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Developing a Model of Communication Skills for Managers in the Public Sector

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Abstract: Communication skills are one of the key elements of managers' success and a process in which individuals share information, thoughts and feelings through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages. The purpose of this research is to develop a communication skills model for managers working in government. This is a qualitative research and data collection tool is deep and semi-structured interview. After interviewing with 15 managers, theoretical saturation was obtained and the necessary data were collected and analyzed. The set collected data were analyzed after continuous comparison of data and open, axial, and selective encoding by using the Maxqda Software and they were organized in 91 concepts, 18 categories, and 9 classes. The final results of the collected data were provided using paradigm model in the form of an initial grounded data theory under title of model of communication skills in the public sector.

Keywords: *Communication Skills; Message Exchange, In-Depth Interview; Maxqda.*

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Introduction

In the today's world, communication in a set plays key role and it is considered as one of the elements of management. Thus, it seems that given the growing number of organizations on the one hand and the complexity of management issues on the other hand, the importance and need for communication is being felt increasingly. Effective communication is undoubtedly one of the key elements in the success of managers, since information, as an important input, enters to an organizational system in light of in effective communication. After finding it, an efficient communication system is required to be processed. It is clear that the managers' interactions with those working in their supervised set should be the best way to communicate, because all aspects of work, such as education, mission, and performance evaluation are performed through communication. Thus, it seems that, wherever communication is more effective, better and more clear, the performance of managers is improved, and vice versa (Robbins, 1998). On the other hand, it should be stated that one of the main barriers to the success of a group or an organization is the lack of effective communication. Effectiveness of communication is important for managers for two reasons. One is that managers perform their management functions through the communication process, and the other is that communication is vital so that managers spend most of their time on it (Stoner & Freeman, 1989).

Research shows that many conflicts that occur between individuals or employees in an organization are due to poor communication or incomplete communication, since people spend 70 percent of their work hours for writing, reading, talking, or listening to communication elements. Thus, effective communication is necessary and the basis for the effectiveness of each group and organization (Robbins, 1998). In organizations where the communication process is not well-established, disruptions in the performance of managers would occur. Thus, given the importance of communication in organizations, this research aims to present a model for improving communication skills of managers in the public sector. Thus, the basic question of the research is that what is the optimal model of communication skills of managers in the public sector?

1. Theoretical principles and research literature

Nowadays, great effort is made to define communication skills in the psychology literature. To understand this concept, it is enough to review

some of the definitions of different theorists. Communication skills are those behaviors, which a person can communicate with others in a way that leads to positive responses and to avoid negative responses (Gerbner 1967; Ghobadi, 2008).

In another definition, organizational communication involves a process in which two or more units of a set exchange their information, and since communications are the primary elements of management, managers at different levels should communicate with members of their set (Rahmani, 1990; Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969).

McGuire and Priestley (1981) state that communication skills refer to behaviors forming the basis of successful and face-to-face communication. (McGuire & Priestley, 1981). Kelly (1995) states that communication skills are learned behaviors, which people show in their interpersonal relationships for the aim of gaining environmental enhancements or maintaining them (Kelly, 1995).

Barton (1990) announced three dimensions of communication skills, including three components: a) verbal skill, b) listening skill, and c) feedback skill (Barton, 1990).

Kumar Singh (2014) referred to the importance of interpersonal communication in an organization in a paper on the role of interpersonal communication in organizational effectiveness. They concluded that interpersonal relationship is inevitable, irreversible, and complex (Kumar Singh, 2014). Hossein (2013), in an article entitled "effective communication brings successful organizational change" stated that change in communication roles is essential to manage the successful change. He referred to the importance of effective communication during the change process in organizations and stated that identification of communication goals and strategies at each stage of organizational change is vital. In this paper, motivations and benefits resulting from organizational communication were discussed (Hossein, 2013).

