Skills of Foodservice Managers within foodservices in public hospitals in Gauteng Province, South Africa

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Abstract

In the study on which this article reports, a greater understanding of the middle management skills that are critical to manage a foodservice unit in public hospitals in South Africa effectively, were investigated. A quantitative research approach using survey design was employed for this study. Data was collected from 131 foodservice supervisors and foodservice assistants using a structured questionnaire. A four-point Likert-type scale was used to determine the participant's perceptions regarding the importance of Belemu's (2000) framework for foodservice managers. The responses were "Of Some Importance (OSI, "Important But not Essential (IBE)", "Definitely of Importance" (DOI) and "Of Vital Importance" (OVI) respectively. A visual analogue scale was also used to evaluate the perceptions of employees. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and means) were used to describe the data set.

Knowledge of policies and procedures were identified as the most important skills category when the average of the responses (66.54%) of OVI was calculated followed by Risk management (64.58%). General management was perceived as the least important with 49.27% of respondents rating it as OVI. Technical skills was perceived as the second least important (51.92%) of respondents rating it as OVI. A similar pattern was detected from the visual analogue scale results. Knowledge of policies and procedures was also rated as the most important and General management as the least important. The Risk management category was more important to foodservice managers compared to the Quality control skills category.

Keywords: Skills, middle management, foodservice units, public hospitals, foodservice managers

Introduction

The hospitality industry has evolved over the last century as an industry with a global orientation due to the increasing liberalisation and globalisation of economies. This transformation has affected the hospitality industry and made it become more discerning, demanding and diverse, resulting in a need to explore skills required by employees to be more effectively experienced and skilful in their dealings (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013:823). The hospitality industry is regarded as the largest (Lew, 2011) and fastest growing industry in the world and it accounts for 10% of the global employment (Barron, 2008). However, the industry is known for high employee turnover rates (Kim, 2014) and an unskilled workforce (Guptar, 2016) and finds it hard to attract suitably motivated, trained and qualified staff who are able to deliver the service promised to their current and potential customers (Barron, 2008). The skills gaps in employees which are in evidence, are a noteworthy challenge in the industry that requires urgent addressing. These skills refer to information technology, time management, administration, customer handling, language and communication skills (Conradie, 2012). These skills remain a training priority as they are critical in assisting in the short supply of qualified staff, in achieving maximum performance for the industry, and in increasing the productivity of employees.

The foodservice sector in public hospitals is unique because the employees form a crucial link in the food chain from farms where food is produced to kitchens where it is processed and ultimately to patients' plates; therefore any malpractice might result in food poisoning or even fatalities which would be catastrophic for an enterprise and of course the victim of such malpractice As a result, trained managers, with appropriate skills play a pivotal role in successfully overseeing the activities relating to food production, the changing demands of consumers, advances in technology and economic pressures in foodservice units (Assaf, Matawie & Blackman, 2008:215; Gaungoo & Jeewon, 2013:2).

As managers begin to occupy pivotal positions within the health systems, it is crucial to endow them with appropriate and relevant skills to ensure that they perform their functions efficiently and effectively (Wu, Ramesh & Howlett, 2015:169) and are able to mentor their employees effectively in the desired skills and attributes required in the industry.The lack of management capacity within the public sector in South Africa results in a significant gap of required skills between the private and public sectors (Pillay, 2008:30).

The South African Department of Health (2001) has set minimum standards in foodservice units for both provincial and national establishments. The minimum standards are statements about a desired and acceptable level of health care. These standards can also be described based on how the provincial and national public food establishments will meet the set criteria. The policy puts emphasis on financial management skills, human resource management and development, food safety and hygiene, safety in the foodservice units and the utilisation of foodservice equipment.

Literature review

Managers in the foodservice industry should be prepared to enhance their strategic decision-making skills continuously (Ogbeide & Harrington, 2009) and reduce operational costs while maintaining high productivity and increasing levels of quality service provision (Assaf, *et al.*, 2008). It has been shown that employees resign from their current employment due to a perceived or real lack of leadership, poor or no feedback, adequate reward and respect by their managers. This has resulted in a higher employee turnover and increased costs to hospitality organisations (Ogbeide & Harrington, 2009).

Based on this argument by Ogbeide & Harrington (2009), proper research became essential in determining the skills required by managers in order to fill these gaps in public foodservice units. Chilanga, Mwanza and Karodia (2014) emphasise that managers should possess critical management skills so that they can bring out viability and growth of hospitality institutions and organisations. In this way, they can fulfil their responsibility in executing the plans of the organisation. This can be achieved in conformance with the hospital policy and objectives of top management in terms of the quality of foodservice employees in general but more specifically managers.

