# Leadership skills of managers of educational institutions

## Habilidades de liderazgo del directivo de instituciones educativas

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## Abstract

The leadership of managers reminds us that the competencies, skills and abilities are not centered on administrative tasks, but should be plural, promoting actions in the financial, academic, pedagogical, administrative and other areas that are necessary for the organization, such as public relations. In this sense, the objective is to analyze the leadership skills exercised by the directors of educational institutions and thus identify the relevance of each one of them. The population were managers of five private higher education institutions in Mexico, for this purpose a questionnaire was made through an instrument validated with the Cronbach's Alpha test whose value was 0.700, with a reliability of 95% and a precision of less than 10%, the above through the statistical software tool Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in its version 21. In this way, it is understood that leadership includes different skills that do not emanate from an individual condition, but participate hand in hand with global dynamics related to the organization and the context, thus generating strategic positioning.

**Keyword:** Education in values, audiovisual media, teaching innovation.

Resumen

El liderazgo de los directivos recuerda que las competencias, habilidades y capacidades, no son centradas en el quehacer administrativo, sino que debe ser plural promoviendo acciones en lo financiero, académico, pedagógico, administrativo y de otros rubros que sean necesarios para la organización, como lo son las relaciones públicas. En tal sentido el objetivo es analizar las habilidades de liderazgo que ejercen los directivos de instituciones educativas y con ello identificar la relevancia de cada una de ellas. La población fueron directivos de cinco instituciones de educación superior privada de México, para ello se realizó un cuestionario a través de un instrumento validado con la prueba de Alfa de Cronbach cuyo valor fue de 0.700, con una fiabilidad del 95 % y una precisión de menos del 10 %, lo anterior a través de la herramienta de software estadístico Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) en su versión 21. De esta manera, se comprende que el liderazgo incluye diferentes habilidades que no emanan de una condición individual, sino que participan de la mano con dinámicas globales relativas a la organización y al contexto generando a través de ello posicionamientos estratégicos.

Palabras claves: Educación en valores, medios audiovisuales, innovación docente.

## Introduction

In the current context, organizations maintain different types of leadership, in this sense, several approaches are found on this phenomenon, and this has been done according to cultural, social, historical and even technological changes, which has brought as an effect a multipurpose theoretical corpus that has allowed to provide answers at different levels and according to social needs. In this regard, Contreras (2008) agrees with this idea and alludes to the different epistemic currents that leadership has had, so he proposes to conduct studies oriented towards the characterization of leaders as personality and other cognitive variables such as self-efficacy, self-concept, perceived control, attributional styles, perceived quality of life, coping styles, achievement orientation and social skills, which undoubtedly are points that from this thesis will be addressed but from the perspective of intelligent organizations.

From the literature analysis, the theoretical proposals of Agüera (2019), Hernández de la Rosa (2019), Contreras, Barbosa, Juárez, Uribe and Mejía (2009), Noriega (2008), among others, focus on the importance of the manager and his leadership in organizations.
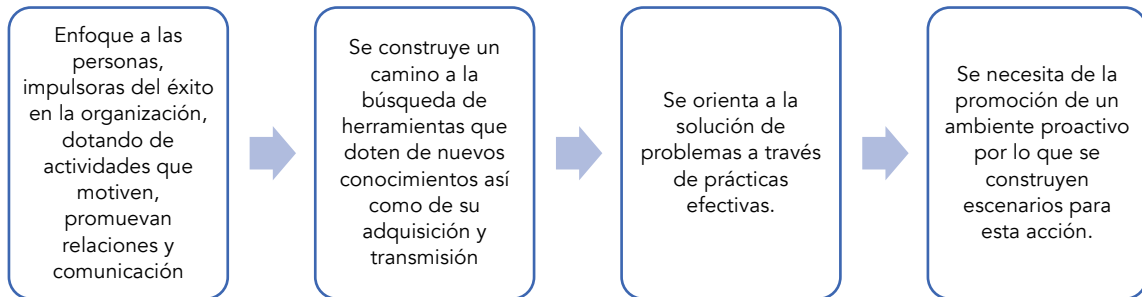
The analysis of the role of the manager not only allows access to a theoretical corpus of relevance for any organization, whether public (Hernández de la Rosa, 2016, Sesento and Lucio 2011), private (Barba-Aragón, 2014) or both (Alcarraz, 2016), but also contributes to the understanding of other parallel phenomena, such as organizational development and what it entails.

Nowadays, organizations hire people with a set of skills, personal and professional abilities and competencies that allow them to perform at their best, both inside and outside the organization; in other words, people's abilities and skills are one of the essential factors to achieve success in any organization, no matter how simple it may

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be. This is possible through the conjunction of several elements that make up organizational success.

