



# Prioritization of the Dimensions of the Professional Competency Model of Managers Based on the Mindfulness (Present-Moment Awareness) Approach from Langer's Perspective in Education

## ABSTRACT

Today, our society requires managers who, while making sound and rational decisions, are able to propose creative and constructive solutions to problems and challenges. The purpose of the present study was to prioritize the dimensions of the professional competency model of managers based on the mindfulness (present-moment awareness) approach from Langer's perspective in the education system. The present research was applied in terms of purpose and exploratory mixed-methods in terms of methodology. The statistical population consisted of national and provincial experts and top-performing managers holding high ranks and possessing relevant expertise, who were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted through library research. The data collection instruments included semi-structured interviews in the qualitative phase and a researcher-developed questionnaire in the quantitative phase, which was derived from the findings of the qualitative phase. The results indicated that the dimensions of managerial competency comprise six dimensions: pedagogical knowledge, professional skills, specialized knowledge, commitment to ethical and ideological values, personality traits, and creativity. The findings also showed that the prioritization of these dimensions, respectively, includes specialized knowledge, professional skills, pedagogical knowledge, commitment to ethical and ideological values, personality traits, and creativity, such that specialized knowledge ranked first and creativity ranked last. Based on the results, awareness of the surrounding environment is considered one of the important dimensions of managerial competency from Langer's perspective; therefore, the educational system should pay close attention to this issue in the selection and training of managers.

**Keywords:** professional competency of managers; mindfulness (present-moment awareness) approach; Langer's perspective; education system.



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## Introduction

In contemporary organizational environments characterized by rapid technological change, increasing complexity, and heightened stakeholder expectations, managerial competency has emerged as a central determinant of organizational

effectiveness, sustainability, and adaptive capacity. Managers are no longer evaluated solely on technical expertise or hierarchical authority; rather, they are expected to demonstrate an integrated set of competencies encompassing knowledge, skills, attitudes, ethical orientations, and cognitive–emotional capacities that enable effective decision-making in uncertain and dynamic contexts (1, 2). This shift has intensified scholarly and practical interest in competency-based management frameworks, particularly within public and educational organizations where managerial decisions have long-term social and developmental consequences (3, 4).

Competency models are systematic representations of the attributes required for effective managerial performance. These models provide a structured basis for recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal, and leadership development (5). In the field of management, competencies are commonly conceptualized as clusters of observable and measurable characteristics—such as knowledge, skills, abilities, motives, and values—that distinguish high-performing managers from average performers (1, 6). Empirical research across sectors has demonstrated that well-designed competency models contribute to improved organizational alignment, strategic clarity, and human resource development outcomes (7, 8).

In recent years, attention has increasingly turned toward contextualized and sector-specific competency models. Studies conducted in government organizations, industrial enterprises, construction projects, and educational systems highlight that managerial competencies are not universally uniform but are shaped by institutional missions, cultural contexts, and environmental demands (9-11). In the educational sector, managerial competency acquires particular significance, as school and system-level leaders directly influence teaching quality, organizational climate, innovation capacity, and student outcomes (12, 13). Consequently, identifying, structuring, and prioritizing managerial competencies in education remains a critical research agenda.

Parallel to developments in competency-based management, the concept of mindfulness has gained prominence as a psychological and organizational construct relevant to leadership effectiveness and decision quality. Mindfulness, particularly as conceptualized by Ellen Langer, emphasizes active awareness, cognitive flexibility, sensitivity to context, and openness to novelty, rather than passive attention or meditative detachment (14, 15). Langerian mindfulness is grounded in social–cognitive theory and focuses on how individuals actively construct meaning by noticing new distinctions, questioning assumptions, and engaging with their environments in a non-automatic manner (15). This perspective is especially relevant for managerial roles that require continuous interpretation of complex situations and adaptive responses.

The integration of mindfulness into management and leadership research reflects a growing recognition that cognitive and attentional processes are central to effective managerial action. Mindful managers are more likely to demonstrate situational awareness, ethical sensitivity, emotional regulation, and creative problem-solving, all of which are critical competencies in modern organizations (16, 17). Empirical studies suggest that mindfulness contributes to improved judgment, reduced decision bias, enhanced interpersonal relationships, and greater organizational learning (18, 19). These findings have stimulated interest in examining mindfulness not merely as an individual trait or intervention, but as an underlying orientation shaping managerial competency.