Belemu (2000) developed the most appropriate framework for foodservice managers, more especially middle management, by focusing on management skills promoting managerial effectiveness. In this framework, six categories of skills, i.e. general management, technical, human relations, leadership, financial and computer skills respectively were identified for middle managers. The framework further emphasises that the skills can be developed through learning by formal academic institutions and job experience. Belemu (2000) ranks the skills according to the order of importance. General management, technical, human, leadership, organising, coordinating, effective communication, performance evaluation, planning, staff development, strategies and practice standards were the skills ranked by mostly their importance. The lowest-placed skills included computer skills, knowledge of political environment, risk taking, humour, interviewing techniques and multimedia presentation.

Therefore, in order to categorise the most important management skills, institutions of higher learning have to emphasise important management skills when training foodservice managers (Sisson & Adams, 2013).

Middle management skills in an organisation

John (2014:1) identifies four categories of middle management skills, namely action skills, development skills, self-development skills and success skills. Action skills are communication, change management, financial management skills and computer skills. Development skills comprise coaching, mentoring, training, performance management and human skills. Self-development skills are self-management and self-efficacy, while success skills involve leadership and general management skills respectively (see Figure 1)

ACTION SKILLS

- Communication
- Change management
- Technical skills
- Financial skills
- Computer skills

DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

- Coaching
- Mentoring
- Training
- Performance management
- Human skills

SELF-DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

- Self-management
- Self-efficacy

SUCCESS SKILLS

- Leadership skills
- General management skills

Figure 1: Middle management skills (John, 2014:1)

Action skills
According to Dominquez et al. (2015:573), action skills provide trainee-centred, cooperative and technology-enhanced learning approaches while addressing active learning methods, promoting lifelong employees with effective communication skills, both oral and written, having problem-solving and team-building capacities. These include those skills that require the manager to perform an activity for the desired outcome to be realised, namely communication, change management, technical skills, financial skills and computer skills.

Development skills
Development skills involve how people learn mostly on their own through re-qualification training so that a professional competence level is maintained and professional skills are enhanced (Zakarevicius & Zuperkiené, 2008:104). Development skills comprise coaching, mentoring, training, performance management and human skills respectively.

Self-development skills
Self-development skills such as self-management and self-efficacy involve the ability to grow and expand personal knowledge, abilities and skills. These help in acquiring the skills and

competencies that employees may lack, but which are demanded by both the internal and external labour markets (Preneen, Verbiest, Van Vianen & Van Wijk, 2015:340). According to Dong, Bartol, Zhang and Li (2016:4), managers and leaders can influence the proactivity of their team members through fostering the development of knowledge, skills and abilities. Furthermore, these skills comprise resources for people to put existing information and newly generated ideas together in novel combinations. Self-development skills comprise skills such as self-management and self-efficacy.

Success skills

Van Scheers and Radipere (2005:185) state that 'success' skills are those skills that managers acquire over time to prevent failure of the business and include a range of leadership and general management skills. Leadership is the process of directing behaviour of others towards reaching the mission and goals of the organisation (Smit, Cronjé, Brevis and Vrba, 2009:310) by exercising authority over subordinates through either stimulation, directing or co-ordination of group interaction and co-operation (Kroon, 2000:354).

Methodology

A quantitative research approach using a carefully crafted survey design was employed for this study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2016) a quantitative approach is used when the emphasis of the research is on quantification of constructs.

Structured questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of 269 foodservice supervisors and foodservice assistants at the selected public hospitals. The respondents completed the questionnaires individually but the researchers were on standby to take any questions for the sake of clarity. The sample comprised both males and females and the response rate was 48.7% (131 responses). The response rate was low because at the time of the commencement of the field work, some of the identified respondents were not available. This was due to changed e-mail addresses and non-functional telephone lines.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections namely A, B, C and D respectively. Section A entailed the demographic profile of the respondents. Section B comprised managerial skills sets where six categories of management skills as identified by Belemu (2000) were divided into 52 statements. A four-point Likert-type scale was found to be useful in eliminating middle categories such as "neutral", "don't know" or "neither agree nor disagree", which might result in spurious results (Reed, 2015:71). The researcher tried to get answers that are specific. For each statement, the following response scale was used: 1= of some importance, 2= important but not essential, 3= definitely of importance, and 4= of vital importance. Section C consisted of questions that were used to assess the perceptions of the respondents about the foodservice manager. In this case, the respondents were required to simply answering either "yes" or "no". Section D consisted of the visual analogue scale.

