

## A Narrative Analysis of Identification of Skills Needed for Management Training Module Development

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### Abstract

Practical training can positively impact the individual's management skills and enhance the organization's performance. This study aimed to examine the management skills required by dietitians. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews comprising items emphasizing the skills required by the dietitians were conducted. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a thematic approach. Five (5) Heads of the Dietetics Department from four government hospitals and one private hospital in Malaysia participated in the study. A needs analysis was carried out to establish the experts' opinions on the management skills required by dietitians. Three main themes evaluating the management skills required by dietitians were generated: (1) individual qualities, (2) working with others, and (3) managing services in the organization. Stress and time management, effective communication, dealing with difficult people, motivation, and teamwork, were suggested to produce better quality work. All respondents agreed to develop and implement management skills training among the dietitians. The findings provided the basis for developing a training module, mainly for dietitians who need to perform management tasks at the workplace. Management skills training promotes career development by enhancing morale and increasing productivity. It would also benefit higher education institutions to equip their dietetic students with these management skills to produce competent dietitians upon graduation.

**Keywords:** Dietitians, Training, Management, Skills, Qualitative

### Introduction

Developing and strengthening management skills and competencies among healthcare professionals is a key objective in many healthcare services. Motivated, well-managed, and efficient health personnel and a strong management system can achieve maximum productivity for patients and the organization (Bjaalid et al., 2020; Chansatitporn et al., 2019).

Investment in training development would enhance job stability, motivation, work performance, and professional advancement (Alamri & Al-Duhaim, 2017; Bhatti et al., 2021). Comprehensive training with structured activities become an important part of human resource management in public or private hospitals to transfer knowledge to the targeted population, enhance skills development, encourage professional behaviour modification in the workplace, and be good for career and personal growth (Alipour et al., 2009; Hindiarto et al., 2020; Shahnazi et al., 2021).

Dietitians are also no exception to receiving training (Riketta, 2002). They are recognized with honed knowledge and competency in dietetics through experiential learning, training, and continuous education (Berthelsen et al., 2014). Many hospitals provide their employees with various types of training, but clinical professionals are usually more interested in attending clinical training than management-related training. However, management-related training is gaining more attention to be exposed employees to build professionalism in hospitals. Furthermore, the roles of a dietitian are now growing and evolving, which may require additional skills, including leadership, communication, and management skills (Hussain, 2017; Maunder et al., 2018). Limited data are available on training dietitians in management skills. Therefore, the main objective of this study is:

- To explore the skills needed to develop a management skills module for dietitians, especially those who have handled management tasks in their work.

The skills here are defined as the interpersonal, people, or behavioural skills that assist the application of hard skills or technical knowledge essential to perform the task effectively.

## Methods

This is a qualitative study using a narrative approach conducted by the head of the dietetics department. The in-depth one-to-one interviews were conducted to obtain data from each respondent. Respondents were recruited using purposive sampling. Study inclusion criteria included: (i) Head of the dietetics department; (ii) male or female; and (iii) has at least ten (10) years of working experience in the dietetics profession. The five heads of the dietetics department ( $n = 5$ ) were initially contacted for an appointment to conduct an interview session. A sample size of five respondents is considered acceptable for qualitative data within the same demographic group; all respondents work in Peninsular Malaysia (Piaw, 2011). The respondents were recruited to represent Malaysia's eastern, northern, and southern regions (Table 1). Interview appointments were sought through email and followed up with telephone calls within one week of the original request to schedule a convenient location and time. An informed consent form was given to respondents before conducting this research.