In this sense, Rivero (2009) distinguishes four characteristics of a manager with a productive leadership style, which are summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Characteristics of proactive leadership



| Enfoque a las personas, impulsoras del éxito en la organización, dotando de actividades que motiven, promuevan relaciones y comunicación | Se construye un camino a la búsqueda de herramientas que doten de nuevos conocimientos así como de su adquisición y transmisión | Se orienta a la solución de problemas a través de prácticas efectivas. | Se necesita de la promoción de un ambiente proactivo por lo que se construyen escenarios para esta acción. |

Note: Own elaboration based on Rivero (2009).

This allows the manager, beyond his role, to become a differentiating and strategic factor for organizational success (Bernal et al., 2010). Strengthening the links between its members, communicating and executing an environment of trust that facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge, the development of skills and attitudes that add value to the company's activities, in addition to strengthening the social links that will generate an organizational identity.

In addition, proactive leadership also makes it possible to expand and improve the intellectual capital of an organization that wishes to be competitive (Nava et al., 2011). In this sense, it should be noted that there are organizations that are governed under the paradigm of "learning companies", which have the ability to expand their growth by focusing their attention on proactive and systemic leadership, in which the members of the organization direct their efforts to the achievement of real objectives and build a shared vision as a motivating axis.

In this order of ideas, the leadership and skills of the managers of educational institutions are a critical factor of the first order in the improvement of education, educational and administrative processes. Therefore, the problem detected is focused on analyzing whether there is a relevance of the leadership of the managers of private universities in Mexico (the names of the universities are omitted for ethical and confidentiality criteria) and their skills to meet the institutional goals and objectives in the national context.

In this sense, five managers of five private universities in different states of Mexico were investigated, it is worth mentioning that the research problem was of an empirical nature that under the scientific methods and techniques was the basis for generating scientific knowledge, allowing to give an answer to What are the leadership skills of managers, their level and how they are developed and promoted in their different areas of work within the universities, therefore the general objective was to analyze the leadership

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skills exercised by the managers of private universities in Mexico to know the contextualized leadership schemes of the educational institutions.

## Materials and methods

The research approach used was quantitative, using the questionnaire technique to collect information through an instrument validated with the Cronbach's Alpha test whose value was 0.700, with a reliability of 95% and a precision of less than 10%, using the statistical software tool Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The questionnaire also helped to ensure that participants remained anonymous and expressed the reality addressed.

It is worth mentioning that the research instrument was structured in six sections that allowed obtaining information from the participants.

**Table1 .** *Instrument design*

| N° | Instrument sections | Contents of the sections | Justification |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Identification data | -Name<br><br>-Campus<br><br>-Years of age<br><br>-Level managing | The identification data allowed the identification of the campus, as well as the level he/she manages to know the implications of his/her functions, in addition to the fact that the data of the years of seniority allows to know the experience he/she might have in the performance of his/her function. |
| 2 | Professional profile of the manager | -Last professional degree: Bachelor's degree<br><br>• Master's Degree<br>• Doctorate or Other.<br>-Continuous training<br><br>• Diplomas, courses, specialties, among others, recently completed. | This section allowed us to know the professional training of the manager, since it is due to the functions and performance involved in his position, to know if his professional development can be an important variable in correlation with his skills in his position. |
| 3 | Leadership | This section is a set of phrases (attributes) designed to make a personal impression and are formulated from attributes that correspond to six types of leadership;<br><br>Autocratic leadership<br><br>Democratic leadership<br><br>Laisser Faire Leadership<br><br>Situational leadership<br><br>Charismatic leadership<br><br>Transformational leadership | It is necessary to mention that educational leadership depends to a great extent on its managers, since they must drive towards continuous improvement, which becomes more dependent on each educational context. The educational leadership of management teams acquires greater relevance in divergent contexts. For this reason, this section asks questions related to identifying the leadership style implemented by managers in their respective areas. |
| 4 | Soft skills | These are questions to identify the communication, | Soft skills are used to identify how to manage the intellectual resources and |

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| | | empathy and assertiveness they employ in their functions. | talent of your employees through motivational actions that encourage them to increase and communicate their knowledge. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Hard skills | These are questions to identify the data management and polyglot skills they employ in their functions. | These are the skills involved in organizational development and take into account factors necessary to coordinate the elements involved in the innovation and development processes. |
| 6 | Cross-cutting skills | These are questions to identify the management, direction, planning, decision making and negotiation that they employ in their functions. | These are related skills in terms of management, leadership and problem solving. |

Note: Own elaboration.