The pre-test of the study was conducted on employees who were working in a foodservice unit of a public hospital in Gauteng at the time of the research. A total of twenty two questionnaires were completed over three days. In order to avoid contamination of the results for the main study, the respondents from the pre-test were excluded from the main study.

The statistical package for the Social Sciences was employed for analysis of the numeric data in this study. Factor analysis was used to identify common themes (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Six factors were identified and their reliability was measured using the Chronbach's Aplha coefficient (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Descriptive statistics (frequencies and means) were used to describe the data set.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty Committee of Research Ethics of the Tshwane University of Technology and the Gauteng Department of Health. This was obtained in compliance with the Health Professions Act (Act No. 56 of 1974). It confers certain rights and privileges which a researcher owes to individuals and society. Participants signed an informed consent form to acknowledge that their participation is voluntarily and all information will be kept anonymous.

Results

Discussed in this section are the results of the descriptive statistics. In the first section the demographic profile of the respondents will be presented.

Demographic profile of the respondents
A total of 131 respondents from 12 hospitals in Gauteng participated in this study. The researcher wanted to obtain an understanding of the middle management skills that are critical to manage a foodservice unit effectively. This was also used to identify the required skills that are different from the actual skills set available in South African hospitals.

The males constituted of 17.6% of the participants and females were 82.4%. The highest number of respondents (49.6% or 65) was between the ages of 41.0 to 54.0 years. Most of the respondents (n=76 or 58%) had a qualification that was lower than Grade 12. The average length of service in the organisation was 15.8 years.

After factor analysis had been performed on the original skills, new factors were grouped and renamed. Precision and accordance are important qualities in research measurement and are insured by paying attention to reliability and validity (Babbie & Mouton, 2016). One of the instruments that was used in the research was a visual analogue scale, hence the Chronbach alpha was considered to be the appropriate guide to use to measure the internal consistency of the instrument.

Figure 2 shows the analysis of the Chronbach alpha for each factor identified after conducting a factor analysis and the newly assigned names of the factors
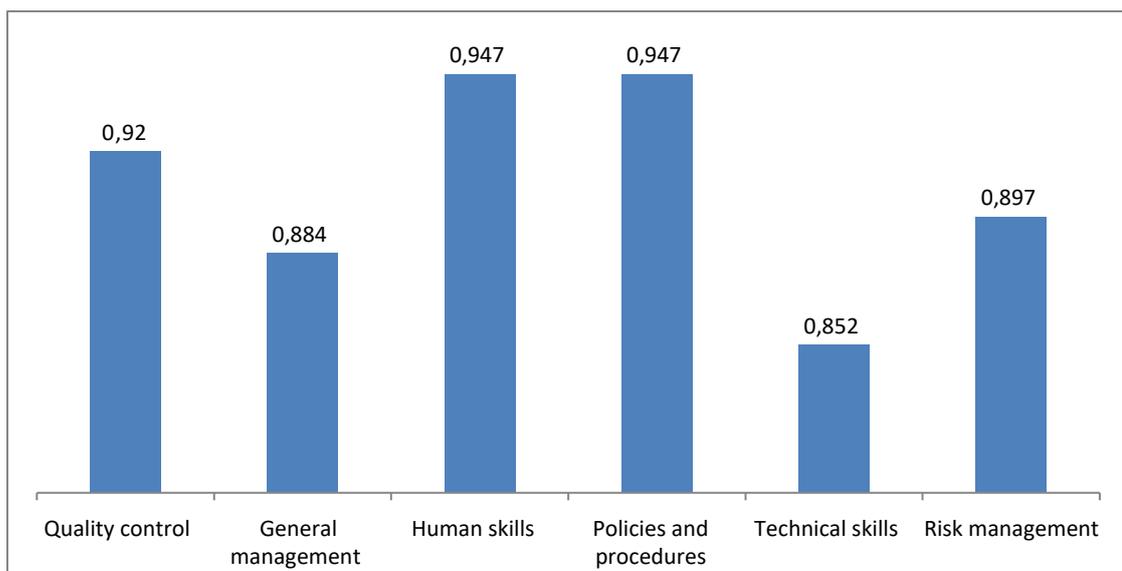

Figure 2: Chronbach alpha for new factors

Frequencies for six skills categories

The respondents were given four (4) possible answers to select on and answer from.

