



# CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION- MAKING SKILLS OF YOUNG OPERATION MANAGERS IN UAE – HR MANAGERS’ PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** *Operation manager’s role is inevitable in every organization. Decision-making and problem-solving skills are important characteristics of operation managers. They usually face challenges in day-to-day functionality of their work. Veteran Operation managers outperform in their profession obviously than the young managers. The young manager’s expertise, exposure, adoptability and analytical skill are supporting them to perform well in their role. Operation manager’s efficiency is measured by their creative problem-solving s and decision-making skills. Proper training and mentorship increased the efficiency of young operation managers’ creative decision-making skills through training.*

**Keywords:** Problem-solving, decision-making, operation mangers, Training, HR managers.

## 1.0 Introduction

Critical thinking is a gimmick word widely used everywhere in this world. In schools, colleges, home, work-stations etc. are the places where this word plays a vital role. Apart, this is a magic word used by the business people nowadays to motivate and inculcate business peoples in marketing, operation, supply chain and many other areas. Critical thinking is nothing but an act of analyzing information in depth so that it can drive better judgement and decisions. Hence, critical thinking is prefixed with decision making. Every decision maker has to do insightful critical thinking.

Operation managers are the crucial players that hold the key to unlock the success of business especially in the aspect of quality and supply chain and driving business growth and excellence. The role of operation managers in any organization is vital and extremely responsible, who is in the driving seat of any business function. His roles and responsibilities involve supervising the entire production timeline from input to a finished goods or service. His primary responsibility is to optimize day to day activities of an organization and channelizing workflows to enhance profitability and to ensure quality output as per the specification. The key player of business flow and organizational excellence depend on the skill sets of an operation manager in business units.

Critical thinking involves analysis, creativity, feasibility study, finding options or alternatives possibilities, professional judgement, decision-making and problem-solving. Critical thinking is the mother of solutions and an important characteristic of operation managers who face day to day issues.

## 1.1 Problem Solving and Decision making

Problem-solving and decision-making are two chief characteristics of critical thinking skills. Both are closely associated because without solving a problem, arriving at a conclusion or decision is difficult and vice-versa in some cases. There are two types of decision makers, firstly believing intuition and gut feelings they arrive at one conclusion as decision-making and problem solving. The first type of persons believes their emotions and may land at loss or negative solutions due to lack of awareness and/ analytical issues. But the second type of people believe in the process of decision making and they use their critical thinking ability and they process the decision step by step to arrive at a conclusion. They use feasibility analysis and multiple landing choices of decision to conclude and to avoid negative results. Problem solving itself is a decision-making skill inclusively the main objective of problem solving is finding the right solution or making the correct decision. Problem solving involves, collecting all information pertaining to the issues, and future forecasting techniques, finding all possibilities to make the correct decision to make profit or to reduce loss. Probing correctly and making cause and effect analysis and thinking all alternatives are a major part of critical thinking ability in problem solving. Decision making is skill based on the evidence, judgments, facts and knowledge, making the right choice of decision to avoid future chaos and difficulties in such a way to identify the correct opportunity. In general, both problem-solving and decision-making are used together.

## 2.0 Literature Review

A study carried out on a team of young managers working in operations departments in various wings depicted that a proper training made them to think critically and become proactive in problem solving during crisis. The concerned HR stated this advantageous behavior during an interview. (Mohamed Riyazh khan 2022). In an operation manager's day to day life decision making is a problem that has to be considered in very different perspectives. The scientific approach into the issues arising has been called today as Multiple Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) when the multiple options are analyzed simultaneously. On the other hand, conscious decision making is a skill developed that can function well in dealing with limited alternatives. Limited choices will restrict distraction and help to focus consciously to step up towards decision making using rational approaches. Mostly the operation managers are facing organizational behavior including decision making with plenty of feelings involved (Atiyeh Vaezipour, 2013)

The literature depicts those studies on operations managers' behavioral, decision-making ability, and their knowledge transfer cum analytical skills aligned with proper training and experience on ground promotes them as effective individual decisions (Johannes Ulrich Siebert, 2021). The decision makers should learn the difference between "must v/s want", "innovation vs creativity", "quantitative techniques v/s cost-benefit techniques" and "implementation v/s controlling". As well as the operation managers working on the planning, organizing, leading, controlling and function of the entire system they arrive at the decision to solve problems by keeping the said traits in mind (Jason Alden, 2019).