In a qualitative research entitled organizational communication: motivation and communication at work, Ramadanty and Martinus (2016) examined the relationship between employee motivation and communication factors, such as non-verbal communication. Their research revealed that non-verbal communication including management of body communication, face communication, and eye communication play a positive and important role in motivating the employees. Studies have also revealed a positive relationship between the satisfaction and the effectiveness of organizational communication and providing information by the leader (Ramadanty & Martinus, 2016).

In a paper entitled the effect of effective communication on organizational performance, Shonubi and Akintaro (2016) reminded that for an effective and efficient organizational performance, management should consider the ideas before communication and better understanding of physical and human environment.

When communicating, the goal of communication should be fully analyzed, and when planning for communication, counseling should be top to down and down to top and all the facts should be explicit (Shonubi & Akintaro, 2016). In a research entitled the effect of organizational communications on attitude, happiness, and job satisfaction of employees, Proctor (2014) showed that attitude, happiness and job satisfaction are related to the level of management communication and the ability of employees to provide suggestions, ideas and criticisms. Studies have indicated that employees who participated in the decision-making had higher job satisfaction and higher levels of self-esteem in the work environment. Supervisors, who encouraged employees to provide suggestions, would increase job satisfaction and higher productivity among the employees. Through sharing information, managers have made employees in the organization feel that they control their work environment (Proctor, 2014).

2. Methodology

The research orientation is developmental, its method is qualitative, its strategy is grounded data theory, its approach is inductive, its objective is exploratory research and the method of data collection is a deep and semi-structured interview. After interviewing 15 managers, theoretical saturation was obtained and the necessary data were collected and analyzed. As mentioned above, the tool to collect the data in this research was a deep and semi-structured interview, which was performed by asking questions lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. First, the framework of the interview, including introducing, the reason for the interview, and a general definition of communication skills were presented. Then, the research questions were asked from interviewed person based on the designed structure. Ethical considerations were also observed in the implementation of the research, reflecting the researcher respect for participants. In this regard, along with interview questions, a letter with a researcher's signature on the ethical commitment in keeping the interview contents and the characteristics of the participants and non-publishing it was sent. Moreover, by informing the participants, all interviews were recorded and analyzed using the content analysis method, it was reviewed carefully, conceptualized, categorized, and

finally, classes were determined based on the similarity of the relationship among the categories.

The research population includes public sector managers who have at least five years of senior management experience and have at least one of the following characteristics: selected as a national selected manager or at the Shahid Rajaei Festival, received one of the government badges, or recognized as effective manager or manager with superior performance from the point of view of deputies of presidency or organizations evaluating the performance of the relevant ministry. The main indicators of these units for effective managers are the result of the factors such as proper implementation of plans and policies, good reputation, constructive interaction with other units, administrative discipline, and so on. In this research, initial interviews were performed with three senior managers with a superior performance among a large number of managers with the aim of collecting the high quality data and gaining the knowledge of effective managers. Accordingly, the initial questions listed in line with the main question of the research were reviewed. Thus, the interview questions were reviewed based on the feedback received from the initial interviews and gradually improved and finalized.

Then, the researcher obtained the considered samples by referring to the database of managers selected as top managers at the Shahid Rajaei Festival and referring to the experts who were familiar with effective managers in terms of organizational status and wide communication with executive organizations, and also by referring to the offices evaluating the performance and office of administrative transformation, which are responsible for evaluating the performance of managers and implementing management development plans. Moreover, at each interview, participants introduced one or two of the people who could contribute to this research. This method of obtaining samples in the methodology literature is called snowball method. It should be noted that the request for the introduction of the next person was presented at the end of the interview, and the considered person could introduce the next person more accurately due to being familiar with the research objectives and the type of questions. The important point here is that in order to avoid focusing the study on a particular branch of organizations, snowball method was used only two or three times in each area of government tasks, and after the interview with the second person from the same work area, the next sample is selected from a new area. As the research is based on the qualitative method and grounded data theory was used, purposeful and theoretical sampling was used. The sample size in this approach was determined during the work, and the sampling continued up to

stage that the data were saturated, that is, to the researcher concluded that the new data is a repeat of the previous data and no new conceptual information requiring a new code or extending the existing codes and classes is obtained. In this research, the researcher achieved the saturation stage after the 12 th interview, but interviews continued for up to 15 people to ensure adequate data collection. The general characteristics of participants of this research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - general characteristics of the research participants

