**What Knowledge, Skills and Abilities do Managers need in order to perform their tasks effectively?**

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## Introduction

The technology advancement today has changed the behavior of the people in every aspects of their lives, including the nature of working in organizations. For managers, a broad range yet applicable set of knowledge, skills and abilities is crucial in order to manage the staff effectively. The top management team, generally the directors, always try to seek for managers that could impact the organization by performing management task effectively according to their competency. Conversely, the team members or employees, always expect their managers to be creditable to lead and manage the team in order to sustain the robustness of the working group. In this paper, an overview of KSA model is given to cover the bond and differences between knowledge, skills and ability. Subsequently, this paper will identify the competencies in terms of knowledge, skills and ability that would contribute to the effectiveness of managers in performing management task. To conclude, the author reassures the importance of the competencies identified in order to increase the efficiency of a manager.

## The KSA Model

Knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) is a competency model widely adopted in assessing the qualification of an individual, generally by recruiters (Indeed.com, 2020). The first element, knowledge, is the basic information or concept regarding the topic that should be known by the individual. On the other hand, the term “skills” can be categorized into two group: hard skills, also known as technical skills, and soft skills. The technical skills are developed by applying and practicing the theory and concept as covered by the term “knowledge” whereas the industry-ready knowledge could be acquired through formal (education) and informal (working experiences) channel (López-Bassols, 2002). The relative importance of technical knowledge and skills varies depends on the scope of the position and the focus of an organization. For instance, Katz (1955) proposed that the first line managers would have clear objective and focus on technical skills, whereas the senior managers would focus more on strategic and political skills or conceptual skill. Additionally, the soft skills characterize the relationship with people or the way an individual approaches life and work (Frank and Ellen, 2019). On top of that, soft skills are often interchangeable with the third element of the KSA Model, which is the abilities. The ability of an individual is the necessary personal psychological condition and character in achieving certain objective (Hongzhang, 2003). These two elements are similar but there are subtle differences, for example communication is a skill, but the ability to communicate well is affected by other factors such as confidence and language fluency. In other words, ability is the capability to accomplish a task, where the skill is the actual performing of a task.

## Technical Knowledge and Technical Skills

As mentioned in the section above, the technical knowledge and skills requirements vary depends on the position of an individual and the focus area of the organization. To put it more simply, technical knowledge and skills are rather generic. As an example, in the Information Technology (IT) workforce, López-Bassols (2002) distinguishes the characteristics of different IT skill sets into three categories:

* Professional – to use advanced IT tools and/or to develop, repair and create them.
* Applied – to utilize simple IT tools in general workplace (in non-IT jobs).
* Basic – to use IT for basic task.

López-Bassols’s way of categorizing has pointed out that a relevant set of technical knowledge and skills are crucial in an organization. One might argue that managers should focus more on soft skills rather than technical skill. However, the first line managers, usually tend to concentrate on operations and technical matter (Katz, 1995). A task can be achieved in an effective manner when the managers utilize the resources available, for instance, the set of knowledge and skills of team members. In order to achieve that, the managers need to possess the similar set of knowledge and skills to extend the capability of each individual. Thus, a specialized set of technical knowledge and skills is crucial for managers to utilize the resources available. Nevertheless, as technological globalization is speeding rapidly, most of the career position involve the use of basic IT tools such as Microsoft Offices or basic device settings. These basic IT skills might not necessarily be a requirement, but they would be beneficial by increasing the efficiency of an individual. To illustrate, Carnevale *et al.* (1988) suggested that the presence of highly skilled workforce to use technology will provide the organization a competitive edge. As can be seen, a set of job specific knowledge and skills is the key for a manager to perform business task effectively. Nonetheless, a set of contemporary skill such as the basic IT skill mentioned, could be advantageous for managers in performing tasks and increasing the manager’s creditability.