The responses were "Of some importance" **(OSI)**, "Important but not Essential" **(IBE)**, "Definitely of Importance" **(DOI)** and "Of Vital Importance" **(OVI)** respectively. The frequencies for Belemu's (2000) six categories of skills, namely general management, technical, human relations, leadership, financial and computer skills will be reported on.

Frequencies for Quality Control

Table 1 depicts the frequencies for quality control. The table shows all the frequencies and percentages of all items that were regrouped under this factor.

Table 1: Frequencies for Quality Control

		OSI	IBE	DOI	OVI
I expect a foodservice manager to quantify and control resource consumption within the budget in the unit	Frequency	4	3	28	96
	Percentage	3.1	2.3	21.4	73.3
I expect a foodservice manager to motivate each employee to do a better job	Frequency	2	4	42	83
	Percentage	1.5	3.1	32.1	63.4
I expect a foodservice manager to function well under pressure	Frequency	6	6	41	78
	Percentage	4.6	4.6	31.3	59.5
I expect a foodservice manager to demonstrate and encourage commitment to quality at all levels	Frequency	3	7	40	81
	Percentage	2.3	5.3	30.5	61.8
I expect a foodservice manager to analyse and report on performance of the unit compare to the plan to be implemented	Frequency	6	4	26	95
	Percentage	4.6	3.1	19.8	72.5
I expect a foodservice manager to be consistent when a need arises to reprimand subordinates for unacceptable behaviour	Frequency	3	7	39	82
	Percentage	2.3	5.3	29.8	62.6
I expect a foodservice manager to utilise different and better conditions and devise ways to achieve these	Frequency	4	14	43	70
	Percentage	3.1	10.7	32.8	53.4

The statement "I expect a foodservice manager to quantify and control resource consumption within the budget in the unit", was scored the highest at 73.3%, with 96 respondents agreeing to the statement. Assaf and Josiassen (2012) agree that proper budgeting is critically important in foodservice units. This is because labour and food expenses are very high and have grown by about 15.0% since 2006.

The lowest recorded statement at 53.4%, with 70 respondents for OVI was "I expect a foodservice manager to utilise different and better conditions and devise ways to achieve this". The average response for participants who rated the importance of quality control as of vital importance for all seven statements was 63.79%. This implied that the respondents regarded quality control in the unit as being an aspect of vital importance.

Frequencies for General Management

Table 2 Frequencies for General Management

Critical Factor		OSI	IBE	DOI	OVI
I expect a foodservice manager to choose a plan of action that is likely to solve problem	Frequency	16	5	50	60
	Percentage	12.2	3.8	38.2	45.8
I expect a foodservice manager to solve problems that occur in the unit	Frequency	5	9	59	58
	Percentage	3.8	6.9	45	44.3
I expect a foodservice manager to set performance objectives for task to be done	Frequency	6	7	56	62
	Percentage	4.6	5.3	42.7	47.3
I expect a foodservice manager to allocate jobs for staff in the unit	Frequency	6	9	53	63
	Percentage	4.6	6.9	40.5	48.1
I expect a foodservice manager to estimate the required time for different tasks to avoid work overload	Frequency	6	9	46	70
	Percentage	4.6	6.9	35.1	53.4
I expect a foodservice manager to identify the strengths and weaknesses of his staff to assist him to reach solutions to problems	Frequency	3	8	55	64
	Percentage	2.3	6.1	42	48
	(Missing 1)				
I expect a foodservice manager to have a working knowledge of the organisation	Frequency	5	3	47	76
	Percentage	3.8	2.3	35.9	58

The highest number of respondents (58%), with a frequency of 76 agreed that it is of vital importance for the statement "I expect a foodservice manager to have a working knowledge of the organisation". The lowest item in general management is the statement "I expect a foodservice manager to identify the strengths and weaknesses of his staff to assist him to reach solutions to problems. One response was missing, hence, it was not included in the statistics for this item, resulting in 130 responses.

For the statement that "I expect a foodservice manager to choose a plan of action that is likely to solve a problem", 12.2% of the respondents said it was of some importance while 3.8% of the respondents stated that it was important but not essential. However, 45.8% of the respondents agreed that it was of vital importance for the manager to choose a plan of action that was likely to solve a problem. The respondents further rated the statement, "I expect a foodservice manager to solve the problems that occur in the unit" as the lowest of all the statements under general management (44.3%). The average response for participants who rated the importance of General management as of vital importance for all seven statements was 49.27%.