## Results

This analysis is presented according to the construction of the research instrument, which contemplates three types of managerial skills taken from leadership theory, managerial competencies, decision making, communication and business coaching.

1. Soft Skills.
2. Hard Skills.
3. Transversal Skills.

These will be approached with a description and interpretation of graphic elements in order to organize the information. It should be noted that the process of interpreting the results made it possible to identify the leadership skills that are essential in the direction and operation of private universities.

Within the global analysis of institutional leadership, a centralized role is identified within the daily practices of the national leadership of the institutions, due to the fact that through accountability to these key figures it is possible to identify progress in the objectives and results sought within the organization.

Thus, the directors respond to a dynamic and vertical organizational relationship, which does not exempt the directors from exercising their leadership in the institutions. It is worth mentioning that the profile of university directors is of an administrative nature, so there is no homogeneous training that meets all the needs of the institutions.

Among the different aspects that can characterize leadership, there are six that are extracted from the theory (together with the skills), which respond to resilience, collective work, assertiveness, commitment and responsibility, timely decisions and direction, which were approached with the questions of the instruments applied.

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## Disucuss

Principals (also identified as rectors) consider communication as one of the most important soft skills, since in all cases the percentage is higher than 90%, which is substantial for the understanding of their processes and especially their organizational tasks. According to these data, the communication they exercise is effective, given that it takes into account not only quantitative aspects developed by the institutional communication processes supported by a management system of educational organizations, but also implies promoting the change of attitude or behavior of a person or group through words, feelings or reasoning, in favor of the objectives of the organization.

Recent contributions consider that top management, or in this case directors, have the role of organizational coaches who drive, motivate and guide the organization, including the personnel, to achieve goals and objectives with tangible results, where communication is extremely important, a fact that is corroborated in the reality addressed.

Now, alluding to hard skills implies thinking about skills from different perspectives, especially when working on the organizational aspect, in this sense, skills are transformed, on the one hand, soft skills are especially important to build and strengthen, as they provide the necessary support to work on the creative process. However, within the context of hard skills, these are functional to ensure the necessary depth and expertise in the achievement of goals and objectives, since they imply the management of information with greater mastery and their respective projections.

Thus, the management of data that are key to the management of an educational institution will be fundamental, as they will be able to define and clarify the necessary paths and procedures that will lead to achieve the goals. However, the figure of the rector must also have the necessary linguistic skills to achieve communication with the different educational institutions, as well as the organizations that lead to the establishment of collaboration. In the case of the principals who participated in the study, they show that the hard skills are substantial in leadership, since the percentages exceed 80% in the application and possession of these skills.

Thus, data management is essential within the organizations, as we can see, there are disparities in the homologation within the consulted directors to be able to manage the information, of course, this is due to different circumstances. In the contextual analysis of the higher education institutions consulted, it has been possible to clarify that there is a pragmatism present within the organization, added to the learning and updating route required for the training of top management, especially those in which emerging situations arise due to the administrative processes that are followed to address such situations. Of course, the Quality Management System makes communication and data management standardized, however, the synthesis of data must be permanently adapted.

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Within the main trends in school analysis and management, universities highlight the importance of establishments in favor of forms of leadership and institutional management. Transversal skills are those that involve permanent action and therefore management processes that ensure organizational development in all its dimensions, in this direction.

Talking about transversal skills also implies recognizing the processes that appear hand in hand with changes, example of these changes are pragmatic management and therefore the resolution of emerging needs, for which the only alternative is to move forward and make effective solutions, these effective solutions are those that not only allow quality assurance within higher education institutions, but also those that ensure the development of their activities to detonate the development and operation of their functions as managers within the institutions.

The organizational development of smart institutions will depend largely on the articulation of transversal skills that account for their impacts and effects.

Higher education institutions of private origin, therefore, have different connotations where the role of leadership should not be understood from the traditional perspective as stated by Pautt (2015) since when he establishes the relationship between leadership and his group of followers or subordinates, he forgets aspects that are fundamental, among them, the need to strengthen a qualitative link with the work team or in his case, generate a relationship of unfolding of his leadership skills in different spheres for the purpose of enhancing his results within the organization.

That is why, following Cortés Mejía (2004), we believe that leadership is not the exercise of providing answers or giving orders to be obeyed at the moment, but rather it is the exercise of defining efforts to find shared answers to common problems that allow the organization to grow, where management skills are fundamental.

