

The High Schools in Colombia and the Creation of a Convenient Environment for Organizational Change

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Abstract

Research on change management and its impact on organizational performance has become a significant factor for the preservation of organizations that operates in markets with high level of uncertainty. However, change management cannot be considered as an attribute of the organizations by themselves; it is closely related to the management and leadership skills of the chancellor, principal or school directors. Being the high schools, those organizations that must be at the forefront of the training processes; this research aims to establish the perception of the schools' directors regarding the creation of an environment conducive to organizational change. To do this, a research instrument was applied to 338 schools throughout the country, extracted from a ranking of the best high schools in Colombia, according to the results of the state tests that are performed on their graduates. The main results indicate the use of proactive language, transmit positive energy and demonstration of gratitude are the most frequent skills to lead positive change in Schools. Likewise, assertive communication becomes a skill to improve and develop change processes in those educational institutions.

Keywords

Management competencies, Organizational change, Management skills in schools, soft skills,

1. Introduction

Any type of organization requires management to be exercised in a professional manner in order to achieve its business objectives. Companies dedicated to construction, engineering, medicine, or design, require knowledgeable managers to run the business. By knowledgeable managers, the authors mean leaders who have both, hard (technical skills) and soft skills (interpersonal skills). It has become crucial for organizations to high perform; in this regard, companies in the education sector must also do so.

School directors, in addition to the training for teaching and the intrinsic knowledge they have about their profession, they must have such knowledge that allows them to manage the institution and understand people with whom they work. In doing so, they should achieve maximum commitment toward institutional activities and decisions (Gorrochotegui et al., 2014).

Those skills can be acquired during the professional practice but it cannot be ignored, that there must be an induction process that allows incoming managers to go through a training process that gives them, the possibility of influencing leadership performance in school management (Mestizo, 2016).

According to Zermeño (2014), the development of the managerial competences applied to the field of education should evaluate the potential of the human capital, necessary for the fulfillment of organizational objectives, within which the managerial capacity plays a fundamental role for institutional performance.

Given the importance of managerial exercise in schools, the first studies about this topic were developed around the 1980s, generating the first advances in the analysis of leadership in middle-level educational institutions (Andrews et al., 1986; Leithwood and Montgomery 1986; Grift, 1990 and Villanova et al., 1981), always based on the postulates published in the Coleman Report back in 1966, in which it is highlighted the low importance given to schools and their managerial practice (Maureira, 2018).

By virtue of the above, this research seeks to establish the perception of the schools' directors regarding the creation of an environment conducive to organizational change. Therefore, this study introduces a literature review of the main soft skills that school principals deal with change, then the methodology, the sample and the measurement instrument are described, next the results obtained are shown and finally the conclusions and new lines of research that emerge from this study are defined.

2. Conceptual framework

In this section, the basic concepts on which the research instrument is structured and on which managers were investigated will be defined.

For the conceptualization of the concepts, one must start from a different perspective of what is a company, eliminate existing paradigms and address it from the diversity and the need for new management constructs that take the leader to a different state to assume the managerial reality. In this sense, Chinchilla y Cruz (2010) propose that there are three management models: the first, far from the proposed business reality, according to which man must be treated as a machine, another resource of the company; the second, related to organizations and people as living organisms, sensitive and responsible for a habitat and the third, more in line with the position of this investigation, which considers the person is a unique and unrepeatable being. From this last perspective, the concepts are described as follows:

Positive Energy in a company can be conceived as a consequence of leadership when it generates an attitude mediated by affection and with manifestations of pleasure, optimism, resilience, job satisfaction, relaxation and enthusiasm by workers (Llorens, 2009).

Compassion is understood as the feeling that a person has, when they perceive the sadness or suffering of another, invites them to solidarity and drives them to avoid, remedy or relieve them (Serrano, 2017; Granados, 2015). In the field of organizational management, compassion can be understood as a manager's option to alleviate the problems of his workers.

Forgiveness, from a psychological point of view, is the possibility that a human being has to free himself from resentment caused by what is considered the mistake of the other (Kofman, 2012). In organizations, forgiveness is the managerial capacity to forget the error and generate other spaces for the construction of a highly productive work environment.

Language helps in the construction of realities. In this sense, the use of proactive language is a language of possibilities, options and alternatives that builds confidence, tranquility and strength. The use of this language allows the organization to be oriented towards action and those conflicts that seem insurmountable are seen with the possibility of a strategic solution based on collective, open and participatory dialogues (Aguilera, 2015).