Gender		Work experience			Education level		
female	Male	10-20	21-30	Over 30	bachelor	Master	PhD
1	14	5	7	3	3	9	3

Source: Interview Form

2.1. Determining the truthfulness of research

Most of qualitative methodologists use truthfulness criterion rather than the reliability and validity criteria, rooted philosophically in a quantitative paradigm, in order to assess the results of qualitative results (Twining, 2000). In this research, the research truthfulness was assessed by the following four methods:

2-1-1- Acceptability: Introducing the next interviewees by previous interviewees, selecting interviewees based on expert advice, providing descriptive codes to interviewees, and receiving corrective views and ideas, and using descriptive phrases such as quotes in interpretations.

2.1.2. Transferability: selecting the interviewees among valid individuals such as general managers and heads of organizations, providing a picture of the context in which research is conducted.

2.1.3. Reliability: Providing data, methods and decisions with the aim of reviewing and scrutinizing research by other researchers.

2-1-4- Verification: Providing interviews and explanations on the process of data analysis to achieve the results of research (Sinkovics et al., 2008).

3. Research results analysis

3.1. Open encoding

In this research, the text of each of the interviews was carefully reviewed and the key message or key concept in each of the phrases was

extracted. In some sentences, the interviewees used the terms that were directly usable as a code, and in some cases, the concept was hidden in the sentences, which the researcher attributed to a concept based on the speaker's intention. All interviews were recorded and analyzed through open, axial and selective encoding using the Maxqda Software, and the final model was extracted. An example of interviews performed with experts and allocation of code and concept to each interview is presented in Table 2.

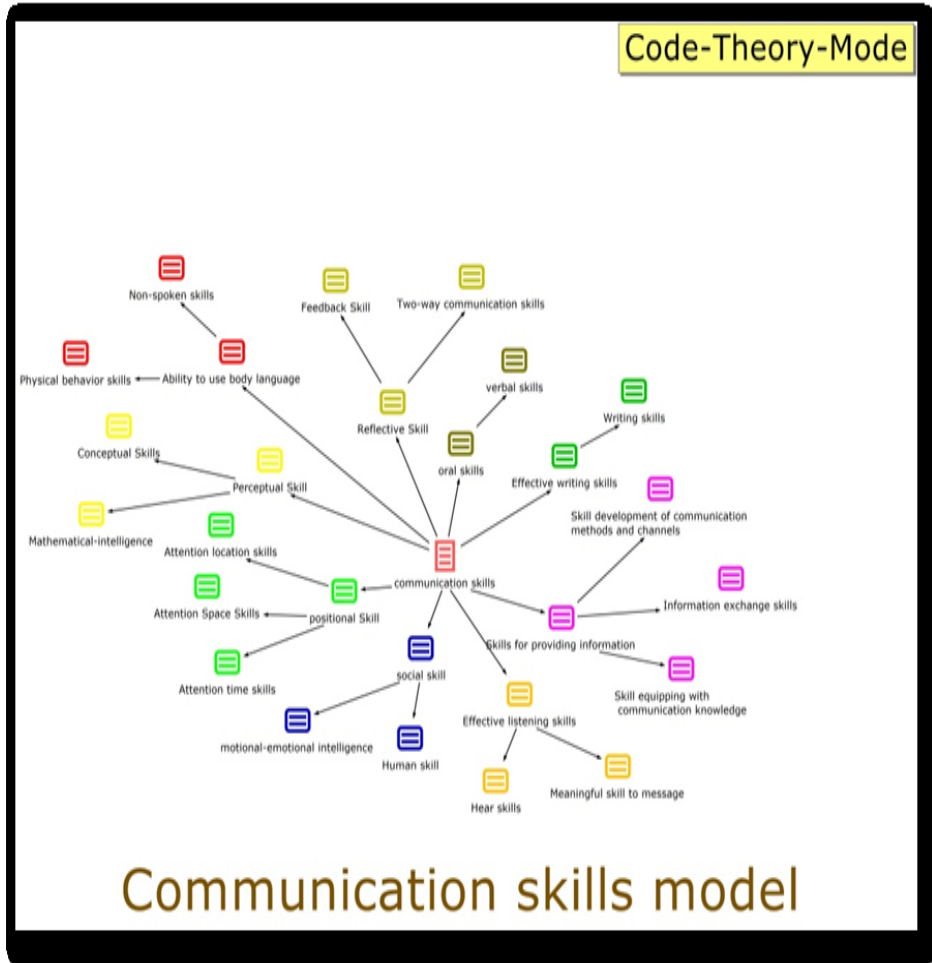
Table 2 - an example of interview and conceptualization of communication skills (open encoding)