Table 1

### *Background of the workplace of respondents*

Respondent	Sector	Geographical area
H1	Government	South
H2	Government	East
H3	Government	North
H4	Government	South
H5	Private	South

A structured questionnaire was predetermined to achieve the optimum use of the interview time. The semi-structured questionnaire was developed to guide and ensure consistency

across the interviewing process and contained various questions (Table 2). The interview sessions were piloted before the actual interview. Following two pilot interviews, the pilot interviewers advised specific changes to the sequence of the questions. Face-to-face interviewing with an open-ended questionnaire provides a higher degree of freedom. The use of semi-structured interviews has the appearance of a discussion or conversation. It facilitates the interviewer's feeling more relaxed, offers a non-threatening atmosphere, and allows respondents to feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Table 2

*Summary of semi-structured guide for the interview session*

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Interview Questions
1. What do you think about the skills and knowledge among dietitians in your department about management tasks?
2. Based on your experience, what are the most important management skills to have?
3. Why should a dietitian have management skills from your perspective?
4. How can dietitians obtain information related to these management skills?
5. Do dietitians need professional guidance such as training to improve management skills for career advancement?

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The face-to-face interviews were conducted in the facility where the respondent worked and lasted 45 minutes and 1 hour. All respondents were informed verbally and in writing about the study's aims. Their identities would remain anonymous, and their participation would not affect their employment. A comprehensive information sheet containing the study information and questionnaire was emailed to them before the interview. The respondents consented to an audio recording of their interviews. Field notes were created after each session to help the researcher generate the transcript coding. The audio recordings were transcribed into the native language by trained transcribers familiar with the speech, including taped interviews, emotion, pauses, and unintelligible speech. The names, places, and any possible identification of personal information were changed to protect personal data. The English words were translated into Bahasa Malaysia. They were then imported into the qualitative software package ATLAS.ti to ensure the sizeable qualitative dataset became manageable (Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2017).

The researcher uses narrative analysis with a thematic approach to understand the respondents' personal experiences and inductively create conceptual groupings from the data (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). Thematic analysis was used to examine findings from the interviews. This analysis helps the researcher identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes within a data set. The researchers labeled segments relevant to the study's research questions as codes. Once codes were assigned, it helped the researchers to identify and compare similar segments within the text. This method allowed the researchers to quickly sort information and analyze relationships among those segments.

Eleven sub-themes with code examples were identified before the theme-searching process. The initial codes were created and incorporated into the themes. The development of these themes involved two levels. First, the coded data indicating a consistent pattern was formed. Then, once a consistent pattern was formed, the themes were considered from the entire data collection. It ensured that the themes represented what was evident in the overall data

set. The final stage of the report production involved choosing examples of the transcript to illustrate elements of the themes. These extracts identified issues within the theme and presented a clear example of the point being made.

Each interview transcript was compared to the recording by repeatedly listening to the audio. To ensure the validity or trustworthiness of the data, the authors reviewed and confirmed the transcribed interview wholly and correctly. This researcher triangulation technique increases the credibility of the findings to ensure that the findings measure what is intended (Nowell et al., 2017).

## Results

The study's findings were categorized into three themes on skills, and the needs related to management skills were identified. These three themes include individual qualities, working with others, and managing services in the organization. Table 3 presents the themes, sub-themes, and codes of the findings.

Table 3

*Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the transcript*

No.	Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
1.	Individual qualities	Time management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment/Meeting</li> <li>• Workloads</li> </ul>
		Stress management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentations</li> <li>• Missed the deadlines</li> <li>• Emotion</li> </ul>
2.	Working with Others	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalism</li> <li>• Interaction with others</li> <li>• Verbal communication</li> <li>• Non-verbal communication</li> <li>• Good communication skills</li> </ul>
		Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Work efficient</li> <li>• Activities for teamwork</li> </ul>
		Dealing with difficult people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of difficult people</li> <li>• Techniques</li> </ul>
		Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal attitudes</li> <li>• Increase motivation</li> </ul>
3.	Managing Services in an Organization	Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of management knowledge</li> <li>• Administration Tasks</li> <li>• Importance of knowledge management</li> </ul>
		Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training offered at the workplace</li> <li>• Suggestions for a management training development</li> </ul>

