



## IDENTIFYING PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS IN THE OIL INDUSTRY

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### ABSTRACT

The psychological characteristics of managers as an important issue in the success of organizations and considered as the main element in empowering the human resources of the organization as well as increasing their productivity. Positive psychological characteristics of managers can lead to a mental feeling of employees and their Self-esteem and the higher the level of mental health of managers is, it can create good features for management in managers. Nowadays, managers' psychological traits are among factors affecting organizations success. Though managers cannot attain organizational goals by their own and without the use of human resources, fair and diplomatic leadership and management can solve the problems of current organizations. The current research aimed to identify psychological traits of Middle managers in National Oil Products Distribution Company of West Azerbaijan Regions in Iran. This study was conducted using a qualitative method, postmodern paradigm, phenomenological strategy, and latent content analysis technique by semi-structured (in-depth) interview (to the theoretical saturation level) with 13 cases of middle managers. The interviews were analyzed through open coding and axial coding using MAX QDA12. Finally, Middle managers' psychological traits in the society under study were identified in Four components of Self-Reliance, Self-Efficiency, Building Trust, and Legal Attitude. Finally, based on the results, suggestions were proposed for the studied organization.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In order to succeed and maintain their survival, today's organizations need empowered employees and managers. Of the two mentioned spectra, managers are far more likely to play a role in the success and excellence of the organization than other employees (Ergeneli et al., 2007; Lee &

Taylor, 2014). Recent studies have found that psychological characteristics of managers' personality can have positive results for employees, and are considered as a very important factor affecting the success of the organizations and have a significant effect on empowering the human resources under the organization authority and their effectiveness (Silen et al., 2018; Dust et al., 2016). Psychological characteristics of managers have a positive relationship with growth at work and employees' creativity (Yang et al., 2019); additionally, managers, especially middle managers with the required psychological characteristics, can react well to threats and opportunities and have sufficient flexibility, and easily change the circumstances in their favor (Cai et al., 2018). Moreover, today, it is believed that awareness of psychological characteristics and mental and spiritual aspects of managers' personality can aid any organization, which in turn leads to the effectiveness and efficiency of managers in doing occupational activities (Hancox et al., 2019). Managers are regarded as the most valuable assets of an organization, who play a vital and fundamental role in its success. Competent and knowledgeable managers with positive psychological characteristics can use their internal abilities, experiences, and knowledge in favor of the organizations and toward attaining their higher goals and protecting their organization against threats and complexities (Pouryousef et al., 2008). Managers choose their managerial and behavioral style in the organization based on their psychological characteristics, and they manage at the organization level. Additionally, according to conducted research studies, the managerial style, behavior style, and even internal characteristics of a manager have a potential contribution to increased effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Hagerman, 2016). With the intensification of global competition and the growth of emerging technology and the reduction of organizational life cycles, the organizations need experienced managers, managers with positive skills and psychological characteristics, more than before (Schlender et al., 2019). It should be noted that psychological views on various occupational groups and at different organizational levels have received less attention (Krausert, 2017; Yan 2011).

Recent studies show that the psychological characteristics of managers are among factors affecting the success of organizations. Though managers cannot attain organizational goals by themselves and without the use of powerful human resources, fair leadership and management can solve the problems of current organizations (Ergeneli, 2007; Krausert, 2017).

Considering the situation of the oil industry in Iran's economy, as well as the strategic importance of this industry, which can affect the general situation of the country and the public lives, unfortunately it is observed that the lack of proper and strategic management by middle managers of this industry has caused a lot of problems. Therefore, given the existence of God's resources in Iran's country, in his initial studies, researcher decided to identify psychological characteristics of middle managers in this industry so that he can, finally, cope with some of these problems by proposing practical and fundamental suggestions to these managers because efficient and effective management at higher level of the organization requires having efficient psychological characteristics so that these managers can act successfully in dealing with problems and organizational barriers by proper management and policy-making and improve their organizational performance and efficiency.