code	Data (interview)	Concept
R1	Communication channel should be clear	Clarity in communication channel
R 2	When communicating, personality attraction is very important in transfer of materials	Personality attractions
R 3	Communication lines should not be complex and ambiguous	Direct and short communicative lines
R 4	Silence is full of unsaid words	Silence
R 5	To communicate and influence others, promise and threat are necessary sometimes, depending on the situation	Promise and Threat
R 6	Others' speech should be listened and this reflects respect to other party	Non-interrupting others' speech
R 7	The tone level and its raising or falling draw the attention of other party	tone
R 8	Used of words an symbols interested by other party is effective in communication.	Use signs and symbols
R 9	Help me in this work	Accompanying skills
R 10	Having honesty is the key in obtaining the trust of other party	Moralization

Source: Interview Form

It should be noted that in order to ensure the reliability of the research findings and the accuracy of the data analysis process, the results of the encodings were shared and discussed with several management experts and the results of the study were provided for several of the managers of qualified public organizations. Based on the feedbacks provided, the strength of the process and the results were strengthened. In addition, the

long-term involvement of researchers with subject proper understanding of the text and the space of research can increase the reliability of the findings.

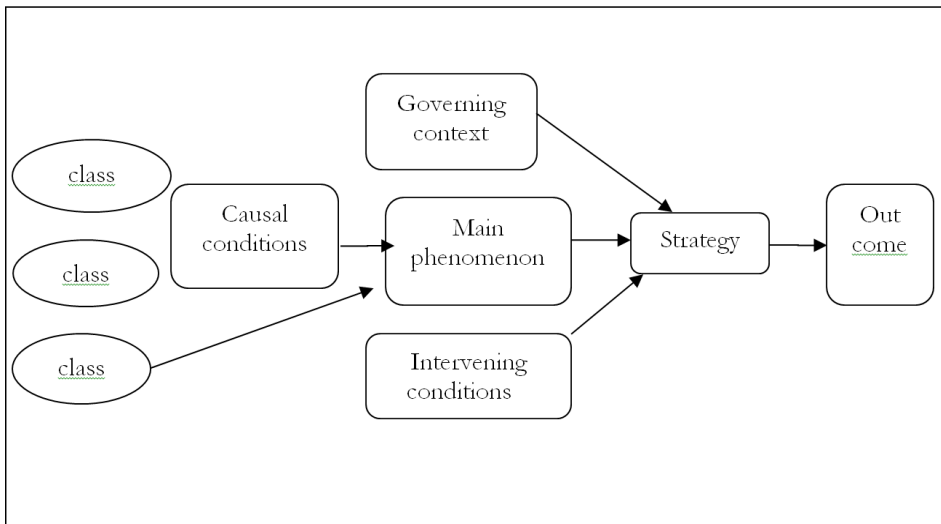


Source: Software Output

Figure 1: The model of communication skills using Maxqda software

3.2. Axial encoding

Axial encoding is the process of linking concepts to a category and linking the categories at the level of features and dimensions or classes. It is called axial encoding since encoding is done around an axis. The axial coding paradigm model is shown in Figure 2 (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).