Only those companies that are within the framework of the "economy of gratitude" can be able to compete and adjust to new conditions (Vaynerchuk, 2012). It is a statement that can be taken to the managers who can only remain in a position, the same way that they develop the feeling of **gratitude** towards all the actors that participate in the organization's performance, regardless of the level in which they are, gratitude must be a condition inherent to the management exercise.

Moreover, the role played by **assertive communication** in the company is described by Filipeanu and Cananau (2015) as an action that goes beyond the possibility of transmitting a message and receiving a response, regardless of the form or means used to do this. It is the way in which behavior changes can be achieved. It allows to adopt mechanisms to reach conflict resolution by eliminating anxiety, agitation and aggressiveness in these situations. In this regard, Romas and Sharma (2017) consider the exercise of assertive communication requires from the issuer, the ability to transmit the message without feeling guilty, generating the least amount of stress on both him and his receiver, the style communication is an indicator of the manager's way of thinking, feeling and acting.

It seems to be taken for granted that a manager must be a person who reflects transparency in his actions. However, Paladino et al (2005) raise the need for permanent analysis of ethical behaviors in organizations, as well as, the decision-making process is carried out from an internal condition of people based on values and practices in accordance with the need of society and the environment. **Integrity** varies according to the manager's personal perceptions. Nevertheless, the perception that employees have respect to this aspect, it can turn in commitment, confidence and the pursuit of exceeding the organizational objectives, resulting in a significant increase in the productivity of employees (Pounds, 2018; Duehr & Bono, 2006).

It is clear that many of the above concepts can be applied erroneously in the case that their implementation does not correspond to the organizational interests. In this sense, the existence of the company guarantees the aforementioned can be implemented, on the contrary, it prevents the school director from putting them into practice.

3. Methodology

Giving this research objective is to identify and describe phenomena or situations existing in a specific population, this study is non-experimental. It is transversal because it was developed at a specific time and did not have the scope to compare or determine variations over time of a phenomenon. On the contrary, the interest is to describe the situation of the population at a specific time. It is descriptive because it explains the behavior that the sample presents against specific aspects previously determined. It is an exploratory study because the scope is to explain a phenomenon that has not yet been studied and serves as a basis for future research projects about the same phenomenon in different populations.

This research was carried out in three phases: The first phase was the identification of the situation to be investigated which arises from the experience and concern expressed by the students who were taking class Theory and Organizational Behavior at the Faculty of Administration, Finance and Economic Sciences - EAN University. In this phase, the population, the sample, and the instrument to be applied were defined. The second phase was the application of the instrument, performed by the students of the study unit and the third one corresponded to the analysis of the information obtained and the explanation of the research findings.

The instrument was applied in the second semester of 2019, by telephone surveys. The instrument has been proposed by Whetten and Cameron (2013). It asks for managers to rate some of their behaviors in a 20 question questionnaire utilizing a Likert-type scale. The six possible answers for each question were: strongly agree, agree, partially agree, partially disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

3.1. The sample

The population chosen for this research work were managers of the schools with the best performance in the Saber Pro Tests (test conducted by the Colombian state to all students attending the last grade of secondary education) in 2018. According to the portal Datos.gov.co (2019), in 2016 there were 22,530 schools in Colombia, being this data the most up-to-date one. Likewise, the sample of the schools was extracted from the Best Schools portal (2019) which

shows the ranking of 12,701 educational institutions. According to this, the sample was established by applying the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N \times Z_a^2 \times p \times q}{d^2 \times (N - 1) + Z_a^2 \times p \times q}$$

Z (level of confidence) = 93%
p (probability of success) = 0,5
q (probability of rejection) = 0,5
d (margin of error) = 5%
N (population size) = 22.530

For the data used, the result of applying the formula was a sample of 324 school executives. It is a statistically valid sample, since it was applied to 337 individuals, who were part of the population, taking in consideration that only one director was interviewed for each school.

3.2. The instrument

For the application of the surveys, the instrument did not undergo any modification. However, for this analysis, the 20 questions that comprise it were classified into four groups in which it was sought to establish (i) the self-perception of some behaviors of the personality of each individual, (ii) the ability to influence the behaviors of those directed, (iii) follow-up process to others and (iv) the manager's self-demand.