Frequencies for Human Skills

Table 3 shows the frequencies for human skills. A total of 67.9% respondents said it was of vital importance for a foodservice manager to use high interaction group activities to build trust and openness. The statement that "I expect a foodservice manager to facilitate training was indicated as the lowest rated at 58.8%. In the responses for Definitely of Importance, the highest number of responses, 34.4%, were for the statements that "I expect a foodservice manager to facilitate training of employees" and "I expect a foodservice manager to share authority and control with subordinates". However, 25.2% of respondents stated that they expect a foodservice manager to create a relaxed atmosphere among team members by making jokes and point out humour; and this was the lowest rated under Definitely of Importance

Table 3: Frequencies for Human Skills (n=131)

Critical factor		OSI	IBE	DOI	OVI
I expect a foodservice manager to conduct meetings professionally	Frequency	5	6	38	82
	Percentage	3.8	4.6	29	62.6
I expect a foodservice manager to have insight into the activities of the unit	Frequency	4	3	36	88
	Percentage	3.1	2.3	27.5	67.2
I expect a foodservice manager to work in harmony with people from different cultures	Frequency	5	6	36	84
	Percentage	3.8	4.6	27.5	64.1
I expect a foodservice manager to use high interaction group activities to build trust and openness	Frequency	2	6	34	89
	Percentage	1.5	4.6	26	67.9
I expect a foodservice manager to create an environment in which people are encouraged to utilise, achieve and develop talents	Frequency	4	4	37	86
	Percentage	3.1	3.1	28.2	65.6
I expect a foodservice manager to facilitate training of employees	Frequency	3	6	45	77
	Percentage	2.3	4.6	34.4	58.8
I expect a foodservice manager to effect promotions, demotions and transfers of subordinates using relevant plans, policies and procedures	Frequency	5	6	40	80
	Percentage	3.8	4.6	30.5	61.1
I expect a foodservice manager to share authority and control with subordinates	Frequency	4	4	45	78
	Percentage	3.1	3.1	34.4	59.5
I expect a foodservice manager always to empower subordinates with skills to keep up with new trends in the industry	Frequency	4	9	40	78
	Percentage	3.1	6.9	30.5	59.5
I expect a foodservice manager to create a relaxed atmosphere among team members by making jokes and point out humour in situations	Frequency	7	13	33	78
	Percentage	5.3	9.9	25.2	59.5

The average response for participants who rated the importance of human skills as of vital importance for all 10 statements was 62.58%. This implied that most of the respondents regarded human skills as being of vital importance.

Frequencies for Technical Skills

The responses for Technical skills in Table 4 ranged between 47.3% to 57.3%, with the statement "I expect a foodservice manager to inspect products and service in the unit regularly", was rated the highest at 57.3% of the respondents. This was the case even though only 130 participants took part in responding to this statement.

TABLE 4: Frequencies for technical skills (n=131)

Critical factor		OSI	IBE	DOI	OVI
I expect a foodservice manager to operate within the parameters set by regulatory bodies in South Africa	Frequency	7	9	53	62
	Percentage	5.3	6.9	40.5	47.3
I expect a foodservice manager to adhere to the requirements laid down in South African Food Safety legislation	Frequency	3	7	52	69
	Percentage	2.3	5.3	39.7	52.7
I expect a foodservice manager to have an understanding of South African political environment	Frequency	6	17	50	58
	Percentage	4.6	13	38.2	44.3
I expect a foodservice manager to make known the services that are rendered in the unit	Frequency	4	6	51	70
	Percentage	3.1	4.6	38.9	53.4
I expect a foodservice manager to inspect products and services in the unit regularly	Frequency	5	8	42	75
	Percentage **(Missing 1)**	3.8	6.1	32.1	57.3
I expect a foodservice manager to deliver on and maintain standards set for delivery systems in the unit	Frequency	5	2	50	74
	Percentage	3.8	1.5	38.2	56.5

The average response rate for participants who rated the technical skills as of vital importance for all six statements was 51.9%. This implied that just more than half of the respondents regarded technical skills as of vital importance.

Frequencies for Knowledge of Policies and Procedures

Table 5 illustrates the frequencies for knowledge of policies and procedures factor.