Operation managers are loaded with the accountability of complete functionality of their organizations to achieve aims and goals. This requires adaptability and expertise, and also more adequate knowledge management with excellent decision-making problem-solving skills. The term "knowledge" has been viewed and defined from differing perspectives like critical thinking, and problem solving (Abubakar Mohammed 2017). It is important to note that decision-making style varies across principles, as such the effects and magnitude. Drawing conclusions that are both rational and intuitive decision-making style will impact problem solving and processes of organizational performance.

Compared to the new young operation managers, experienced managers take swift decisions and their problem-solving decision-making skills are highly significant due to more exposure and expertise. Senior managers are always fore runners and set models and act as mentors to the new young operation managers (Jaroslav Vrchota, 2015).

The employee management, team strength and knowledge on the operation functional and ability to withstand, as well as the cultural, environmental, ethical intuitive ability will reflect in his decision to ensure organizational performance (Kais Lassoued, 2019). A cross-sectional study was conducted among young managers during the year 2015 found that the decision-making process was found to be good, but their styles of making decisions were overlapping (Rutu Sanjaybhai Buch, 2021)

The operations managers held the responsibility of socially responsive decision making where an organization is publicity promoting the commitment to its social responsibility. Various literatures analyzed in-depth of the alleged influence of

control systems on social responsive operation managers problem-solving decision-making skills and findings specify that the dominant influence of informal controls such as social and self-controls in instilling socially responsive decision making among the operation managers (Gweneth Norris, 2004).

### 3.0 Research Objective

The main objective of this study is to understand the effect training in critical problem-solving decision-making facts of proactive thinking and intellectual skill based and personality traits and decision makings. It is assumed that decision training with critical thinking skills can, with proper control, be an effective means to improve the efficacy of young operations to be proactive cognitive in their role and promote their solicitation in business excellence.

Some of the considerations for this study are:

- *Critical thinking and Decision making has a positive effect on proactive cognitive skills.*
- *Creative Decision making has an effect on proactive personality traits and roles*
- *Decision making training has a positive effect on decision satisfaction and gives confidence*
- *The effect of decision-making training on proactive cognitive skills depends on the participants' (a) professional decision-making experience and (b) responsibility to make (or analyze) decisions professionally.*

### 4.0 Material and Methods

This study completely takes on the views and perspectives of HR managers from the UAE companies. HR managers play vital roles in every organization. The role is vivacious. Starting from the recruitment, training and development, knowledge management, employee benefits, employee happiness etc. are major roles played by HR managers. Identifying the dynamic, skillful and expertise in the concerned field of operations and recruiting them then training and development are the challenging tasks for the HR department. Recruiting a candidate for the right position is always challenging in the job market. The operation managers play a key role in every organization and their knowledge, skills, expertise, swift response, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making are important characteristics of Managers. It's the duty of HR manager' role to identify such potential candidates and recruit them. After that they have to provide training to develop the concerned managers in a righteous way to increase the performance of individual and operational efficiency.

The operation manager's decision-making skill and problem-solving efficiency is essential for every organization. The HR department always conducts training and development sessions throughout the year and whenever required. They use different appraisal techniques to evaluate the efficiency of managers and other personnel in their company. Based on those measures they arrange necessary training programs. The appraisal and evaluation of every individual employee will be archived by the HR department.

For our study we conducted a survey among HR managers in the UAE firms to learn their perspectives about their middle-aged operation managers. A set of questionnaires were sent to almost 100 HR managers and received 76 positive responses from various organizations in the UAE. This study included all types of organizations MSME and other organizations without any bias. The companies were chosen across in all emirates. A simple random sampling method was used through three-digit random numbers to choose originations from the list of establishments obtained from the ministry of economy website.

#### 4.1 Data Analysis and Presentation.

Primary data was collected from 76 HR managers as participants for this study through an online email link directly. And the secondary data was obtained from HR managers, findings about their operation managers through appraisal and other ways of observations. The outcomes are presented below.