In the first group, the questions shown in table 1 were included.

Table 1: Questions associated with the manager's personality.

POSITIVE ENERGY	To transmit positive energy to others by interacting with them.
COMPASSION	To express compassion towards people facing pain or some difficulty.
FORGIVENESS	To forgive others for the damage they cause or the mistakes they make.
PROACTIVE LANGUAGE	To utilize e language that encourages virtuous actions in people.
GRATITUDE	To express gratitude frequently and notoriously, even for small actions.
ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION	When communicating a vision, it captures people's feelings and thoughts.
INTEGRITY	Exemplify absolute integrity.

In the second group, the questions shown in table 1 were included.

Table 2: Questions associated with the influence as a manager.

ENERGY ACTIVATION IN OTHERS	It knows how to activate personal energy in others.
COMPASSION ACTIVATION	It helps promote compassionate responses in others, whenever relevant.
EXALTATION OF THE PURPOSE	It Highlights a higher lust or meaning related to the work it directs.
TEACHING	It has developed a teaching point of view on topics that interest others.

In the third group, the questions shown in table 3 were included.

Table 3: Questions associated with the follow-up process to the directed ones.

RECOGNITION OF SUCCESS	It keeps a record of what goes well not just what goes wrong.
POSITIVE FEEDBACK	It often gives other people positive feedback.
CONSTRUCTION ON STRENGTHS	It emphasizes building on strengths and not just overcoming weaknesses.

POSITIVE / NON-NEGATIVE COMMENTS	It makes many more positive comments than negative.
GENERATION OF COMMITMENT TO CHANGE	It knows how to make people commit to the vision of positive change.

In the fourth group, the questions shown in table 4 were included.

Table 4: Questions associated with the manager's self-requirement.

HIGH PERFORMANCE	It maintains high performance standards, although It forgives quickly.
COMPARISON WITH HIGH STANDARDS	It compares its own (or group) performance against the highest standards
SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE	It tries to close the abundance gaps: the difference between a good performance and an extraordinary one.
RECOGNITION OF PROGRESS IN CHANGE	To take advantage of a strategy of small triumphs in all initiatives of change.

4. Results y analysis

The analysis of the answers given by the directors is based on the consolidation of the percentages given to the Totally Agree and Agree options in each of questions.

Respondents give great importance to gratitude, the use of proactive language and the diffusion of positive energy to their subordinates as the elements that most frequently impact their management exercise. The lowest assessment in this group is obtained by assertive communication and forgiveness. Figure 1 shows the aspects of the school director's personality.

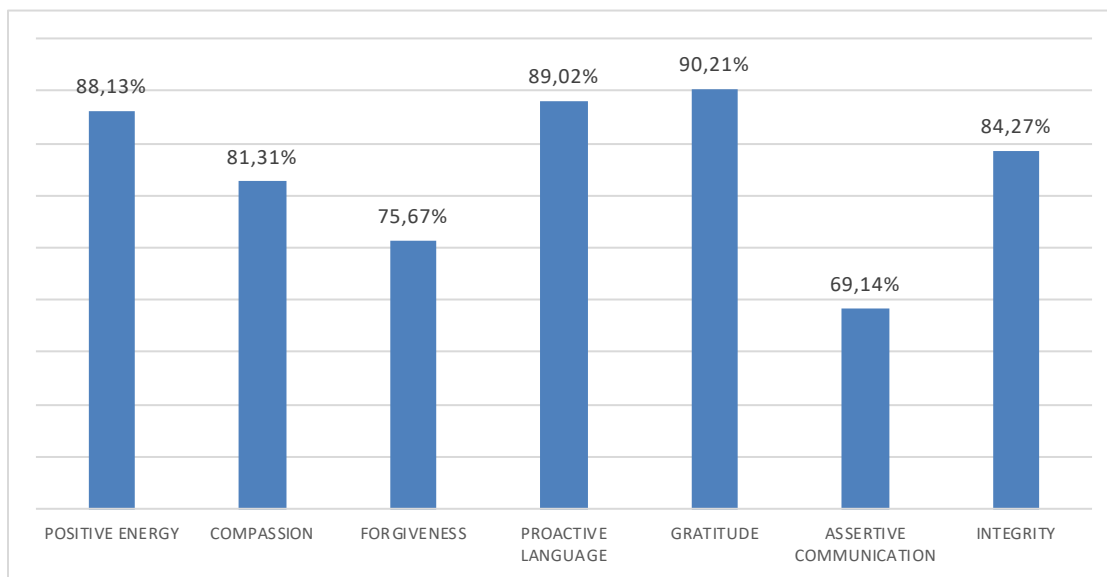


Figure 1. Manager's self-perception regarding aspects of his personality.