Table 5 Frequencies for knowledge of policies and procedures (n=131)

Critical factor		OSI	IBE	DOI	OVI
I expect a foodservice manager to ensure that the unit is safe	Frequency	4	3	36	88
	Percentage	3.1	2.3	27.5	67.2
I expect a foodservice manager to encourage different racial groups to work together	Frequency	5	6	36	84
	Percentage	3.8	4.6	27.5	64.1
I expect a foodservice manager to be computerliterate	Frequency	7	6	30	88
	Percentage	5.3	4.6	22.9	67.2
I expect a foodservice manager to deal with emergency situations in the unit	Frequency	5	6	38	82
	Percentage	3.	4.6	29	62.6
I expect a foodservice manager to communicate in such a way that people will understand what is required	Frequency	2	6	34	89
	Percentage	1.5	4.6	26	67.9
I expect a foodservice manager to deliver on and maintain standards set for delivery systems in the unit	Frequency	5	2	50	74
	Percentage	3.8	1.5	38.2	56.5
I expect a foodservice manager to take into account feedback from subordinates so that everybody is understood and happy	Frequency	4	4	37	86
	Percentage	3.1	3.1	28.2	65.6
I expect a foodservice manager to estimate cost and implement measures to reduce expenditure	Frequency	4	6	31	90
	Percentage	3.1	4.6	23.7	68.7
I expect a foodservice manager to assist and guide subordinates on how to resolve problems as they occur in the unit	Frequency	4	4	45	78
	Percentage	3.1	3.1	34.4	59.5
I expect a foodservice manager to understand, interpret and explain the policies and procedures of the organisation	Frequency	2	4	25	100
	Percentage	1.5	3.1	19.1	76.3
I expect a foodservice manager to control costs in the unit	Frequency	4	4	23	100
	Percentage	3.1	3.1	17.6	76.3

The highest score of 76.3% was for two statements: "I expect a foodservice manager to understand, interpret and explain the policies and procedures of the organisation" and "I expect a foodservice manager to control costs in the unit". A majority of employees (67.2%) believed that a foodservice manager should be computer-literate. If DOI and OVI are added for the statement "I expect a foodservice manager to assist and guide subordinates on how to resolve problems as they occur in the unit", at least 93.9% of the respondents agreed. By adding OSI and IBE for the statement "I expect a foodservice manager to encourage racial groups to work together, a small

percentage of 11% agreed; However 91.6% perceived this statement as definitely of importance and of vital importance. The average response for the participants who rated the importance of policies and procedures as of vital importance for all 11 statements was 66.54%. This implied that policies and procedures were regarded as the most important skills category compared to the other categories.

Frequencies for Risk Management

In Table 6, the highest and lowest scores of respondents are indicated.

Table 6. Frequencies for risk management (n=131)

Critical factor		OSI	IBE	DOI	OVI
I expect a foodservice manager to be held accountable for results obtained	Frequency	8	8	31	84
	Percentage	6.1	6.1	23.7	64.1
I expect a foodservice manager to take calculated risks	Frequency	2	14	38	77
	Percentage	1.5	10.7	29	58.8
I expect a foodservice manager to solicit funds from both internal and external sources	Frequency	5	8	28	90
	Percentage	3.8	6.1	21.4	68.7
I expect a foodservice manager to be able to estimate and categorise proposed expenses and take them into account when planning	Frequency	4	5	27	95
	Percentage	3.1	3.8	20.6	72.5
I expect a foodservice manager to procure equipment for the unit	Frequency	4	12	38	77
	Percentage	3.1	9.2	29	58.8

The highest score for Risk Management was 72.5% with a total number of 95 respondents agreeing that it was "of vital importance" for a foodservice manager to be able to estimate and categorise proposed expenses. They should also be able to take them into account when planning. The lowest score was for the statements that "I expect a foodservice manager to procure equipment for the unit" and "I expect a foodservice manager to take calculated risk".

When combing DOI and OVI, all the statements for risk management rated above 85% of the responses. This shows that the respondents value the risk management items as definitely of importance and of vital importance. However, when combining the percentages for OSI and IBE, the scores range lowest between 6.90% and 12.3%. The average response for participants who rated the importance of risk management skills as of vital importance for all five statements was 64.58%. This implied that most of the respondents regarded risk management as of vital importance.

Results from the Visual Analogue Scale
The results for the visual analogue scale is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Visual Analogue Results

NEW FACTOR	NUMBER	MEAN
Knowledge of policies and procedures	131	3.5663
Quality control	131	3.5278
Risk management	131	3.5038
Human skills	131	3.5000
Technical skills	131	3.3634
General management	130	3.3402

The mean scores were calculated from the data obtained from the Visual Analogue Scale that respondents were requested to complete in Section D of the questionnaire. The highest score of 3.57 was rated for items that were dealing with "knowledge of policies and procedures". The lowest rating of 3.34 was for general management.