### **Theme 1: Individual qualities**

*“This level of leadership we build from experience.” [H1]*

*“When it comes to management, I learn through experience.” [H5]*

*“Through experience, we can get to know someone, and we will know how to deal with that person.” [H4]*

To answer questions on how dietitians get information about management-related duties, most respondents indicated that they do so through work experience. The longer a person works, the more skills they gain. Most of the respondents agreed with this notion. The experience gives the respondents an advantage when dealing with staff from diverse backgrounds. As head of the department, the respondents considered those who know about performing management-related tasks to be prioritized in carrying out a task. Besides, the respondents also believed that the opportunity given to the dietitians, such as performing duties involving the public instead of patients, giving talks, and becoming panelists on television programs, would give meaningful experiences and benefit their professional growth.

*“Public talks by the dietitians will indirectly sharpen their skills and confidence. Besides, it is also one of the components of the annual assessment in the learning and growing part.” [H5]*

The characteristics of a dietitian defined in this theme are skills that help them succeed in work. It is helpful to the individual and positively impacts the co-workers, thus producing better quality work. However, the work quality can be improved with good time management because they also involve administrative activities such as paperwork and documentation, which shows that the dietitians' duties are not restricted to therapeutic or clinical areas only when working in the hospital. *“Those newly joined as a dietitian also required to do duties other than clinical” (H3).*

#### **Subtheme: Time Management**

Clinical work is undoubtedly what most dietitians prefer to conduct over management activities, and they feel more burdened when required to perform management-related responsibilities, such as documentation. It is undeniable that medical professionals have a busy daily routine, and the administration's instructions also impact the daily work routine. The respondents explained: *“As dietitians, there are many documentations that requires to be done...” [H2]. “Sometimes the time they take to complete a given task is also short...” [H3].* Besides, most respondents shared that many dietitians were involved in the frequently conducted meetings at their hospital.

*“Along with patient treatment, dietitians participate in management responsibilities such as meetings, which may include discussions with other hospital professionals....” [H1]*

One of the weekly routines for dietitians is to attend meetings. It can be a meeting within the department, medical professionals in the hospitals, or others such as vendors. Conducting meetings facilitates task delegation, which supports patient-care coordination.

*“For example, there is a meeting organized by the medical zones of the hospitals. The meeting involves hospital specialists and clinical support staff, including dietitians. From here, everybody will know what their assigned tasks are”* [H4]

Thus, the respondents agreed that having proper time management at work would enhance employee performance. The respondent felt they would easily feel overloaded because their dietitians are often too focused on the clinical and require involvement in management issues such as meetings. Some shared that the management work affects the actual work to some extent: *“There is no doubt that management responsibilities disrupt clinical work...”* (H1). Deadlines are always crucial when involving management tasks, and they could experience distress and probably feel worried, drained, and stressed.

### ***Subtheme: Stress Management***

Feeling overwhelmed by too much work can have a detrimental effect on productivity and general health. Nowadays, challenges in the workplace are often regarded as a high degree of emotional liability. Almost all respondents agreed that having many meetings, tight deadlines, and increasing demands may distress their staff, causing worrisome feelings and feeling drained and overwhelmed. *“It is undeniable that overlooked deadlines and appointments happen among dietitians who were too busy at work”* [H4].

However, some had opinions that stress may not be bad.

*“I think the pressure is important, but we need to see if it will motivate or demotivate us.”* [H3]  
*“Stress can be a positive sign because it puts pressure on getting things done immediately.”* [H2]

## **Theme 2: Working with Others**

*“Because people value us, how we communicate with others, and the aura when we meet the people. Some people want to work with us because they perceive us well.”* [H1]

As indicated previously, the respondents share points related to personal aspects. In theme 2, the respondents discussed things or skills required by dietitians when interacting, cooperating, collaborating, and working with others. Similar to other healthcare professionals, dietitians are no exception to being employees who value professionalism. The respondents indicated that dietitians should possess several skills when interacting with others. One of the department heads revealed why a dietitian should be professional, especially when dealing with others, including staff, patients, and colleagues. This leads to the next subtheme, which is communication.