## 1. Gender of HR managers (Respondents)

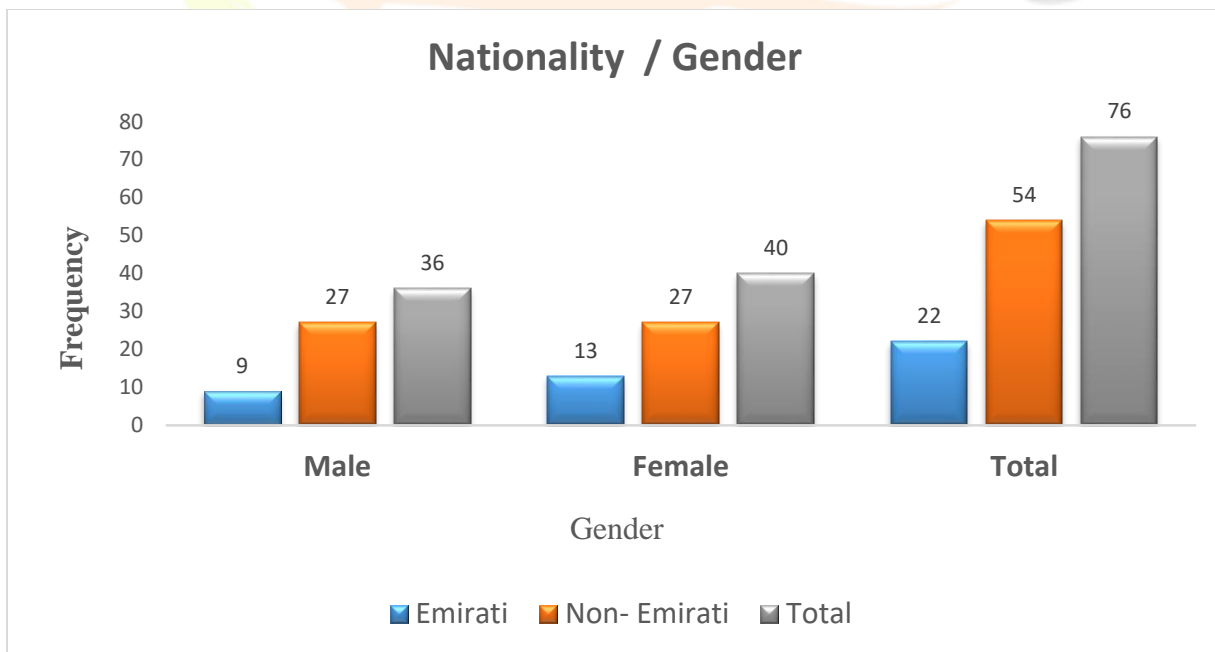
Gender	Male	Female	Total
Frequency	36	40	76
Percentage	47.4%	52.6%	100.0%

## 2. Nationality of HR Managers (Respondents)

Nationality	Emirati	Non- Emirati	Total
Frequency	22	54	76
Percentage	28.9%	71.1%	100.0%

Mostly, HR manager positions are outnumbered by female employees in the UAE. Emiratis are preferably employed in the HR department in government and in the private sector the number is not significant.

<b>Gender</b> / <b>Nationality</b>	Emirati	Non- Emirati	Total
Male	9	27	36
Female	13	27	40
Total	22	54	76