Discussions of the findings

Six skills were identified in the literature by Belemu (2000). When respondents were asked to rate the importance of these six skills, all of them scored very high on the Visual Analogue Scale. In the order of importance, the highest rated skills were knowledge of policies and procedures, with a mean of 3.57, followed by quality control at 3.53, risk management at 3.50, human skills at 3.50, technical skills at 3.36 and general management skills at 3.34.

Therefore, the most critical skills to operate a foodservice unit in a public hospital effectively according to this study in the order of importance were:
*   knowledge of policies and procedures;
*   quality control;
*   risk management;
*   human skills;
*   technical skills; and
*   general management skills.

The perception that foodservice managers were always eager to please was not held by all foodservice subordinates in public hospitals in Gauteng Province. However, there was a very high expectation that a foodservice manager has to acquire new information and encourage his or her staff members to improve their qualifications. They should also aim for success at all times, meet the minimum requirements for the position, be friendly, and be in control all the times since they are dealing with a wide variety of stakeholders. According to the findings in the study, six skills that are critical for effective management of foodservice units in public hospitals were identified. A framework of these skills is depicted in Figure 3 on the next page…

Continues…

KNOWLEDGE OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

>Emergency management
>Effective communication
>safety in the unit
>managing workforce
>Listening skills
>Information system
>Delegation
>Budget forecasting
>Mentoring
>Cost of Managing

HUMAN

>Intercultural harmony
>Self-understanding
>Empowerment
>Humour
>Result achievement
>Effective discipline

GENERAL MANAGEMENT

>Problem solving
>Planning
>Organising
>Coordination
>Analytic thinking
>Conceptual skills
>Time management

QUALITY CONTROL

>Financial resources procurement
>Stress management
>Quality orientation
>Tolerance of uncertainty
>Report writing
>Performance management
>Performance evaluation

TECHNICAL

>Regulatory agency standards
>Practice standards
>Marketing the foodservice unit
>Assessment skills
>Political environment of the foodservice unit

RISK MANAGEMENT

>Accountability
>Policies and procedures
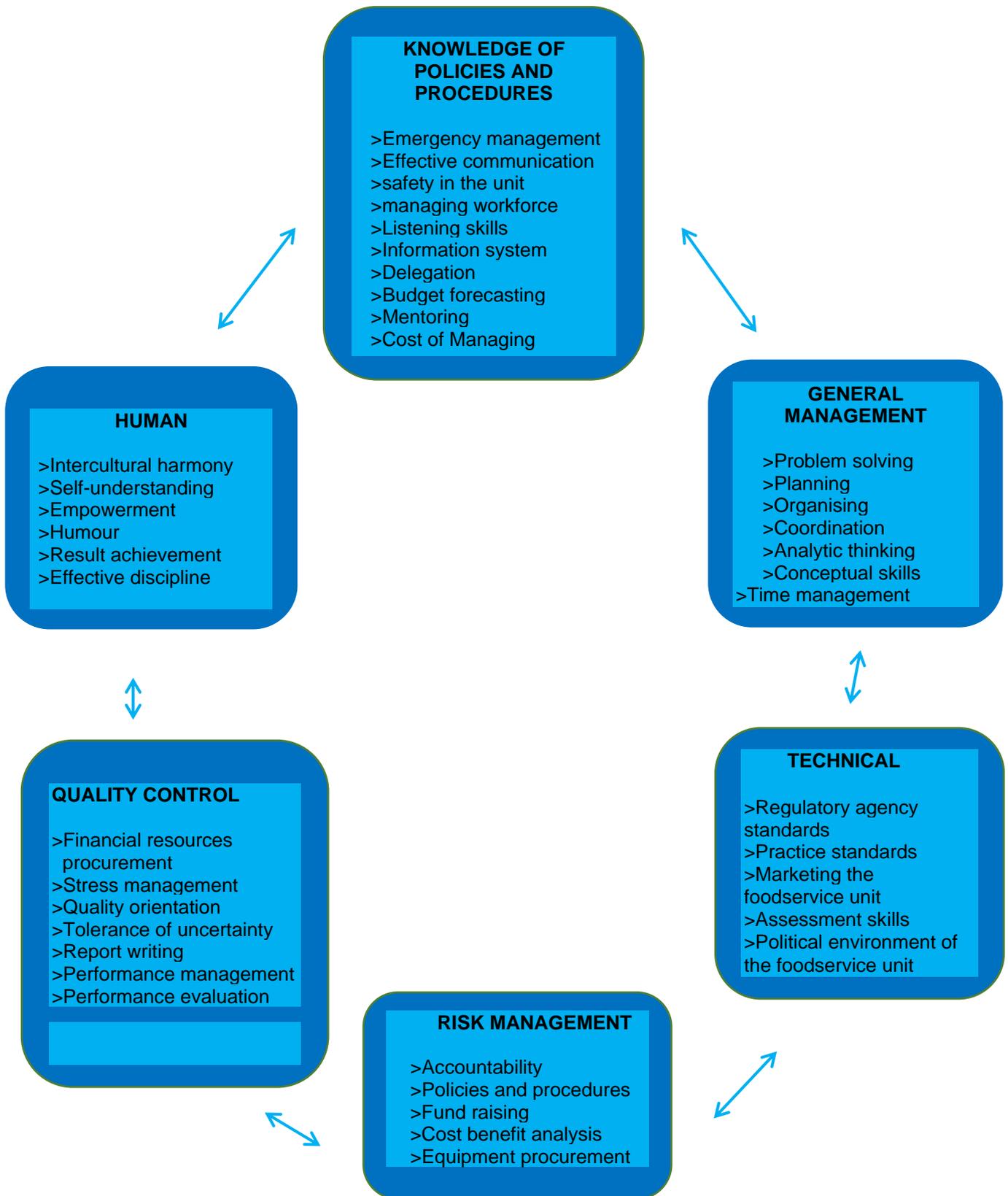>Fund raising
>Cost benefit analysis
>Equipment procurement