Source: Own research

As regards the influence on the directed ones, the school directors consider that the most relevant aspects are compassion and teaching, above the activation of energy and the exaltation of the organizational. Draws attention to the score given to compassion which incorporates moral criteria and shared behavior patterns into the organization. It

can be useful in the treatment of complex situations that generate states of passivity, demotivation and psychological insecurity (González, 2018).

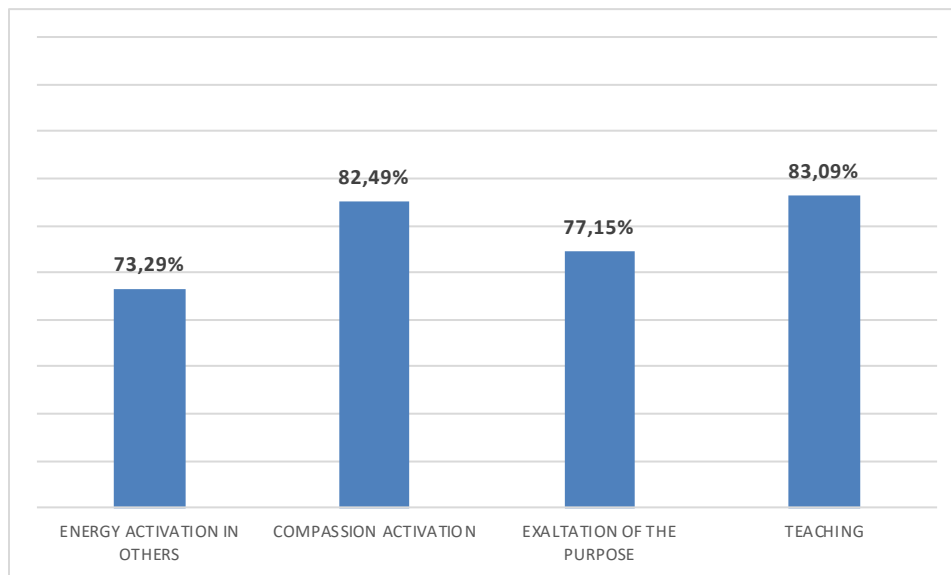


Figure 2: Self-acceptance of the manager regarding his influence on his directors.
 Source: Own research.

On the other hand, among the aspects related to the follow-up to the followers, the managers consider that the least important is the recognition of the success. There are factors of greater importance such as the construction of processes from the use of strengths, and the feedback based on positive returns. Those are above any reference that can be made to ineffective performances in the development of the responsibilities for each position.

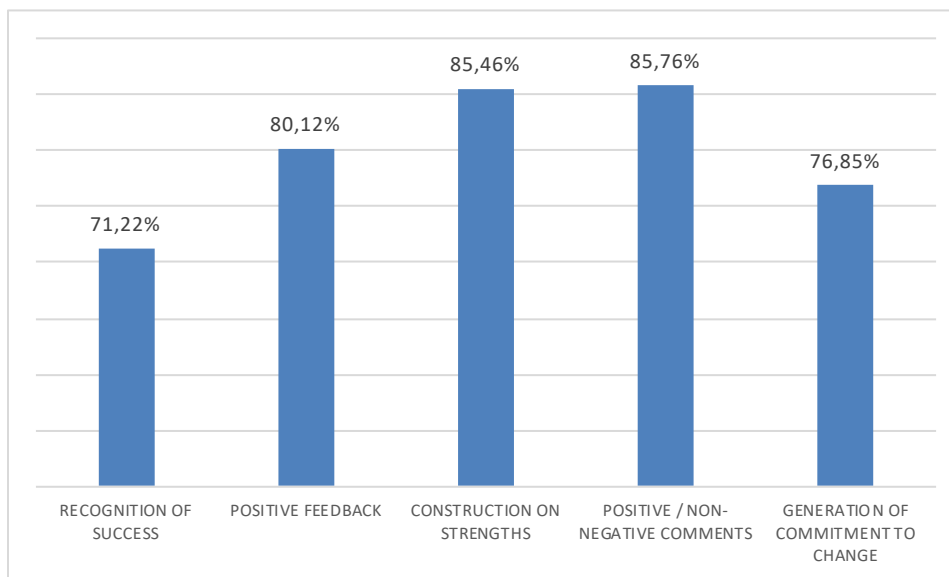


Figure 3: Self-acceptance of the manager regarding the follow-up process to those directed.
 Source: Own research.