In a research conducted to investigate managers' psychological characteristics and their effect on the whole performance of the company, Palmer et al.(2019) concluded that managers' personal

psychological characteristics and self-efficiency in companies can affect their positive entrepreneurial orientations and strategic decisions, which finally lead to a sharp increase in the company's performance.

Dust et al. (2018) identified psychological empowerment as a comprehensive motivational mechanism which is needed for ethical leadership of managers and stated that managers' positive psychological states can have a potential contribution to their empowerment.

In a research study conducted on the improvement of employees' agility, Cai et al. (2018) identified the managers' positive psychological characteristics (compatibility and flexibility) as a factor affecting the employees' agility improvement.

Silen et al. (2018) showed that the managers' psychological link and positive psychological characteristics have positive consequences for employees. In this research, a mediator model was investigated. They showed that managers' psychological characteristics can act as a mediator variable between structural empowerment and the status of employees.

Newman et al. (2017) conducted a research study to investigate the psychological characteristics of managers. They identified the need for progress, mutual understanding, and psychological safety as psychological components of managers. Additionally, theoretical views were developed in this research to improve the psychological health of managers and suggestions were proposed for future experimental research studies.

Krausert (2017) distinguished psychological components of employees and managers at different levels and distinguished between managers' psychological components and those of employees. In this research, the managers' fairness and perception were identified as the most important psychological components.

Lee and Taylor (2014) showed that managers act as an important factor in psychological contracts employees have concluded with the organization. They also concluded that in addition to playing the role of a factor in increasing their profits, they themselves choose the psychological contracts with employees and this is done in the shadow of social exchange theory. Therefore, it is suggested that main factors to motivate managers to choose positive psychological contracts are identified and arrangements are made to strengthen these contracts.

Considering the literature and the history of the conducted research, the appropriate psychological characteristics of managers can affect the success of the organization and play the role of an effective factor in increasing the organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Psychological characteristics can manifest in the managers' behavior and promote the mutual relationship between managers and employees through personal measures and interpersonal relationships, and strengthen the decision-making system, integration, and accountability in the organization (Wolfe, 1988; Hitt, 1999).

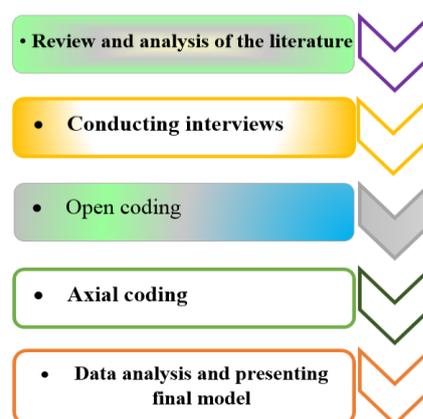
Nowadays, it has been believed that awareness of psychological characteristics and recognition

of different mental and spiritual aspects of managers' personality can aid any organization, which in turn lead to the effectiveness and efficiency in doing occupational activities, and problems cannot be solved properly and logically unless the managers', especially middle managers' mood, traits, and psychological characteristics are recognized. Therefore, the main question and the main aim of the current research is posed as follows: what are the required psychological characteristics for success of middle managers and their effectiveness and efficiency in the National Iranian oil products Distribution Company, West Azarbayjan regions in Iran?

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Considering the research objective, which is the identification of managers' psychological characteristics in the oil industry, this paper studied and analyzed the population under investigation using a qualitative approach. The current research paradigm is of postmodernism type in which phenomenological strategy and the analysis of latent content technique were used to analyze data.

The statistical population of the current research consisted of middle managers of the National Iranian oil products Distribution Company, West Azarbayjan in Iran, of the size  $n=37$ . In order to select the sample, non-probability (judgmental) sampling method was used; and the process of conducting research using a semi-structured interview (deep) continued to reach theoretical saturation (interviewing with 13 middle managers) such that after conducting the 13th interview, no new code was extracted. Today, in qualitative methodology, there are different strategies such as ethnography, case study, phenomenology, data-based theorizing, etc. (Danaeifard & Imami, 2007). In phenomenological strategy, we, in fact, identify a phenomenon through the lived experience of the sample under study (Strauss and Corbine, 1990; Patton, 1978). Natural conditions (lived experience of researcher and activist) affect the study (Nicola, Thomson & Stew, 2012). The content analysis technique is a method to analyze communicational text, voice, audio and video messages (Cole, 1988). This method was used, for the first time, as a method to analyze songs, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and political speeches in the 19th century (Harwood & Garry, 2003).