Within educational organizations, the relevance of mindfulness-informed management is particularly pronounced. Educational managers operate in environments characterized by policy pressures, resource constraints, diverse stakeholder expectations, and rapid pedagogical change. Mindful awareness enables leaders to navigate these complexities by fostering reflective practice, contextual sensitivity, and adaptive leadership behaviors (20, 21). Research in educational leadership indicates that principals' competencies are closely linked to teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and innovation readiness, underscoring the need for competency models that incorporate cognitive and ethical dimensions alongside technical skills (12, 22).

Despite the growing body of research on managerial competencies and mindfulness, several gaps remain evident in the literature. First, many competency models prioritize structural and functional skills while underemphasizing cognitive orientations such as present-moment awareness, flexibility, and meaning-making, which are central to Langer's mindfulness framework (23, 24). Second, existing studies often identify competency dimensions without systematically prioritizing them, limiting their practical utility for decision-makers responsible for selection and development processes (4, 6). Third, empirical research integrating mindfulness theory with competency modeling in the education sector remains relatively limited, particularly in non-Western and public-sector contexts (3, 11).

Prioritization of competencies is a crucial methodological and practical step, as it enables organizations to allocate resources strategically, design targeted training programs, and clarify performance expectations. Statistical techniques such as factor analysis and nonparametric ranking methods have been widely used to identify and rank competency dimensions across sectors (5, 25). However, prioritization gains deeper significance when grounded in a coherent theoretical framework, such as Langer's mindfulness perspective, which provides interpretive logic for understanding why certain competencies may be more critical than others in complex managerial roles.

From a theoretical standpoint, integrating mindfulness with competency modeling aligns with contemporary views of management as a practice-based, context-sensitive activity rather than a purely technical function. Mindfulness emphasizes the manager's ongoing engagement with situational cues, ethical considerations, and human dynamics, complementing traditional competency dimensions such as specialized knowledge and professional skills (2, 15). This integration also resonates with human-centered and sustainability-oriented approaches to management education, which stress reflective capacity, responsibility, and long-term value creation (17, 24).

Empirical evidence further supports the relevance of mindfulness-related competencies for managerial effectiveness. Studies in diverse fields—including healthcare, disaster management, industry, and education—demonstrate that competencies such as situational awareness, ethical commitment, emotional regulation, and creative thinking are critical for leadership under uncertainty (8, 25, 26). Moreover, research on psychological processes underlying managerial behavior highlights the role of attention, self-regulation, and cognitive appraisal in shaping performance outcomes (27, 28). These findings provide a strong rationale for examining managerial competency through a mindfulness-informed lens.

In the context of education systems, particularly those undergoing reform and transformation, the need for competent and mindful managers is increasingly evident. Educational leaders are expected to balance policy compliance with innovation, uphold ethical and cultural values, support professional learning, and respond effectively to crises and change. Developing a prioritized competency model grounded in both empirical evidence and mindfulness theory can therefore contribute to more effective leadership development and organizational improvement (12, 13). Such a model also has implications for policy-making, as it can inform standards, evaluation frameworks, and leadership preparation programs (3, 4).

Furthermore, the growing international literature on managerial competencies underscores the importance of comparative and context-sensitive research. Studies conducted in Bhutan, South Africa, Iran, and other regions illustrate both commonalities and contextual variations in competency priorities, reinforcing the need for locally grounded yet theoretically informed models (8-10). Incorporating mindfulness into such models offers a unifying conceptual framework that transcends technical differences while respecting contextual specificity.

In summary, the convergence of competency-based management and mindfulness theory offers a promising avenue for advancing managerial research and practice in education. While substantial progress has been made in identifying managerial competencies, less attention has been paid to their prioritization within a mindfulness-oriented framework. Addressing this gap

can enhance the explanatory power, practical relevance, and developmental utility of competency models, particularly in educational settings where leadership quality has far-reaching social implications (2, 11, 14).

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to identify and prioritize the dimensions of a professional competency model for educational managers based on the mindfulness (present-moment awareness) approach from Langer's perspective.