## Soft Skills and Abilities

On the other hand, soft skills and abilities are the personal traits and behaviors that a person displays when connecting with others or dealing with events. The most significant competency of a manager, could be emotional intelligence, also known as Emotional Quotient (EQ). Matthews *et al*. (2004) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to identify emotions, understand emotions, express emotions, assimilate emotions and manage the emotions in self and others. Emotional intelligence is often associated with other inter-relatable competencies such as communication skills. A communication is performed effectively when the encoder passes the message correctly and the decoder receive the message accurately (Shannon, 1948). Yet, the message is never transmitted plainly, and it is normal when people “decorate” the message subconsciously with their own emotions and feelings through non-verbal elements such as tone, body language, eye contact and facial expression. The situation grows critical when either the sides (encoder or decoder) enhances the negative emotions due to unpleasant circumstances, this is where conflict happens. The negative consequences of conflicts in workspace includes decrease in productivity by work disruption or resignation of talented employee which both would eventually cause negative impact to the organization (Jha, 2012). Having trained with a high level of emotional intelligence, a manager is able to quickly aware and manage his/her own emotions in any situation with a clear mind without offending anyone (in most scenario), in other words, not being dominated by the emotions. For example, in a tense conversation, a manager with high level of emotional intelligence would be able to notice the emotions of others and be more cautious with the speech and response, consequently, a conflict is avoided. Moreover, communication skill is vital for employees in any organization with diverse culture. It would be beneficial when everyone is able to empathize, which is defined as the ability to understand others’ emotion and respect every culture in order to create an inclusive environment. This is a broad yet critical element of communication skill since the managers would have more opportunity to represent the organization in a multinational platform. Furthermore, the ability to communicate effectively would enhance the credibility of a manager especially when reporting to the directors and during a meeting or presentation. This is because the audience could grasp the main idea presented immediately through an effective communication and respond to it in a constructive manner. Ultimately, communication skill is a crucial soft skill that a manager should possess in order to achieve target more effectively. However, the significance of emotional intelligence in communication is non-negligible.

Next, the critical thinking skill is another momentous skill for a manager. Robert (1886) referred critical thinking as the mental processes, strategies and representations that people use to solve problem, make decisions and study new concepts. The essence of this skill in the current context is the part about solving problem and making decision. Each manager is expected to contribute to the organization by solving the dedicated business or management problem through utilizing the available resources in a constructive manner. For this reason, the managers need to think critically upon their team player and their own custom set of technical knowledge and skills, then process them with other strategies to generate an innovative yet effective result. Moreover, critical thinking is the process of forming an opinion through careful analysis and judgement (Agnew, 1985). A manager with strong critical thinking skill will be able to make constructive decision in the busy yet frequently changing business environment. For instance, senior managers or directors of an organization need to think critically on top of the strategic plans to prepare for organizational change or other decision that could greatly on the organization. To summarize, the ability to think critically is essential for a manager in relation to problem solving and decision making in an organization. On top of that, senior managers or directors with strong critical thinking will be able to determine the state and direction of an organization effectively.

## Conclusion

The challenges in management arises as the workplace evolving, a manager needs to keep improving and updating the latest competencies in order to retain and survive in the workplace. In this paper, the author explained the relationship between knowledge, skills and abilities through an introduction of KSA model. Next, the author proposed the competencies that the subject of current context, the managers should possess. It can be concluded that a manager should have a significant level of technical knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the author suggested that the communication skills and critical thinking skills are crucial for managers in order to perform task effectively. In fact, the ability to communicate effectively is influenced by the emotional intelligence of an individual.

As can be seen, the role of soft skills and abilities become more significant as an individual progress upwards of the management hierarchy. Yet, one must retain the technical knowledge and skills from previous experiences as the foundation of their executive career. Finally, despite researches and studies have been conducted to identify the most demanding competencies, one should always work towards the skills and abilities that they find suitable and comfortable with, in different aspects, to customize their unique set of knowledge, skills and abilities.

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