The lowest overall score corresponds to the self-demand imposed by the manager. In this regard, 80% give importance to high performance, while comparison with high standards is not one of the elements that are significantly important. This situation arises, despite the fact that the schools, on which the field work was done, are included among the best schools in Colombia. In this sense there are two possible causes: first, they see that the high standards are a

consequence of their management exercise. Second, they do not consider it as an element that enhances their possibilities of improvement, which is in line with the qualification given to the pursuit of excellence.

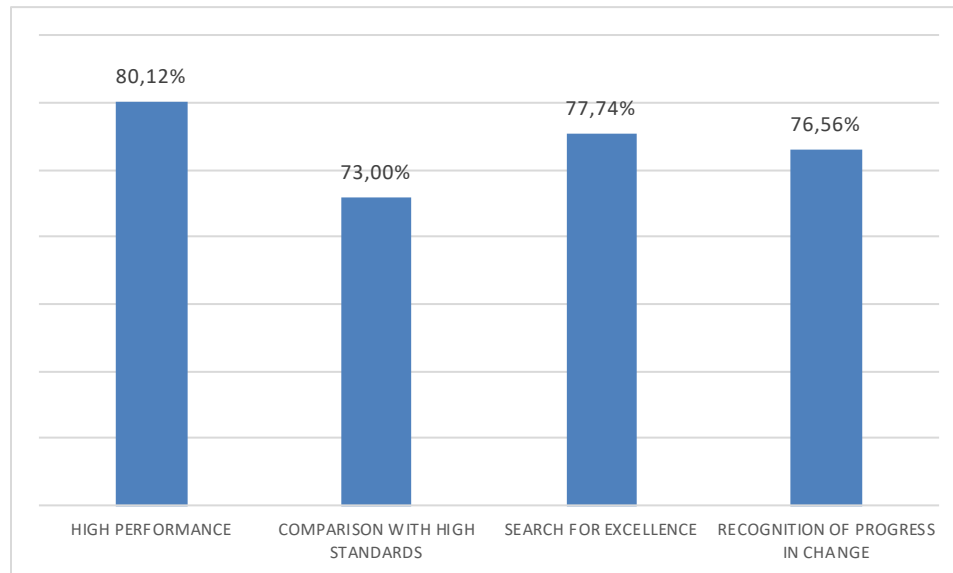


Figure 4: Manager's perception regarding their self-demand.

Source: Own research.

En la figura 5 se aprecia que los promedios agregados, por cada uno de los grupos de preguntas definidos, son similares en el caso de los aspectos que tienen que ver con la relación con los otros (la influencia que ejercen sobre sus dirigidos, 79,01% y el seguimiento a los mismos, 79,88%) mientras que aquellos aspectos que van más con la individualidad del directivo presentan diferencias significativas (personalidad del directivo, 82,53% y autoexigencia, 76,85%). Esta diferencia demuestra que los directivos de los colegios dan una mayor importancia a aquellos aspectos de su personalidad que les permiten desarrollar lazos de confianza y facilidad para la interacción con sus dirigidos, que a la exigencia propia en el desarrollo de las metas propias de su cargo.

Figure 5 shows that the aggregate averages, for each group of questions defined in this study. They are similar in the case of aspects that have to do with the relationship with others (the influence they exert on their directed, 79, 01% and the follow-up to them, 79.88%). On the contrast, those aspects that go more with the individuality of the manager have significant differences (manager personality, 82.53% and self-demand, 76.85%). Those differences demonstrate that the school directors give greater importance to those aspects of their personality that allow them to develop bonds of trust and ease for the interaction with their directed ones. Consequently, they take a great care on the relationship with others rather than their self-demand in the achievement of their professional goals.