**Figure 1:** Research process.

In the covert content analysis (Interpretation and Hermeneutics), which is our intended method, the researcher will summarize, identify, and describe the literature based on the literature at his disposal through prior research literature study. Considering the strategy used in the present study, at first, given managers were interviewed, and after transcribing the interviews, the texts were analyzed

in two stages of open coding and axial coding in order to identify psychological characteristics (Denzin et al., 2008). In open coding, the initial codes and categories were extracted, and then, the categories were classified in axial coding. In addition, it should be noted that coding was done using MAX QDA12 software. Generally, the work process is shown in Figure 1.

### 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Considering all ethical issues relating to the conduct of interviews and obtaining the written consent from interviewees, the researcher recorded all interviews, and then, transcribed them. It should be noted that after each deep interview, the whole rewriting and coding operation was performed, and then, the next interview was conducted. As aforementioned, in the present paper, the lived experiences of people were used to gather data. The key points and understanding of psychological characteristics of middle managers in the given population were identified in the first interview, and after initial coding, they were classified, and finally, the given characteristics were identified using axial coding. This process continued until the 13<sup>th</sup> interview of theoretical saturation. It should be noted that for initial coding, at first, 192 signs or events were identified within interviews, and were assigned semantic labels.

After this stage, these signs were put in the related initial codes which could have special meanings, and then, in the axial coding, the initial codes, which were related to each other, were put in the created categories, and finally, these categories were considered as the subset of the given concept or structure in the axial coding stage. Table 1 shows the categories and the initial codes that organize categories.

**Table 1:** Categories and the initial codes organizing categories

Structure	Categories	Initial codes
Psychological Characteristics of Middle Managers	Self-Reliance	Relying on capabilities Spending time for self-study packages Attractive behavior instead of guidance Risk tolerance in helping others
	Self-Efficiency	Being kind and affectionate Treating others with kindness and compassion Being interested in and having a passion for career progression Flourishing talents on the entrepreneurship platform
	Building Trust	Being a model in performing works Performing works with confidence Building trust in keeping information secret Trusting in other organizations in performing good works for clients
	Legal Attitude	Complying with formal instructions The ability to access genuine legal and lawful information in the working area Supporting and defending employees' rights Respecting contractual obligations Acting based on rules and regulations Understanding legal affairs and acting based on them, implementing policies

After determining the initial codes and categories intended by the researcher shown in figure 2, the researcher presented the final model.