Of course, there are slight differences between the subjects investigated, but the percentages are high in terms of the importance of these skills. This is due to the fact that management is a fundamental factor within the organization especially in two directions, on the one hand, in the endogamy of communication centralized in the National Rectory, on the other hand, in the constant communication with the agents of the different spheres that are important for the expansion, growth, regularization and normative operation of the organization.

## Conclusions

The development of this research allowed us to visualize the need for a professionalization program for organizational leaders, which contributes to the development of skills that are fundamental in the work of a private institution. It is important to highlight that involving the agents of change in a homogeneous training will contribute to the positioning of the organization as an educational system, by

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strengthening the nuclear aspects within the existing leadership in each educational institution.

The skills that have been found so far to be fundamental factors of action within the leadership of the rectors are constituted as follows:

A. Soft Skills: We understand that the global action process performed by management figures requires a set of key knowledge, within the research, three fundamental skills that are important within the governance process that is established within educational institutions were detected. This is why the following conceptual delimitations of the research findings are described:

- Communication: To think of communication as a global element within organizations is also to link its pragmatic elements to other constructs, however, here the communication factor implies recognizing a constitutive sphere of human development, which determines the process of humanization and is consolidated as a fundamental axis of well-being and quality of life of people (Calvache, 2015. P.p. 327). That is, following Calvache (2015) communication should be seen as the basis that allows the individual to establish interpersonal relationships and expand its heuristic function to inquire, discover and interpret the world, being the world to which we refer to the organizational context, thereby involving all internal and external agents in favor of the organization and its expansion.

- Assertiveness: According to Gaeta and Galvanovskis (2009) assertiveness is to raise psychological aspects that allow us to retake the intrinsic security, to delimit tenacity within the discourse and persistence in our argumentation, whether behavioral, psychic or discursive, since it requires a firm step with responsibility to maintain the necessary social interactions. Thus, within the research, it was found that being assertive also implies having a projection on the members of the organization and exogenous agents that gives rise to a real dialogue between the needs that are raised by the direction of the organization and the natural internal and external tensions. Failure to balance these aspects contributes to a weakening of the identity, and the generation of work groups that are in permanent dispute to co-opt followers and apply more energy in decision-making through different strategies. Thus, to think of assertiveness is to think of an internal and external dialogue projected within the organization as an ability that a leader must develop at all times.

- Empathy: López, Filippetti and Richaud, (2014) state that empathy is the ability to understand the feelings and emotions of others, based on the recognition of the other as similar. Under this approach, thinking about empathy, also implies recognizing the exercise of assertiveness mentioned above, however, within

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an organization having empathic aspects within the work teams contributes to achieve an adequate and objective organizational climate, while empathy also implies recognizing the specific needs of people, including within this agency a set of undeclared knowledge, but necessary to restate responsibilities or if necessary propose others, taking care that the mental states are always taken care of for the benefit of the whole institution. In the context of private educational institutions, recognizing empathy implies recognizing the status of people and the relationship they have with the goals, thus generating an adequate projection for the management of human talent.

Hard Skills: The so-called hard skills are those that contribute to the unfolding of the leaders' agency, in this sense, we are talking about much more technical aspects that require a permanent updating work, thus contributing to the expansion, growth and of course elements for decision making. Within the university context, leaving aside these aspects, implies having descriptive agents, however, it is necessary to have elements that allow the leader to truly act in favor of the organization. In the private initiative, these two elements are fundamental, since the look implies the recognition of the institutions in favor of our challenge as members of a work team, that besides being linked in the operativity also does it in the projection, namely, they are two abilities which are considered fundamental, nevertheless, in the results these abilities were of those that more negative elements had, hence the importance of the professionalization.

Data management: Within the current context, we have seen the change of paradigms from the information society, to the knowledge economy, although, we can imagine that information is not present within the context of the knowledge economy, the reality is totally different, since, information within the process of data management, becomes knowledge, hence this is one of the most important hard skills. In this regard, Orellana and Sanchez (2006) state that talking about information also implies a set of techniques that allow us to collect data, from traditional aspects such as observation and participation, as well as non-conventional aspects such as data mining within social networks (Hernandez de la Rosa, 2021), today there are several aspects that contribute to think of data as a factor of utmost importance, there are within the organization, not only aspects, but needs that lead us to think of data mining as a key element for decision making and setting the course within the organization.

Polyglot: Language and, therefore, communication will always be a preponderant factor in human relations. In organizations, to think of a polyglot agent is also to think of a cultural authority; therefore, a Rector should position himself as an academic-manager (Hernández de la Rosa, 2017). That is why they must remain in close liaison processes to achieve training in the communication of different languages. In this regard, Arismendi, (2016) discusses the importance of talking about multilingual competence, so organizations such as higher education

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institutions and especially private ones, should have agents with leadership also in linguistic competence that respond to the needs of students who are from other contexts, as well as visits from academics or institutional authorities.