Source: Authors' own elaboration

Figure 2. Paradigm model of axial encoding

Figure 3 is the result of data re-analysis based on the paradigm model and shows the axial encoding results in this research. In the axial encoding stage, while selecting a class as the axial class, the data are re-processed based on the structure of the paradigm model. Accordingly, based on the features, proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) on the axial class (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), in this research, the information-communication class was considered as the axial class, and it was tried causal conditions, intervening conditions, background, and outcomes to be defined for axial category using the classes produced in the open encoding stages and collected data.

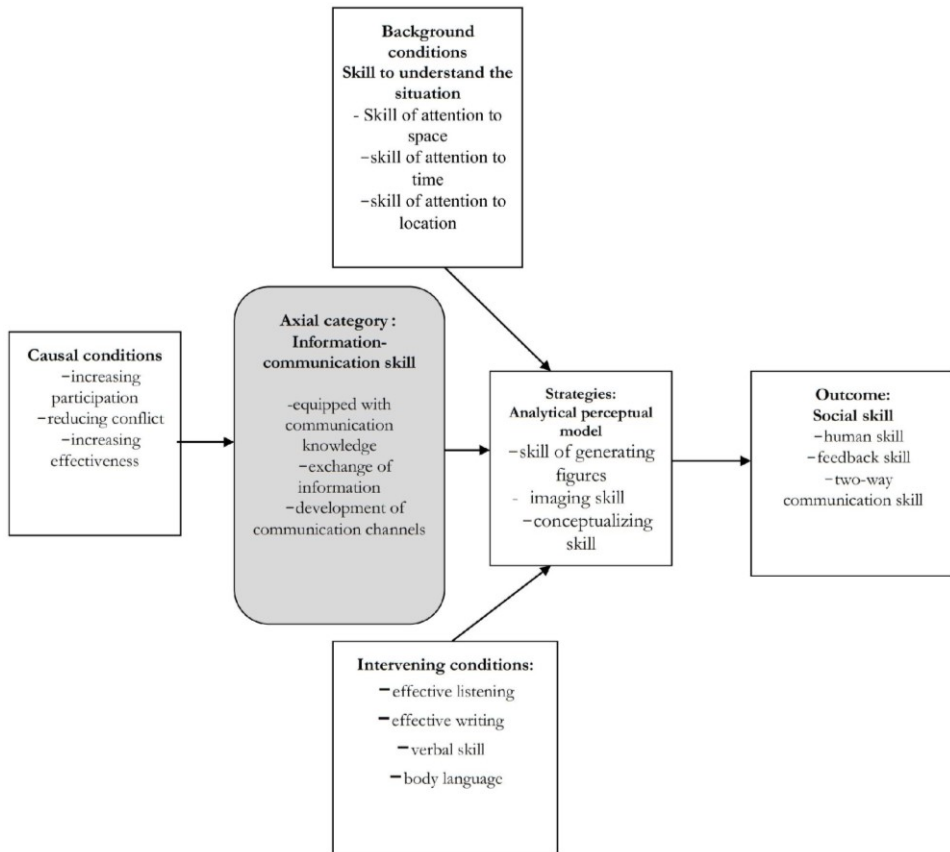


Figure 3- axial encoding based on paradigm model
 Source: Authors' own elaboration