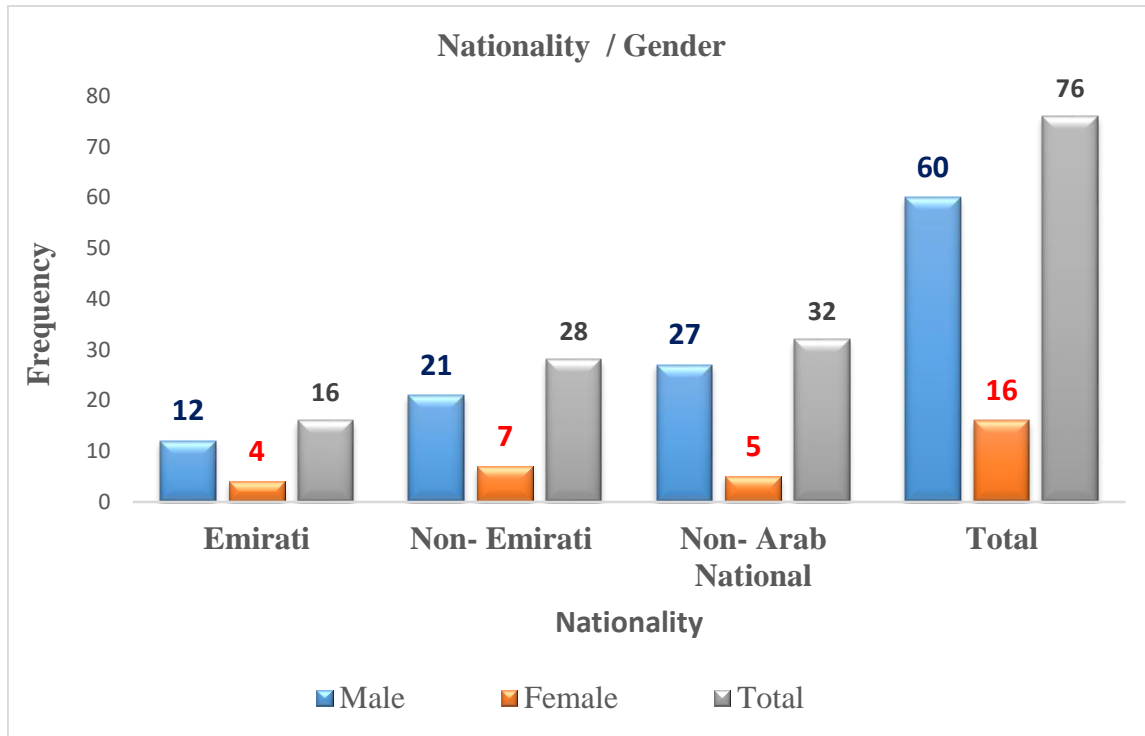
## 3. Gender of operation managers

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Frequency	60	16	76
Percentage	78.9%	21.1%	100.0%

Operation manager positions are dominated by the male employees in the UAE

#### 4. Nationality of Operation Managers

Nationality	Emirati	Non- Emirati (Arab National)	Non- Arab National	Total
Frequency	16	28	32	76
Percentage	21.1%	36.8%	42.1%	100.0%

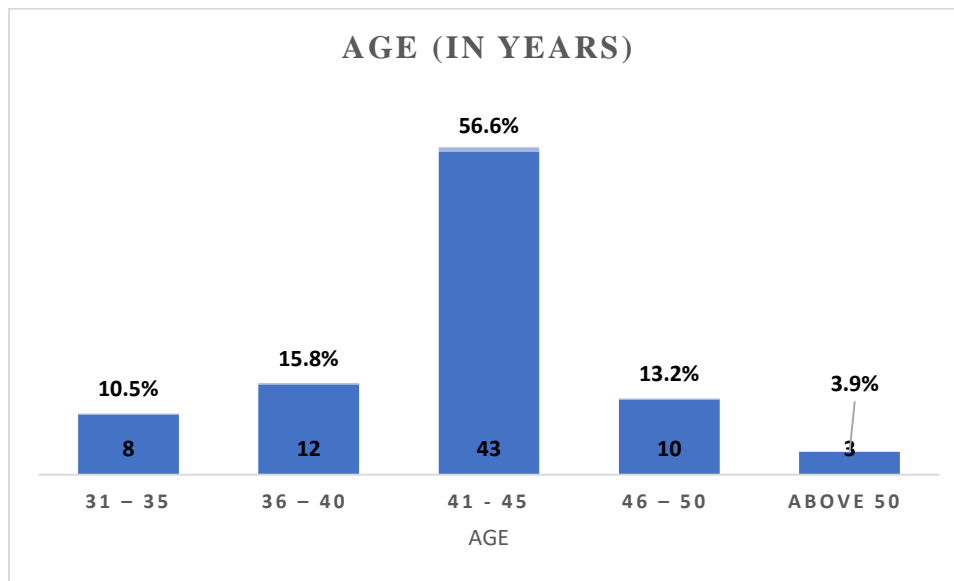


#### 5. Age of operation managers

Age (in years)	31 – 35	36 – 40	41 - 45	46 – 50	Above 50	Total
Frequency	8	12	43	10	3	76
Percentage	10.5%	15.8%	56.6%	13.2%	3.9%	100.0%

Descriptive	Age (in years)
Mean	42.2105
Median	42.5930
Mode	42.9219
SD	4.6226

Here the central tendencies are almost close to each other and deviation is approximately five years. The distribution of age of operation managers looks normal. The mean, median and modal age of the operation manager is 42 years with a deviation of five years. More than 50% of the managers are in the age group of 41 and 45.



## 6. Educational Qualification

Qualification	Secondary	Diploma	Degree	Master's	Doctorate	Total
Frequency	3	13	41	19	0	76
Percentage	3.9%	17.1%	53.9%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%

Most of the operation managers hold at least a degree and more. But 21% of the managers are with Diploma and Secondary school certificates. They held the position due to their vast experience and expertise in their field.