### ***Subtheme: Communication***

Communication is expected to establish appropriate interpersonal relationships. Most respondents emphasized that excellent communication involved correct and pleasing intonation, good eye contact, and appropriate body language.

*“We use the right intonation and body language to deliver the information and get people to listen. It is also called nonverbal communication....”* [H1]

The dietitians speak not only with patients, families, and caregivers but also regularly communicate with other members of the medical team and suppliers; *“Communication is not only one-on-one with patients but also with other members of the team....”* [H1].

Thus, good communication skill is expected to establish appropriate interpersonal relationships and symbolizes a person’s professionalism. However, the ways of communication are changing from verbal and face-to-face to online, in line with the current technologies, which are more effective and make work faster.

*“Good communication is essential because we interact physically and communicate virtually, such as via WhatsApp application... ”* [H2]

However, if communication skills and delivery methods are less effective, the message will be difficult to understand, creating mistrust and an unusual emotional response from the recipient.

***Subtheme: Dealing with difficult people***

Based on the previous subtheme, communication becomes a big key while working. Learning techniques for dealing with difficult people is worth learning to help us all live meaningful lives. Communication skills can help people manage situations calmly, including when dealing with difficult people.

*“Communicate skill is important because it gives way to handle problematic staff.”* [H2]

Some respondents disclosed ways they used when dealing with problematic staff.

*“From time to time, there are things we need to be assertive.”* [H2]

*“What I often did if there is a problematic staff, I would call them first. I will ask the staff to share and explain the problem the staff faced”* [H3]

*“What I can share here is that we need to be transparent. For those who always give excuses, they can only be dealt with by providing evidence.”* [H4]

However, if the problem cannot be solved at the departmental level, it should be referred to those who are more knowledgeable such as the disciplinary unit within the organization.

*“If there is a problem with our staff that we cannot resolve, we will refer to the higher authority. For example, if the staff continues to violate work rules, they will be referred to the organizational unit.”* [H3]

The use of language and questioning skills are examples of communication skills commonly used during work.

*“Even communication is the medium of negotiation, which sometimes it will be used for the problematic staff, or with others....”* [H4]

Based on these findings, it shows that a person is not only often happy when interacting with other people at work, and sometimes they have to face those who are difficult to deal with.

Using the right approach will do wonders for one's career and allow one to respond appropriately to those challenging colleagues or staffs.

**Subtheme: Teamwork**

Excellent interpersonal skills are required when a job involves employees from different backgrounds, including academic and job positions. Teamwork is one of them, whereby skills help to facilitate exchanging of opinions, feedback, and experiences between the team members or organization. Many respondents stated that they held team building as an initiative to strengthen teamwork.

*"For training, team building is magnificent indeed to implement...We have been doing this recently, and I can see it positively impacts doctors and other colleagues."* [H4]

Moreover, all respondents stated that training is a program carried out each year for the staff in their departments, where the primary objective is to strengthen relationships and foster better collaboration.

**Subtheme: Motivation**

Dealing with difficult people is either easy or challenging, and motivation is one of the strategies for dealing with those difficult people. Motivation is one of the skills that help encourage employees to achieve their goals or assigned tasks. It encourages the employee to achieve the goals or assigned tasks, and having high motivation could inspire them to become more committed to their jobs. Two respondents have expressed their opinion about motivation, where motivation from within the individual has an important role:

*"To motivate people, we need to increase our motivation first."* [H1]

*"To motivate people to follow what we say, we must set an example ourselves."* [H3]

The level of commitment and energy that a person gives indirectly encourages others to work well. Team building and appreciation of those who work productively are among the approaches that keep employees motivated to work

**Theme 3: Managing Services in an Organization**

*"Even though it is not a job or tasks that must be done every day, a dietitian must also know how to conduct associated tasks like documentation....."* [H2]

Previous sharing from the respondents clearly states that dietitians are also responsible for quality service management to facilitate the optimal accomplishment of the department's goals, objectives, and outcomes. The respondents agreed that dietitians must be knowledgeable in clinically related skills to provide nutrition care to the community or general hospital clinics, and they also need to have skills in psychology and administration to give optimum services to organizations. Moreover, dietitians have been trained in clinical and psychological aspects during their degrees and have had clinical practice since working in the field, although not for administrative tasks.