## Methods and Materials

The present study was applied in nature and conducted using a qualitative–quantitative approach (exploratory mixed-methods design). The statistical population of the study included all national- and provincial-level experts and top-performing managers holding superior ranks and possessing relevant expertise, who were selected through purposive sampling. The qualitative data collection method was library-based research, and the measurement instrument in the qualitative phase was a semi-structured interview.

In line with this research, an initial proposed model was developed using the meta-synthesis method based on credible prior studies. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview protocol was designed to elicit expert opinions through the Delphi technique. This questionnaire included selected dimensions in accordance with previous research. The instrument used in the quantitative phase also consisted of a researcher-developed questionnaire, which was formulated based on the results obtained from the qualitative analyses.

The questionnaire designed based on the initial proposed model was administered to experts in the form of a semi-structured questionnaire, and they were asked to express their views both on the degree of importance of the selected dimensions and components and on the dimensions that, in their opinion, represented the final research model. In the first stage, 10 dimensions and 55 components related to competency were identified based on the theoretical foundations of the study and were used as criteria for designing the first Delphi questionnaire, which was then distributed among experts. A five-point Likert scale was used for designing the questionnaire. This procedure was also carried out in the second and third rounds.

In the second round, 8 dimensions and 50 components related to competency were considered, and in the third round, the process resulted in 6 dimensions and 42 components related to competency. Following these stages, based on the secondary model, a final 30-item questionnaire was designed and administered to a group of experts in order to establish the face validity of the questionnaire. This 30-item questionnaire was scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from completely incorrect (1) to completely correct (5). Based on this questionnaire, levels of agreement and disagreement were identified, and the components related to new ideas, revision, interpretation, elimination, and explanatory power were examined.

After confirming the face validity of the questionnaire, its content validity was also assessed. In the next stage, the reliability of the questionnaire was examined. For this purpose, the questionnaire was administered to 20 individuals from the statistical population, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine its reliability. Subsequently, the questionnaire was distributed among the sample, and the data were analyzed using SPSS software (Version 21), through which the prioritization of managerial competencies was extracted.

## Findings and Results

In this study, 56.8% of the sample (213 individuals) were men and 40.2% (162 individuals) were women. The highest frequency in terms of age was related to the 30–35-year age group, accounting for 22.7% (85 individuals) of the studied sample. In terms of work experience, individuals with 10–15 years of experience constituted the highest proportion of participants, with a frequency of 40.2% (151 individuals). Regarding educational attainment, the highest frequency corresponded to individuals holding a master's degree, accounting for 51.5% of the sample; that is, 193 participants held a master's degree.



**Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Research Variables**

Section	Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation
Managerial Competency	Personality traits	7.96	0.615
	Specialized knowledge	6.98	0.633
	Commitment to Islamic values	8.12	0.701
	Pedagogical knowledge	7.34	0.625
	Professional skills	7.09	0.624
	Creativity	7.12	0.681

**Table 2. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test Results for the Research Variables**

Sample size	Maximum difference	Z	Sig.
375	0.099	0.98	0.796

Given that the significance probability value is greater than the Type I error level set at 0.05, the null hypothesis—indicating the plausibility of a normal distribution for the data—is not rejected. Therefore, if the data follow a normal distribution, the use of parametric tests is permissible.

**Table 3. KMO and Bartlett’s Test Results**

Test	Results
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.781
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Chi-square = 565246.027 Degrees of freedom = 4551 Sig. = 0.001

According to the obtained results, the KMO index is greater than 0.6 and shows values relatively close to 1, indicating the adequacy of the sample size based on the identified indices for factor analysis. The significance level of 0.001 for Bartlett’s test also indicates the suitability of the research variables for factor analysis.