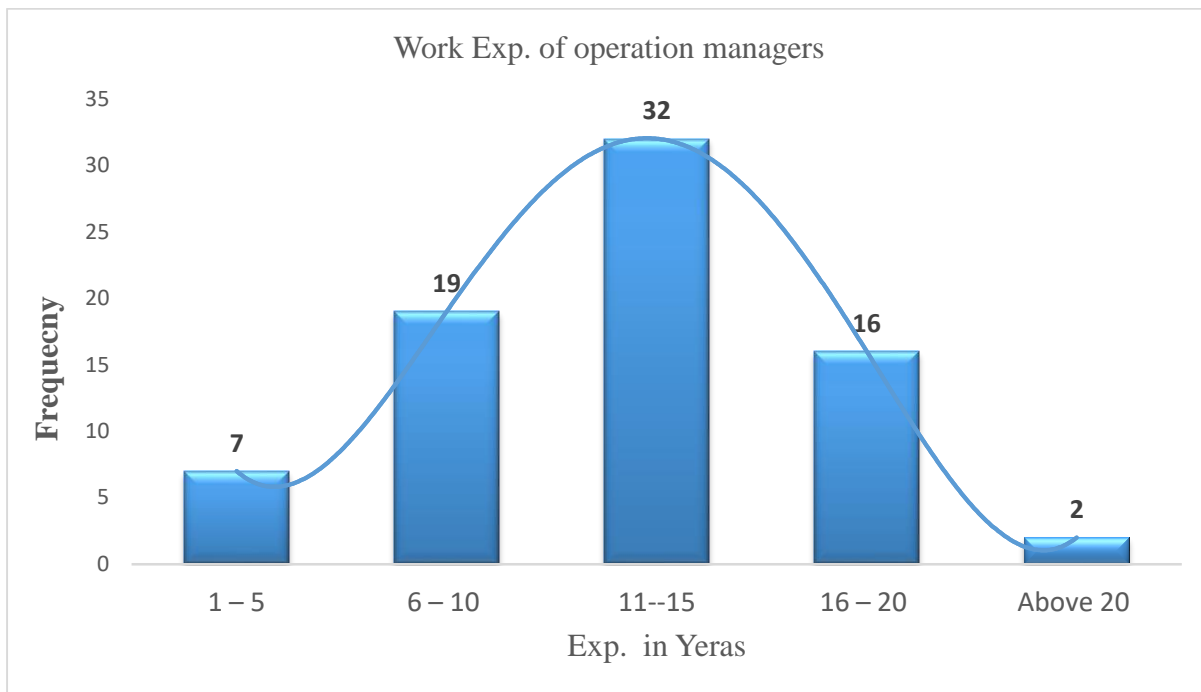
## 7. Work Experience

Experience (in years)	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16 - 20	Above 20	Total
Frequency	7	19	32	16	2	76
Percentage	9.2%	25.0%	42.1%	21.1%	2.6%	100.0%

Descriptive	Age (in years)
Mean	12.1447
Median	12.3750
Mode	12.7414
SD	4.7881

No manager is new to the job and almost all are well experienced. The central tendencies are around 12 years of experience and their age bracket lies between 41 and 45. This distribution is normal with a deviation of 5 years.