**Subtheme: Knowledge**

The majority of respondents stated that the level of knowledge of officers when performing management-related tasks was at a moderate level. Typically, junior dietitians would not be



given direct administrative tasks or human resource management such as budgetary and act and policies. However, they would have been given tasks related to managing food and other material resources (e.g., developing special or therapeutic menus for clients), accessing employees' learning needs and performance, and collecting data for clinical and management decisions.

*"It is not important for the junior dietitians to know the financial resources because the department head does it. I also learned when I was the head of the department...."* [H1]

Besides, they are also involved in administrative activities such as paperwork and documentation. Some may be required to complete the tasks via healthcare technology, such as by using electronic medical records that share patient data, test results, and other information between healthcare providers and departments. These views show that dietitians are not restricted to therapeutic or clinical areas only when working in the hospital.

*"The dietitians who have worked for less than two years, I invited them to participate in this management issue. Thus, they may simultaneously learn to manage their time because they are responsible for seeing patients and other responsibilities. Indeed, they also handle a significant amount of documentation-related work...."* [H5].

The dietitians are not required to have leadership skills in total but should slowly develop soft skills which are useful for task management. It is suggested that the dietitians develop an integrated personality with a drive to learn, improve, and work better with other staff. Additionally, throughout the interview, the respondents mentioned training that aided them in maintaining a high standard of work.

### **Subtheme: Training**

Most respondents described the training as a part of the initiative, which included management training arranged by their organization to enhance job performance and skills. While two respondents explained the participation of the dietitians in the training sessions, others explained how the training was usually performed in the hospital.

*"There is no denying that such management training is available, but it depends on the hospital itself to provide it for their employees."*[H2]

*"Yes, at the hospital level, there are management training slots offered to every hospital staff in the hospital...However, it is up to the staff to get involved or not...."* [H5]

Most respondents shared training related to management skills offered at their hospitals.

*"Examples of management training other than clinical training is communication skills training. One of the training objectives was to expose our staff to skills required when dealing with problematic staff."* [H2]

*"Here we have the managerial module training...."* [H5]

However, due to the limited number of participants required in training, often the staff could not join the program delivered by the organization.

*“Yes, there are courses such as leadership skills in the hospital, but they are limited to the number of participants, as each department can send a maximum of two persons.”*

[H2]

At the end of each session, the development of a training module related to management skills was inquired. All respondents agreed to design and develop a management training program for dietitians. They believed that dietitians participating in the management skills training program would strengthen their management skills and prepare them for future responsibilities, allowing them to advance in their careers.

## **Discussion**

The respondents expressed their perceptions and experiences by sharing the skills needed at the individual level as a dietitian when dealing with people around and then sharing the important things when a dietitian serves in the organization. The interviews explored past and current experiences and their views on the need for dietitians to possess the skills related to management that may lead to a higher rate of employability (Hashim et al., 2019). From a knowledge-based perspective, it is not critical for a dietitian to understand management knowledge in detail, such as finances, unless appointed as the department head. However, the knowledge that emphasizes human capital development, including skills, competencies, attitudes, and motivation of the dietitians within an organization, has significant benefits to the organization per se. Professionalism is one of the competencies that every dietitian should hone. Professionalism has been characterized by having job clarity, feeling valued and appreciated, having a positive connection with co-workers, and being willing to seize opportunities to learn and develop skills (Vidman & Strömberg, 2021). The organizational culture encourages the professional team to develop professionalism build a trusting relationship with patients, and display a commitment to individualism, a healthy work environment, diversity, and teamwork (Mason, 2017):