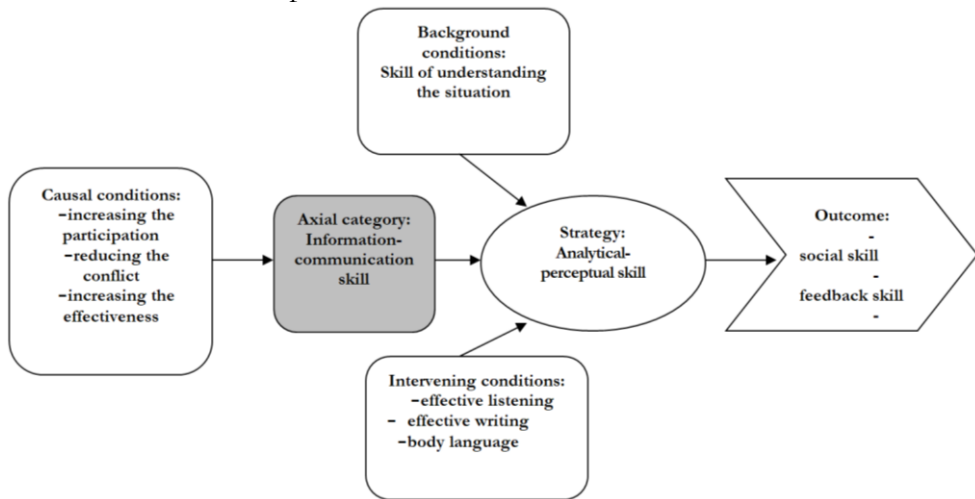
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Figure 3. Axial encoding based on paradigm model

3.3. Selective encoding (theorizing)

As mentioned above, the goal of grounded theorizing is generating the theory not mere describing the phenomenon. To transform the analyses to the theory, classes need to be linked orderly to each other. Selective encoding is the main stage of theorizing. Accordingly, the axial class is linked to other classes systematically and those relationships are presented within the framework of a narrative and the classes requiring further improvement are modified. At this stage, the researcher, based on his own understanding of the text of the phenomenon studied, presents the framework of the paradigm model as a narrative or depicts the final theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this research, the researcher identified the common aspects of the

components of the previous stages and, based on their common aspects, they are organized in a more general and more limited classification. Then, given the fact that the design of the model is an exact and difficult task and requires skill and expertise, after consulting with several consultations and implementation of multi-vote technique among the experts, the conceptual model of research was presented as follows:



Source: Authors' own elaboration

Figure 4. Comprehensive model of communication skills in public organizations

3.4. Research findings

3.4.1. Social skill

Social behaviors refer to desired learned behaviors enabling an individual to have a good relationship with others and avoid socially unreasonable responses. Social skills include a wide range of behaviors, such as the ability to initiate effective and appropriate communication with others, provide useful and desirable responses, tend to show generous, empathic, and helpful behaviors, and avoid mockery and bullying.

3.4.2. Effective writing skill

Writing skills means that you can communicate your message (including ideas, thoughts, memories and experiences, perspectives and concepts) to your audience in a clear, organized and structured manner through letter, email, weblog, message and text, or in any written form or record them and use them in future.

3.4.3. Verbal skills

They refer to words spoken by one person to encourage the behaviors or activities of others, which should be expressed at a specific time. Our better understanding of verbal communication and the use of more vocabulary completes our ability to think and approach to the world.

3.4.4. Ability to use body language

The body language refers to all forms of non-verbal or behavioral communication, which a person can communicate with others through his physical behaviors without talking. These behaviors can be related to body position and state (the location of the arms, legs, the way of sitting, standing, walking, sleeping), gestures (states), body movements, facial expressions and eye movements.

3.4.5. The skill of understanding the situation

To manage the works in organization, managers need to have right understanding of the environment. The organizational environment includes all the factors affecting the organization's activities. Understanding the situation means what and where we are from and where we go. In fact, an understanding of the situation is important from two dimensions, including religious-moral and social dimensions. Understanding the situation involves knowing when an event should occur in order to lead into a desired behavior response.

3.4.6. Analytical-perceptual skill

Perceptual skill refers to ability to understand the complexity of the whole organization and the perception of all elements and components of the work and organizational activity as a whole unit (system). In other words, it is the ability to recognize that the different functions of the organization are interdependent and change in each department affects other departments. Knowing these relationships and recognizing the important components and elements in various situations enables the manager to make a decision or act in a certain way.

3.4.7. Feedback Skill

The feedback skill is the return of the result of the message to the message sender in such a way that the message sender is aware of the status of the sending the message and its receiving. The communication process, without feedback skill, would not be complete. In the feedback skill, the message

receiver sends the received message to the sender. Feedback skill may be seen in different forms in the communication process.

