communication, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving along with personal qualities such as self-esteem and motivation as critical for workforce productivity. [7] IT executives favour candidates who understand the business process, can work well with a team, know how to get their points across, are inquisitive, use initiative, and are willing to take risks [4]. It clearly shows that technical skills are not the only requirements in IT management. Instead, technical skills are being recognized as one of the minimal

requirements for a manager. The need for excellent interpersonal, or soft skills, are necessary requisites for success. [8]

In this paper, ratings of the soft skills as perceived by the IT managers in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines are presented. Specifically, this paper discusses the rating of the IT managers' agreement and disagreement on the statements about the soft skills they possessed. It further presents the significant relationships of the IT managers' soft skills in terms of their age, status, gender, highest educational attainment, type of the institution, employment status and assignment of teaching loads. This paper is a derived document from the study on the landscape of IT in the HEIs in the Philippines [9]. The study was a descriptive-correlative and utilized a survey method. The respondents are IT managers in HEIs in the Philippines. In consideration of time, there are only 95 HEIs were included in the analysis of data, 15 of which are public colleges and universities and 80 of which are private colleges and universities. Moreover, the survey questionnaire is composed of close-ended questions that were adapted from the administrator's evaluation tool of Silliman University. Respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agree or disagree with each of the statements given in the survey according to the five alternative choices: 5-Strongly agree, 4-Agree, 3-Moderate, 2-Disagree and 1-Strongly disagree.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. Soft Skills among IT Managers in the HEIs

The study reveals an aggregate mean of 4.46 which has a description of *strongly agree* on the statements related to soft skills. This shows that these statements are true of the IT managers most of the time. Specifically, the statement on "accepting limitations and welcoming constructive criticisms intended to improve the respondent's performance" has the highest weighted mean of 4.63. This implies that the statement is true to the respondents most of the time. Constructive criticism is defined as the way to become skills and develop the managers both personally and professionally [10]. Taking into this account, the result of this study suggests that the IT managers in the HEIs have the ability to learn in two different but equally important perspectives, the personal and professional aspects. The result may entail that they have gained a place of respect and they have performed collaborative approach to problem-solving among his/her colleagues in school. It also suggests that welcoming constructive criticism is also welcoming judgment given for five different purposes [11]. These purposes provide relative implications to the result of this study. First, accepting limitations and welcoming constructive criticism offer IT managers external views of their performance to compare with self oriented views of their work. Secondly, it helps the IT manager recognize or interpret ways to improve past performances and/or ways to improve on future attempts. Third, it demonstrates to IT managers that their efforts merit judgment. Fourthly, it shows genuine interest and appreciation for an IT manager's effort. Lastly, it is encouraging, affirming, and supportive for the purpose of building confidence among IT managers in the HEIs.

The statement "I promote open communication among members, students, colleagues and community." was rated *strongly agree* with a weighted mean of 4.62. The result of this study shows that the statement is true of the respondents most of the time. The dawn of mobile and Internet technologies have revolutionized our accessibility to open communication. The digital age provides the ability to create open communication cultures within the organizations that comprise the business society and other institutions [12]. IT managers must be able to effectively communicate with their bosses, peers, and subordinates; otherwise what is desired will not happen and the efficiency of the managed team will decrease [13]. The result may entail that the IT managers in the HEIs actively promote and facilitate open communication through the use of an open door policy. Open door policy, according to Morris, means that literally every manager's door is open to all stakeholders in any institution with the purpose to encourage open communication, feedback, and discussion about any matter of importance to an employee as well as the students, colleagues and member in the entire learning community. Likewise, the result of this study may also mean that the IT managers see to it that important information and feedback reaches the management who can utilize such information.

Another *strongly agree* rating is on the statement "I demonstrate fairness in dealing with my constituents such as colleagues, students, others." with a weighted mean of 4.62. The result shows that the statement is

true of the respondents most of the time. This implies that the IT managers in the HEIs have integrity. In the chapter on "Integrity" of the book "The Seven Heavenly Virtues of Leadership" states that good leaders who have integrity are those with values that include fairness and relationship [14]. The role of fairness as a consideration in the workplace, has demonstrated that fair treatment has important effects on individual employee attitudes and individual behaviors [15] [16]. Guided with the former findings, the result of this study may imply that IT managers in the HEIs have positive attitudes on satisfaction and commitment as well as pleasant behaviors on absenteeism and citizenship.