The ability to communicate well, express opinions, and use the correct body language are thoughts given by the respondents in this study, suggesting how professionalism should be. Listening and speaking are two components of communication that every employee should have at work, and these skills are a foundation for other talents, such as interpersonal, negotiating, motivation, and teamwork, which benefit the dietitians when dealing with difficult people that could put much pressure on individuals if they do not know how to handle it. One factor influencing people's efficiency in executing a particular task at the workplace is how motivated the individuals are (Ali et al., 2016; Zameer et al., 2014). Putting trust in others and being trusted by them can give a sense of being valued. It is a feeling that might occur when two people engage in open and respectful interaction. Dietitians in the food service industry may attempt to create a facilitating zone within the premise, such as implementing an excellent working environment and connection with the hospital staff. These should be practiced and applied in the workplace. If this situation is not created, they become demotivated. A bad relationship and uncooperative colleagues and superiors could demotivate individuals (Damij et al., 2015). This statement concurs with the respondents' opinion: dietitians must be motivated to stimulate or trigger others to complete the assigned tasks. Applying one's experiences is essential in encouraging other employees to increase their commitment. A person with better experience should guide, give directions, and communicate more with colleagues to motivate them to complete assigned tasks (Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015). With the current management style, people within the organization can substantially work together to yield better outcomes instead of just being ordered by their

employers to follow their instructions. This working style makes superiors better aware of their subordinates' problems. These findings reinforced the general belief that the administration can cause a burden on the dietitians. Effective workplace communication, time, and stress management may benefit dietitians and their departments.

Nowadays, developing and strengthening management competencies and skills among healthcare professionals are key objectives in many healthcare services. These abilities help dietitians execute various responsibilities in the workplace, including management and clinical tasks. Most respondents described the training as part of the initiative, including management training prepared by their organization to enhance job performance and skills. However, the respondents mentioned that dietitians are more interested in attending clinical training than management training. The proposal to develop management training for dietitians received support from respondents. The training program will eventually educate people to identify factors that may interfere with one's behaviour and will likely be more prepared to find alternative solutions to the situation.

This study uses one-on-one interviews, which may not provide a diversity of opinion as many are contributing their views, and may not observe participants agreeing and disagreeing sentiments, which becomes a limitation of the study. However, the depth of interviews conducted and the application of suitable software helped the researcher to gather rich and deep information on respondents. These interviews shared the respondents' perspectives on skills that need to be emphasized and provided training based on those needs before going on to the validation phase (Majid, Damio, & Hoon, 2020). The findings will also provide a clear picture of what variables need to be measured to increase the chances of success of the training program and the expected outcome after the training.

### **Conclusions**

As a dietitian, the management responsibilities are usually tasked-oriented, and it involves developing the human capital, mentoring potential individuals, and resolving conflicts while maintaining ethics and discipline. Management skills are just as essential as hard skills for health professionals, and employers want their employees to improve their job performance. Regardless of the past, dietitians' management tasks today involve human motivation and better use of several skills, including time and stress management, communication, dealing with difficult people, and teamwork. Therefore, these findings can help researchers determine which management skills need to be emphasized and also may benefit the design and development of dietitians' training programs to enhance the effectiveness of their management skills. Understanding the challenges, strengths, and opportunities for improving the management skills of dietitians would help enhance professionalism, strengthen skills, and create a better atmosphere, all of which will lead to increased productivity. Superiors' support should encourage dietitians to participate in training to ensure a higher participation rate. The training program for the empowerment of dietitians should be implemented so that the right people with the right competencies will effectively carry out management responsibilities. Continuing education and training can become parts of the ongoing processes of organizational learning, facilitating and moulding their competence, thus benefitting the professional development of dietitians.

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