Figure 3: Critical skills of middle management in foodservice units of public hospitals

Implications and recommendations of the findings

Literature such as Sisson and Adams (2013) and Belemu (2000); have listed leadership, computer, financial management, human skills, general management and technical skills as the most important skills that middle management require in order to manage a foodservice unit of a public hospital. The perceptions and experiences of current foodservice subordinates (supervisors and their assistants) are slightly different. Based on the findings of the study, it appeared that there was a difference in the perceptions of critical skills of middle management in foodservice units and those identified in the literature. In order for foodservice units in public hospitals to reach the minimum standards as set out by the Department of Health (2001) intensive training is required in the skills that were identified in this research (Figure 3). Additionally, it was found that institutions of Higher Learning should also align their curricula so that they can be relevant to the demands of the foodservice sector in the hospitality industry and also public and private medical facilities requiring food services.

It was evident from this research that there is a need for specialised skills for foodservice managers as middle management so as to empower them and upskill them to operate foodservice units in public hospitals effectively. Strategies that can be utilised to retain managers and as career planning initiatives, need to be developed. In order to improve the skills of foodservice managers, government should allow these employees to improve their qualifications and also retain them intensively on the job.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that on-the-job training of foodservice managers should be conducted in order to meet the standards of the Department of Health. Re-curriculation of foodservice programmes should be done according to sector requirements. An environment conducive to improving qualifications should be established in the workplace by employers in public hospitals to enable foodservice managers to study without losing their workplace benefits. Finally, intensive training of the soft skills (i.e. team development, coaching and problem-handling) is needed to assist foodservice managers to understand their obligations in the workplace should be introduced.

Future research should focus on a national study about the skills of middle management as perceived by the foodservice managers. This could be used to compare the findings of foodservice supervisors and foodservice assistants' perceptions about the critical skills required by middle management in public hospitals.

Limitations of the study

A limitation of this study was that the sample size was small, even though it fell within the prescribed guidelines. The study was restricted to Gauteng and only foodservice units funded by the government were used. The results can therefore not be generalised.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of foodservice supervisors and foodservice assistants regarding the skills required by middle management in foodservice units of public hospitals. The rationale of this study was to identify the skills that are critical in managing a foodservice unit by middle management in public hospitals. The results indicated that the majority of respondents rated six categories of skills high; and those skills were different from those that were initially stated in the literature.

In conclusion, it is evident from this research that there is a need for specialised skills, such as cost control, communication skills and group activity facilitation, for foodservice managers as middle management to effectively operate foodservice units in public hospitals. Strategies are required to retain managers and for career planning initiatives. To improve the skills of foodservice managers, the government should allow such employees to improve their qualifications and also retraining them intensively on-the-job by developing integrated strategies with relevant industry stakeholders in the health sector.

There were no variations in perceptions by position in the organisation; both foodservice supervisors and foodservice assistants had the same understanding of the skills required to effectively manage a foodservice unit in a public hospital. Similarly the perceptions on the skills required and expectations of foodservice managers did not vary by age or level of education. However females rated quality control and human skills more highly as the skills expected of a foodservice manager more highly than males.There were no variations in the rating of the other skills (knowledge of policies and procedures, general management, risk management and technical skills) based on whether or not the respondents were male or female.

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