3.4.8. Information and communication skill

In the vocabulary, it means showing and displaying and it is used in the Persian language as presentation. The presentation of the subject means the transfer of information on the subject. Presentation as a data transfer has its own system. This system has always existed in nature and in human community, and it has existed even in its primitive form before human civilization.

3.4.9. Effective listening skills

In the book entitled "communication experience in human relations, Sam Dip defined effective listening as "active participation in a dialogue". Listening is one of the essential components of communication. Some experts believe that effective listening is the cornerstone of communication skills of today's managers.

3.5. Theories supporting research findings

As the theory derived from data in methodology of the grounded data theory is a basic theory, its reliability would depend on to the extent that this theory is supported by relevant theories (Adib Hajbagheri, 2003). Research literature and analyzing the findings of the research and extensive examination of theories related to this domain suggest that the theory developed in this research is most closely related to the following studies and supported by them:

Table 3. Studies related to research findings

Row	Dimensions of research findings	studies related to research findings
1	Verbal skill	It includes speech and content of the speech of the person. This particular kind of communication can be considered as transfer of thoughts, feelings, desires, and what goes on in the mind of the sender to the audience and mutually hearing of their thoughts and feelings (Argyris, 1986)
2	Communication and information skill	In a research entitled the future of university libraries and librarians, the skills and characteristics of university librarian were mentioned as communication skills, information technology skills, management skills, and

		subject-matter knowledge. (Freet & Marcinek , 2005)
3	Skill of understanding the situation	examining the relationship between self-awareness skills, environmental knowledge and management of the job path in the Ministry of Education (Abbasi & Fani, 2005 ; Byham et al., 2002)
4	Feedback skill	Feedback is the process through which the recipient of the message announces communication and tells how he is feeling the main message (Schermerhorn , 1993)
5	Analytical-perceptual skill	Analytical skill is the ability to understand the complexity of the whole organization and the perception of all elements and components of the work and organizational activity as a whole unit (Robbins, 1992).
6	Effective listening skill	Effective listening is a learned and complex process of feeling, interpreting, evaluating, storing and responding to verbal and oral messages (Brownell, 1990).
7	Effective writing skill	Examining the relationship between personality traits and communication skills (Writing and Speaking) (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2009; Ghaeb Zadeh et al., 2016).
8	Skill of using the body language	Body movements are a form of communication which is distinct from oral communication. Anger, hatred, excitement, hand and foot movements are types of this communication (Moshabaki, 2001; Pies, 2016).
9	Social skill	Social skills refer to desirable learning behaviors enabling a person to have desired relationship with others and avoid unreasonable social responses (Matson et al., 2000)

Source: Authors' own elaboration

3.6. Discussion and conclusion

Communication is a very important skill in management and is the basis for effective management. Communication help managers establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, which are necessary for performing the daily tasks. Through communication, managers listen to others and are involved in understanding of the information they need to create motivation in the work environment. No manager can perform his duties without communication skills. In fact, many developments in today's work environment often depend on communications as the key to unlock all abilities of the human resources in an organization. In this research, entitled

as development of a model of communication skills for managers in public organizations using a qualitative research and open, axial and selective encoding techniques, the communication model was designed and explained and the findings of research were discussed. In general, it could be stated that a comprehensive model as extracted due to use of paradigm model, which takes the causal, background, intervening, main phenomena, strategies and outcomes into consideration. In addition, in presenting the model of researchers, they have tried to use the experience and knowledge of experts.

3.7. Research limitations

3.7.1. Problems of accessing to national top managers due to multiplicity of their job and shortage of time

3.7.2. Lack of research resources in the area of qualitative research, especially data grounded research.

3.7.3. Problems of access to research services such as access to books, magazines, statistics, databases, etc.

3.7.4. Viewing the research results private by individuals and lack of assistance in transfer of experiences and research findings.

3.8. Research recommendations

3.8.1. It is recommended that future studies to develop a model of communication skills separately based on personality types.

3.8.2. It is recommended that the results of the studies and the current model to be tested quantitatively in selected public organizations.

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