Transversal Skills: The so-called transversal skills will be those that contribute to the development of our more circumspect aspects, those that lead to the development of managerial functionality and therefore of the application of leadership as an axis that establishes cohesion with the other skills. Namely, these transversal skills will be fundamental for the achievement of institutional objectives. In the research carried out, these aspects are taken up and reinforced in different ways by the agents and their contexts; however, the conceptual recovery of these leadership skills will be useful when training new agents who participate in the strategic, tactical and operational direction and operation of the organization.

Management: Management is a process that allows the specific development of operations, but under a global view, understanding that the management of the director, in this case of the rectors, is a global process, which requires operational attention to look at the expected results. Thus, Murray (2002) shares with us that thinking about management implies thinking about the development of administration, being thus that management becomes the methodology that allows finding differentials of different natures, giving rise to the possibility of acting in any institutional space. It is for this reason that the results that were obtained marked important scores within the spectrum of management; however, it is important to emphasize that these operations will always be viewed from the point of view of organizational development, not only as quantitative, but also qualitative, involving both endogenous and exogenous aspects.

Planning: Planning is the art par excellence of foreseeing, of ensuring that the direction of the organization can cope with emergencies, changes and both internal and external factors. That is why being a good planner is also one of the leadership skills that become a necessary focus within any organization. In private higher education institutions, planning projects, not only academic consolidation, but also and with preponderance, the consolidation of enrollment, especially within the area of expansion, but it must also emphasize diversification, an aspect that is fundamental and forgotten by many agents who become representatives, leaving aside planning and considering it as a simple and plain administrative process. It is here where the institutions must place emphasis, in ensuring that the planning instruments are lean, to meet the needs, but robust in the congruence and foundation of the actions. Salazar and Romero (2006, p. 2) state that planning implies, in addition to well-defined tasks, an active participation between those who execute and support the link between scope and logistics, through the exchange of actions, resources and information and the evaluation of achievements.

Decision-making: This leadership skill, is as we realize result of the sum of the predecessor skills in this research, that is why, Acevedo, Linares and Cachay (2010) propose that it is important to recognize this skill with four streams, which are:

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analytical rationality, harmony of the objectives of the actors, strategic decision making and business circumstance with managerial perspective, these aspects will be extremely necessary to take up and attend to for any private higher level institution. In this sense, the discussion on decision making will imply an adequate discrimination of judgments about the information gathering process, the treatment of that information to obtain data and other aspects that are necessary to be considered within the reading of the organizational task.

Negotiation: Negotiations are strategic situations, that is, the actions of one party depend on what the other party does, and involve a continuous series of interactions that gradually outline both the result (or final agreement) and the process through which the result is reached, the rules of the game that are sequentially established by the parties until a procedure or process is defined that will be maintained in future interactions between the parties (Paz, 2004). Therefore, this skill is one of those included within the transversal leadership skills, the relevance acquired by the negotiation is focused on the especially qualitative aspects of it, including its history within the dimensions of management, finance, academia, administration, organizational climate, social projection or others, these aspects allow the negotiator to generate a clear path of elements to consider to regain confidence in the negotiation, giving clear evidence of what can be done pragmatically for the resolution or solution proposals. In the private sector, negotiations necessarily imply acting with immediate results, since there is a contractual relationship with users and any delay is harmful to the organization in its services. Being in permanent action is a situation that must attend to the users that allow the achievement of objectives, goals and indicators.

Up to this point, we can discern that within the private universities in question, there are outstanding elements that should be considered by other organizations, however, in the full exercise of objectivity, it is also essential that the agents that govern the development of organizations, take up a common axis of training in order to homologate and support each other under different perspectives to further enhance leadership skills.

The scale used to measure leadership skills in this study allows for the enhancement of outstanding aspects, however, it should be considered as an exploratory study within the context of intelligent organizations, especially those focused on human talent, especially in the private context.

According to León, Tejada and Yataco (2003), all intelligent organizations must find learning as part of their agency, which means that leaders must be the ones to develop and expand the possibilities for growth and creation, including the ongoing training of managers. The construction of an organization with an authentic capacity for learning and creativity is based on the development of five disciplines: personal mastery, teamwork, shared vision, mental models and systemic thinking. (León, and Yataco, 2003. P.p. 82), which is already a training route that will impact

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the skills detected in this study, thus being a reference for the training of human talent in the five private universities in question.

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