"Being a role model of harmonious working relations" is rated also as *strongly agree*. It implies that the statement is true to the respondents most of the time. Specifically, being a role model of harmonious working relations with colleagues ($\bar{x}$ = 4.48), students ($\bar{x}$ = 4.47), faculty ($\bar{x}$ = 4.46), staff ($\bar{x}$ = 4.52), community members ($\bar{x}$ = 4.35), and alumni ($\bar{x}$ = 4.22). The very nature of the computer revolution indicates that the ethic of the future will have a global character. It will be global in the sense that it will address the totality of human actions and relations cited by [17]. Harmony in human relations is one of the essential teachings by Confucianism [18]. It is noteworthy to say that the result of this study may entail that the IT managers show piety, respect, and care for his/her staffs. It further suggests that the respondents demonstrate active peer-to-peer relations and social interaction with their staff. Responsible computer professionals, like IT managers, therefore, will be aware of possible conflicts of interest and try to avoid them [17]. IT managers should aim at designing "working relations" which "sustain the visible and invisible work required in constructing technical systems and put them to use" [19].

The statement "I generate alternative approaches to solving problems" is rated with a weighted mean of 4.52 which is described *strongly agree.* This entails that the statement is always true to the respondents. This may imply also that the IT managers in HEIs are confident problem solvers who are knowledgeable and have a sense of initiative. Problem-solving is a key and fundamental skill for every manager [20]. Likewise, in another article at geekWise.com, described problem-solving as a critical skill for information technology employment. Problem solving skills as mental procedures that allow a person to take on a problem, choose the best technique, and find the best solution to the problem [21]. It is added that problem solving skills are very imperative to individuals and/or a team, because they provide manager the ability to face a problem head on, utilize the techniques learned and arrive to a desired outcome, thus solving the problem with the least difficulty possible in the most effective and effective way.

"Adhering collective decisions to foster university or institutional goals" is described as *strongly agree* by the respondents with a weighted mean of 4.51. This implies that this statement is true to the respondents most of the time. This further entails that the IT managers possessed an ability to listen and discuss uncertainty and risk with the other colleagues in the institution. The essence of management is making decisions [22]. Managers, like the IT managers, are constantly obliged to evaluate alternatives and make decisions regarding a wide range of matters. Decision making involves uncertainty and risk, and decision makers have varying degrees of risk aversion. Decision making also involves qualitative and quantitative analyses and some decision makers prefer one form of analysis over the other. Decision making can be affected not only by rational judgment, but also by nonrational factors such as the personality of the decision maker, peer pressure, the organizational situation, and others. However, some collective decision exercises are often highly dependent upon individual perspectives and opinion, which are subjective in nature [23].

Lastly, the statement "I inspire my colleagues to enhance interpersonal awareness" is rated by the respondents as *strongly agree* with a weighted mean of 4.34. This suggests that the statement is always true to the respondents. Interpersonal awareness is a spectrum that differentiates how people desire and gather awareness for individuals across three different social groupings: home inhabitants, intimate socials, and extended socials [24]. The study may imply that IT managers in HEIs coordinate, connect and share personal knowledge among his/her colleagues in school. Interpersonal skills are the life skills we use every day to communicate and interact with other people, individually and in groups.

2.2. Relationship Between the Profile and Soft Skills' Rating of the IT Managers in the HEIs

The result shows that the computed x^2 value of gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, employment status, teaching load assignment, and type of the institution are less than the tabular x^2 value. It means that soft skill has *no significant relationship* with gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, employment status, teaching load assignment, and type of the institution. It implies that these variables do not influence or affect the soft skills of the IT managers in the Philippine HEIs. On the other hand, it shows that the computed x^2 value between the immediate supervisor and soft skills is greater than the tabular x^2 value. It means that immediate supervisor is *statistically significant* at .05 level of confidence with soft skill. It implies that soft skill's rating is influenced by the immediate head or supervisor of the IT managers.

3. Conclusion and Recommendation

IT managers in the Philippine HEIs perceived themselves to have possessed the soft skills needed in the ever changing and dynamic working environment. They valued soft skills as equally important skills in running a growing business. Because businesses are becoming less dictatorial and more social, the understanding and value of soft skills to an organization are growing daily [25].

IT managers in the Philippine HEIs are good communicator. They have open communication and demonstrate fairness in the workplace. They strongly believe that they accept limitations and strongly welcome constructive criticisms intended to improve their performance. IT managers in the Philippine HEIs are great motivator. They strongly believe that they have the skills in inspiring their colleagues to enhance interpersonal and intrapersonal awareness, and of global issues and concerns. IT managers in the HEIs in the Philippines demonstrate of being a good leader. Evidence to this is being a role model of harmonious working relations with their staff, colleagues, students, faculty, community members, and alumni.

Possessing soft skills is challenging and crucial. Soft skill helps shaped the manager's personality and his/her working behavior and attitude. It is highly recommended that IT managers in the Philippine HEIs should keep in possessing the soft skills. However, they should also not forget to equate and balance soft skills with the hard skills in leading IT management. The importance of soft skills has increased significantly in the knowledge economy [26]. It is highly suggested also that HEIs in the Philippines should continue giving importance and value soft skills in their organization and consider providing enhancement trainings and workshops on soft skills. Although some would disagree, others advocate that these are skills that can be taught and learned rather than skills that are innate or genetic [8].

4. Acknowledgements

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