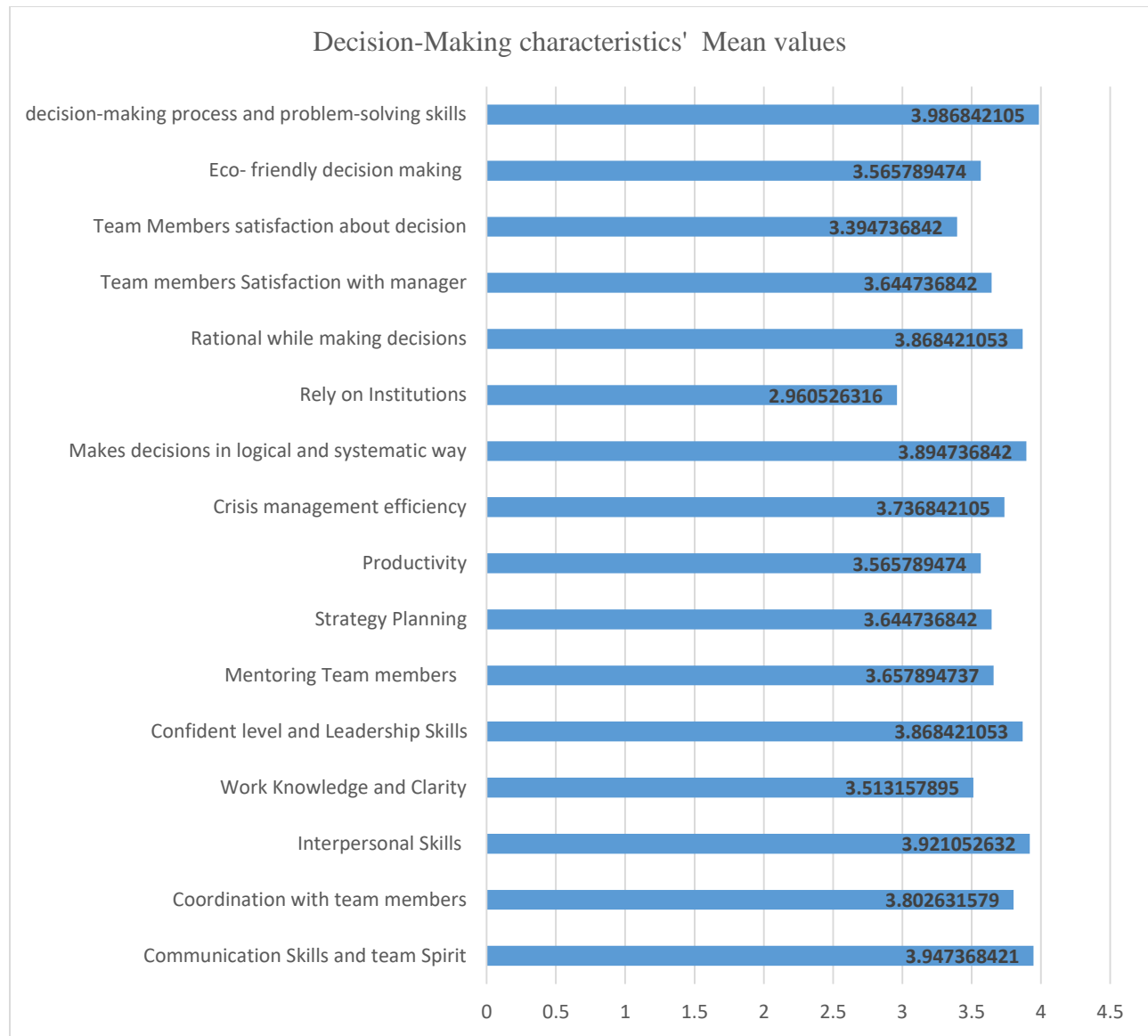
Here most of the Managers acquired at least five plus years of experience in the UAE itself and that is an added advantage for the UAE job market. Few managers are working here from the beginning of their career.



**Decision-Making characteristics of operation managers**

#	Decision-Making characteristics	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent	Total
8	Communication Skills and team Spirit	1	5	17	34	12	7	76
9	Coordination with team members	5	6	9	40	11	5	76
10	Interpersonal Skills	3	6	16	29	13	9	76
11	Work Knowledge and Clarity	4	9	16	40	5	2	76
12	Confident level and Leadership Skills	4	8	8	38	10	8	76
13	Mentoring Team members	5	8	15	32	12	4	76
14	Strategy Planning	4	7	20	30	11	4	76
15	Productivity	5	7	18	34	10	2	76
16	Crisis management efficiency	4	5	15	39	9	4	76
17	Makes decisions in logical and systematic way	2	6	18	30	12	8	76
18	Rely on Institutions	9	11	33	20	3	0	76
19	Rational while making decisions	3	6	17	31	10	9	76
20	Team members Satisfaction with manager	10	11	5	30	10	10	76
21	Team Members satisfaction about decision	11	9	12	31	9	4	76

22	Eco- friendly decision making	8	9	13	29	12	5	76
23	decision-making process and problem-solving skills	4	6	11	31	14	10	76