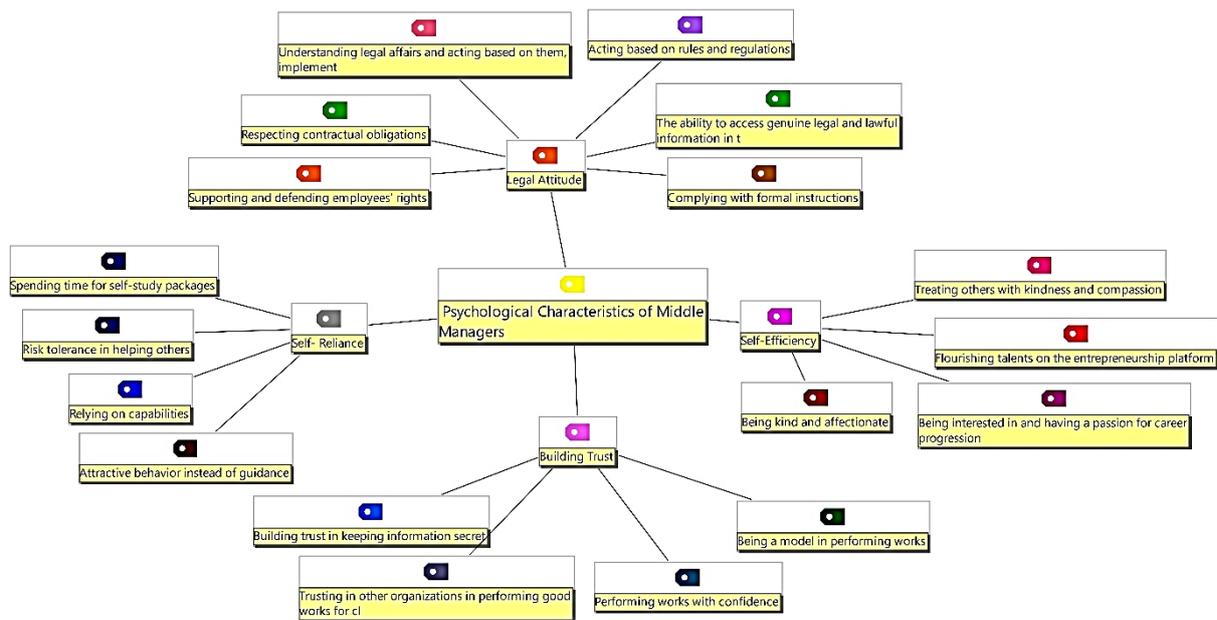


Figure 2: Software output MAX QDA12

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aims to identify the psychological characteristics of middle managers in the oil regions of West Azerbaijan Province in Iran. So far, psychological characteristics have received less attention in occupational groups and different levels. Considering that no research has been yet conducted in this research area, the covert content analysis was used to identify the characteristics. The results from this study draw the attention of the oil industry policymakers to the key points about the required characteristics for middle managers in this industry. .Therefore, considering the lived experiences of the activist, the psychological characteristics of the middle managers in the society under investigation were identified in this research, in four categories of self-reliance, self-efficiency, building trust, and legal attitude in the mentioned population. It can say that the characteristics identified in middle managers can be a turning point to succeed at this managerial level (middle level) because in order to reach the desired situation and improve the performance of these managers in the population under investigation, it is suggested that policy makers and decision makers in the oil industry pay attention to select middle managers who have the above-mentioned characteristics. Additionally, considering the obtained results in this research, some suggestions are proposed for the success of middle managers based on the extracted categories:

- Self-reliance: Considering the obtained indicators, it is desirable that the middle managers in the oil industry know well the capabilities of all employees of the company and use them toward attaining the company's goals if needed. Additionally, as the middle managers are the link between managers in the company, they should consider a required opportunity for themselves to study and increase their capabilities, and use attractive behaviors which are of interest to employees instead of leading and guiding them; and when the need arises, identify and tolerate risk so that they can pave the way for their own and their organization success.
- Self-efficiency: Considering the extracted indicators for this category, it is suggested that managers at the middle level in the oil industry be kind to the employees and clients, and realize affection and compassion as the goal of their working affairs, program for themselves and the organization, choose ideal goals because this leads to a proper and good occupational progress in the oil industry, and always try to identify creative persons and entrepreneurs because this will provide an excellent context for entrepreneurship in the company

- Building trust: Considering the obtained indicators for this category, it is desirable that the middle managers in the oil industry pay enough attention to the consequences of affairs, do things with confidence, introduce themselves to others as a model in works, realize building trust as their goal in relationships and other works and compared to other organizations so that employees can do their job with confidence, and always pay attention to the consequences of affairs because the managers who pay attention to the affairs consequences can give enough feedback to the system and reduce entropy in the system.
- Legal attitude: Considering the extracted indicators for this category, it is suggested that middle managers in the mentioned society act based on organizational instructions and have the required capability to access the legal and lawful information in their area, have the ability and power to defend their rights and the rights of the company and organization's employees in all affairs. And effectively do their best to provide arrangements for success in the organization in performing all policies of the company.

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