**Table 4. Dimensions and Components of Competency and Mindfulness (Present-Moment Awareness)**

General Category	Components
Commitment to ethical and ideological values	Possession of national, religious, and revolutionary identity; having a jihad-oriented spirit and alignment with the revolutionary front; belief in the effectiveness of the system; familiarity with the discourse of the Islamic Revolution; adherence to the directives of the Supreme Leader; belief in the principle of <i>Velayat-e Faqih</i> ; revolutionary insight.
Personality traits	Responsibility, perfectionism, participatory orientation, organizational belonging and commitment, self-confidence, creativity and innovation.
Specialized knowledge	Familiarity with the fundamentals of educational planning; familiarity with instructional design; familiarity with principles of assessment and evaluation; general management knowledge; familiarity with relevant laws, regulations, and executive bylaws.
Pedagogical knowledge	Understanding the philosophy of education and Islamic education; familiarity with teaching methods and techniques; familiarity with learning styles; creative ideas in managerial methods; ability to make in-the-moment decisions; ability to manage crises under critical conditions.
Creativity	—
Professional skills	Planning and preparing diverse educational and developmental situations; continuous learning and individual and colleague development; integration of educational domains in different situations; analytical ability; proficiency in applying managerial and educational techniques; visionary goal setting.

Based on the results of the Friedman test, the prioritization of managerial competency dimensions is as follows: (1) specialized knowledge, (2) professional skills, (3) pedagogical knowledge, (4) commitment to ethical and ideological values, (5) personality traits, and (6) creativity. Subsequently, the results of the Friedman test for prioritizing the components of managerial competency are presented in Table 5. As observed, the higher the mean rank, the greater the importance and priority of that variable. Given that the significance value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 5. Friedman Test Results: Mean Ranks of the Dimensions of the Studied Variables**

Section	Dimensions	Mean Rank	Chi-square	df	Sig.	Error Level
Managerial Competency	Specialized knowledge	4.78	69.863	5	0.001	0.05
	Professional skills	4.66				
	Pedagogical knowledge	4.45				
	Commitment to ethical values	4.11				
	Personality traits	3.98				
	Creativity	3.62				

## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify and prioritize the dimensions of a professional competency model for educational managers based on the mindfulness (present-moment awareness) approach from Langer's perspective. The findings revealed that managerial competency in the educational context is a multidimensional construct comprising six core dimensions: specialized knowledge, professional skills, pedagogical knowledge, commitment to ethical and ideological values, personality traits, and creativity. Moreover, the prioritization results indicated that specialized knowledge ranked first, followed by professional skills, pedagogical knowledge, commitment to ethical and ideological values, personality traits, and finally creativity. These findings provide both empirical and theoretical insights into how managerial competency is structured and valued within education systems when interpreted through a mindfulness-oriented framework.

The prominence of specialized knowledge as the highest-ranked competency dimension underscores the continued importance of domain-specific expertise for educational managers. This result aligns with competency-based management literature emphasizing that effective managerial performance is grounded in a deep understanding of organizational processes, regulations, and sector-specific knowledge (1, 2). In educational settings, specialized knowledge encompasses familiarity with curriculum planning, assessment systems, educational policies, and administrative regulations, all of which are critical for informed and mindful decision-making. Similar findings have been reported in studies of public and industrial organizations, where specialized knowledge consistently emerges as a foundational competency for managerial effectiveness (3, 4, 10). From Langer's mindfulness perspective, specialized knowledge does not merely represent static information but serves as a cognitive resource that enables managers to notice meaningful distinctions, interpret contextual cues, and avoid mindless reliance on routines (14, 15).

The second-ranked dimension, professional skills, reflects the applied and action-oriented aspects of managerial work, including planning, analysis, communication, and the effective use of managerial and educational techniques. This finding is consistent with prior research demonstrating that professional skills mediate the translation of knowledge into effective practice (5, 6). In educational leadership studies, professional skills have been linked to improved organizational coordination, teacher support, and institutional performance (12, 22). From a mindfulness standpoint, professional skills are enhanced when managers engage in present-moment awareness, allowing them to respond flexibly to emerging challenges rather than applying rigid, pre-scripted solutions (16, 17). Thus, the high prioritization of professional skills supports the view that mindful engagement strengthens managerial competence in practice.

Pedagogical knowledge, ranked third, highlights the educational specificity of the managerial role examined in this study. Unlike generic management contexts, educational organizations require leaders who understand teaching-learning processes, learning styles, instructional strategies, and the philosophy of education. This result aligns with research emphasizing that educational managers must integrate leadership and pedagogical expertise to effectively support instructional quality and school development (13, 26). The mindfulness approach further reinforces the importance of pedagogical knowledge by emphasizing sensitivity to learners, situational awareness in instructional contexts, and openness to pedagogical innovation (18, 20).