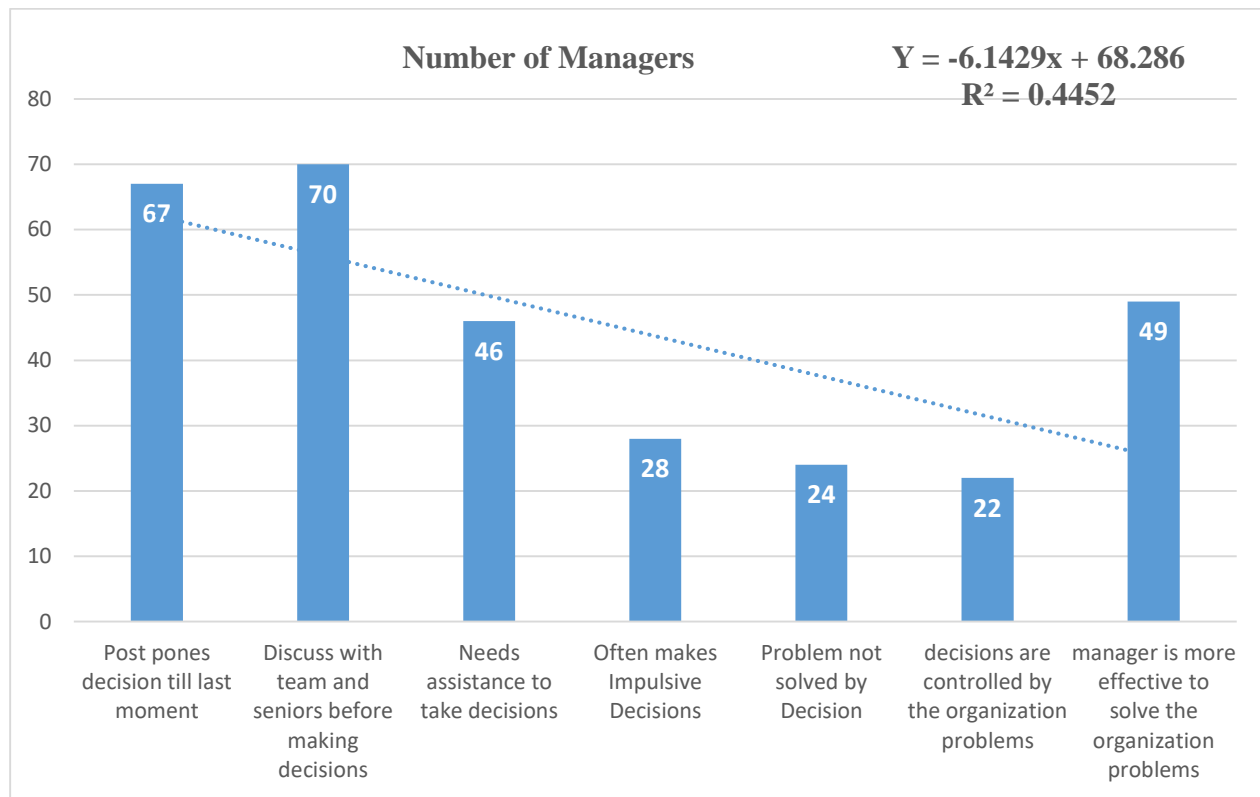
## 4.2 Findings

- On the average more than 72 % of operations managers perform well.
- Their self-attitude and maintaining harmony with fellow team members are good.
- Impersonal skills, team management and communication skills are reasonably significant.
- Productivity and planning are moderate
- Working knowledge and operational expertise are good at 73% of managers
- Team members' satisfaction with manger lies at median
- Team members' satisfaction about decision making skills of managers is at median level
- More than one third of the managers are not decisive, they are hesitant to make decisions by individuals and they need some assistance or holding hands.
- About 10% of the managers rely on others opinion blindly and never take decision by self
- About 15% managers are performing efficiently and their productivity is high

- More than 20% of operation managers are not able to cope up with marketing managers, and stock management and output.
- About 7% of the managers are having poor knowledge and negligence of Environment and customer friendly and leads to penalty and poor feedback.
- Almost 12 % of the managers do not maintain professional etiquette with management and resulting unwanted humiliation.
- Few managers make decisions based on their intuition alone.
- Few managers follow all the steps and process of decision making
- Strategic thinking is significant with most of the managers
- Productivity does not affect
- Functionality humiliation exists.
- Hard and fast rules, and languages are uncomfortable to the employees of the operation section.