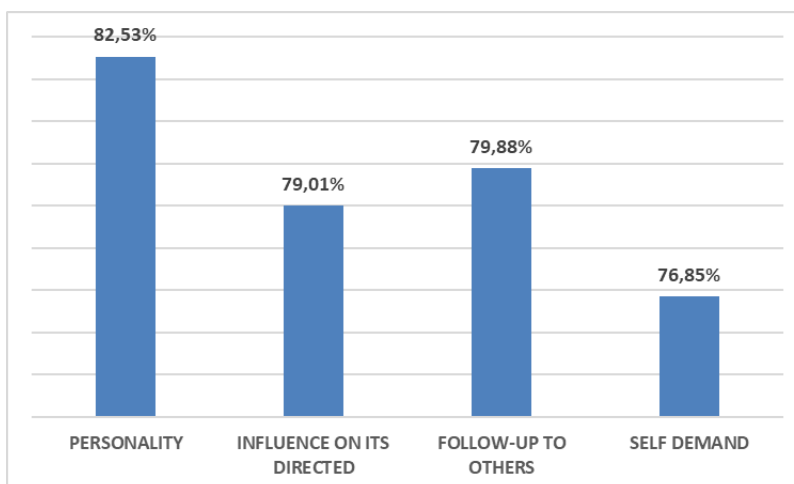


Figure 5. Average rating of managers to their management characteristics

Source: Own research.

5. Conclusions

The development of managerial competences is an important element for high performance organizations. It takes significant importance when the processes of change are permanent and the change in business dynamics are becoming faster and faster. In this sense, educational institutions, particularly, schools must train students who are capable of facing uncertainty conditions and deal with change.

Staying in this dynamic of change requires that managers, together with their staff, develop skills that allow them to permanently adjust to new situations. Those skills are so-called soft skills or interpersonal skills, which have become an important tool to generate commitment and meaning of belonging from the collaborators towards the organizational objectives.

Among these soft skills, there are some that relate to the manager's own aspects, considered as an individual with personal behaviors that may or may not be part of his or her role as a manager, and others that are closer to the ability to relate and feedback to the team.

For the school directors in Colombia there is no preference for one or the other, the averages obtained, according to this classification are similar. From the internal aspects of the director, the general average was 79.69% and from the interpersonal aspects of the director the average was of 79.45%.

Although this situation is illustrated in the aggregate, when the scores are analyzed thoroughly, there are significant variations. Some aspects such as gratitude and the spread of positive energy towards the team are highly valued by the respondents. On the contrary, aspects such as the search for excellence or the comparison with high quality standards have lower valuation.

As a result of this study, managers consider they do a worthy exercise in the transmission of positive energy, nevertheless, they do not consider to achieve an environment full positive energy in the same proportion. In contrast, when the aspect of compassion is analyzed, the results are highly similar between the one demonstrated by the manager and the one that manages pretend to develop among the team.

In general, it can be affirmed that school directors in Colombia consider they utilize in a high degree soft skills such as compassion, gratitude, integrity, proactive language and foster organizational environments with positive energy. The interpersonal skill that requires a high level of development is the assertive communication, which was score below 70 points. It becomes an element to work on. There is a room for improvement and managers must develop supportive and assertive communication to enhance the school environment.

From the experience of this study, later work can be developed in two different research lines: the first one, contrasting these results with those obtained from the staff, co-workers or team members. The second one, looking for the application of the instrument in executives of other sectors. It allows to compare the perception of development of these competences according to the sector in which the manager perform.

On the other hand, this study can also be developed in Colombian schools that are not classified as part of the best, with which managerial styles can be compared. From the results, several training programas can be created that contribute to the improvement of management skills, along with it the improvement of basic and secondary education in the country.

6. Limitations

This study encountered the difficulty to reach the schools directors, who in the first instance did not agree to the solution of the questionnaire for reasons of distrust of those who communicated to conduct the survey. Once this aspect was resolved, some executives saw the research as an intrusion in their managerial work, with the aim of evaluation. As a result, a clearer and deeper explanation of the intended scope was necessary, since the initial objective was getting the students closer to managerial experiences, which are near to their future professional work.

As it is a survey that seeks to evaluate the development of managerial competencies from the same answers given by the population under study, there may be biases since the self-assessment may differ from the assessment of those who depend directly on the direct one that gave the response to the Questionnaire. In this sense, it is convenient to carry out the research work, apply the instrument to a different population (employer or workers who are subordinate to the manager), in order to establish the coincidence or difference in the results.

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