Therefore, the prioritization of pedagogical knowledge reflects both the functional demands of educational management and the cognitive–attentional orientation promoted by Langerian mindfulness.

The fourth-ranked dimension, commitment to ethical and ideological values, underscores the normative and value-based foundations of managerial competency in education. Ethical commitment has been widely recognized as a core element of responsible and sustainable management, particularly in public and educational sectors where leaders are entrusted with social and developmental missions (23, 24). Previous studies have shown that value-driven leadership contributes to trust, organizational commitment, and stakeholder legitimacy (21, 25). Within Langer’s mindfulness framework, ethical commitment is closely linked to conscious awareness of the consequences of one’s actions and resistance to automatic, unreflective behavior (14). The moderate prioritization of this dimension suggests that while ethical and ideological values are essential, they are most effective when integrated with knowledge-based and skill-based competencies.

Personality traits, ranked fifth, include characteristics such as responsibility, self-confidence, organizational commitment, and participatory orientation. These traits have been frequently associated with leadership effectiveness and job performance across sectors (8, 12). However, their lower prioritization relative to knowledge and skills suggests that personality traits may function as enabling or moderating factors rather than primary drivers of managerial competence. This interpretation is consistent with competency theory, which distinguishes between core competencies that can be developed through training and more stable individual attributes that shape how competencies are expressed (1, 5). From a mindfulness perspective, personality traits may influence an individual’s propensity for mindful or mindless engagement, but mindfulness itself is viewed as a learnable orientation rather than a fixed trait (15).

The lowest-ranked dimension, creativity, warrants careful interpretation. Although creativity is widely regarded as essential for innovation, problem-solving, and organizational adaptation, its lower prioritization may reflect contextual and institutional factors within the educational system under study. Similar findings have been reported in competency research where creativity, while valued, is often perceived as less immediately critical than operational knowledge and skills in highly regulated environments (9, 11). Nonetheless, mindfulness theory strongly associates creativity with present-moment awareness, openness to novelty, and the ability to generate new distinctions (14, 15). Therefore, the low ranking of creativity may indicate an underutilized potential rather than a lack of importance, suggesting that educational systems may not yet fully recognize or reward creative managerial behaviors.

Overall, the prioritization pattern identified in this study aligns with international research on managerial competencies while offering additional explanatory depth through the mindfulness framework. Studies conducted in diverse contexts, including government organizations, construction projects, and industrial sectors, similarly emphasize the primacy of knowledge and skills while acknowledging the supporting roles of values, traits, and creativity (4, 8, 9). By grounding these findings in Langer’s theory, the present study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of why certain competencies are prioritized: mindful managers require a solid knowledge base and practical skills to engage consciously with complex situations, while values, traits, and creativity shape the quality and ethical orientation of that engagement.

Importantly, the results also suggest that mindfulness operates as an integrative lens rather than a standalone competency. Awareness of context, sensitivity to change, and openness to multiple perspectives permeate all six dimensions, reinforcing the idea that present-moment awareness enhances the effectiveness of traditional managerial competencies (2, 16). This integrative view is consistent with contemporary approaches to management education and leadership development, which emphasize reflective practice, adaptability, and human-centered decision-making (17, 24).

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the use of purposive sampling and reliance on expert judgment may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts or sectors. Second, the study focused on

perceived importance and prioritization of competencies rather than directly measuring their impact on managerial performance outcomes. Third, the cross-sectional design does not capture potential changes in competency priorities over time or in response to systemic reforms and environmental shifts.

Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs to examine how managerial competency priorities evolve over time and under changing policy conditions. Comparative studies across different regions, educational levels, or organizational types would also enhance the external validity of the proposed model. Additionally, integrating qualitative case studies or experimental interventions could provide deeper insight into how mindfulness-oriented competencies influence real-world managerial behavior and organizational outcomes.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educational systems should prioritize specialized knowledge and professional skills in the selection and development of managers while simultaneously fostering mindfulness-based awareness across all competency dimensions. Leadership development programs can be redesigned to integrate reflective practices, contextual analysis, and ethical deliberation alongside technical training. Finally, policymakers and educational authorities should consider incorporating mindfulness-informed competency frameworks into standards, evaluation systems, and professional development pathways to enhance managerial effectiveness and organizational resilience.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to this study.

### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

### **Transparency of Data**

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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