### Critical thinking decision making Style

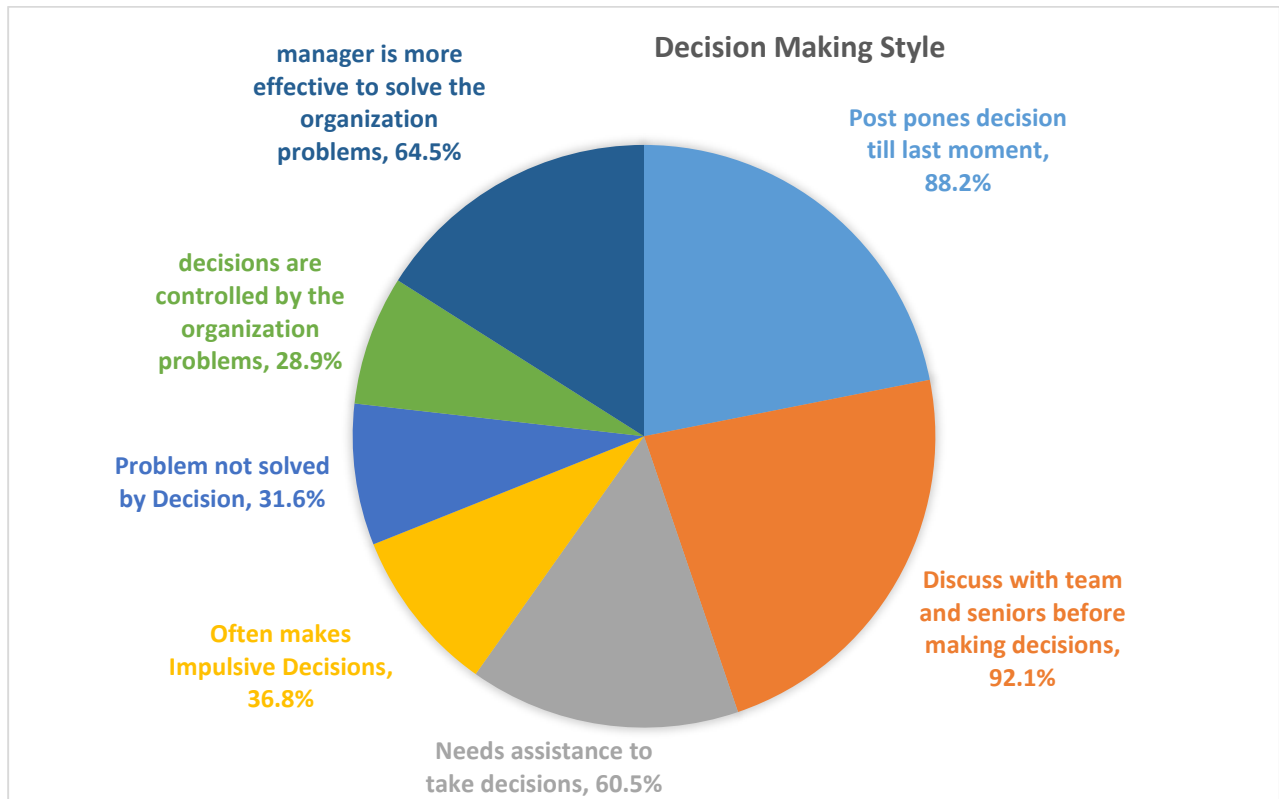
#	Critical thinking decision-making	Number of Managers	%
24	Post pones decision till last moment	67	88.2%
25	Discuss with team and seniors before making decisions	70	92.1%
26	Needs assistance to take decisions	46	60.5%
27	Often makes Impulsive Decisions	28	36.8%
28	Problem not solved by Decision	24	31.6%
29	decisions are controlled by the organization problems	22	28.9%
30	manager is more effective to solve the organization problems	49	64.5%



### 4.3 Observations

- Decisions are not controlled by the management as per the general myth. But whenever operation managers need inputs, management offers help.
- Most of the managers do discussion with the team, analyze the situation, follow the norms of extraneous and internal issues and strictly follow the step-by-step procedure before making any decision. Moreover, their decision-making is to solve the problem or issues and needs.
- Very few make their own decisions, without any insights, study based on their intuition and or experiences.
- Impulsive decisions made by operation managers are at 37%
- Even after taking decisions by the managers, problems persist at 32 %. It means that one third of operations managers are not good decision makers.
- Most of the operations managers' delay their decision making till the last moment or they delay implementation of decisions. Numerous reasons behind delaying decisions predicted by the experts after having a discussion with operations managers. Some managers wait for updates hoping that the problem will be resolved by itself, management interference, environmental issues and government policy etc. Few managers complained about the poor cooperation from the workers in implementing decisions and distractions from workers and extraneous people.

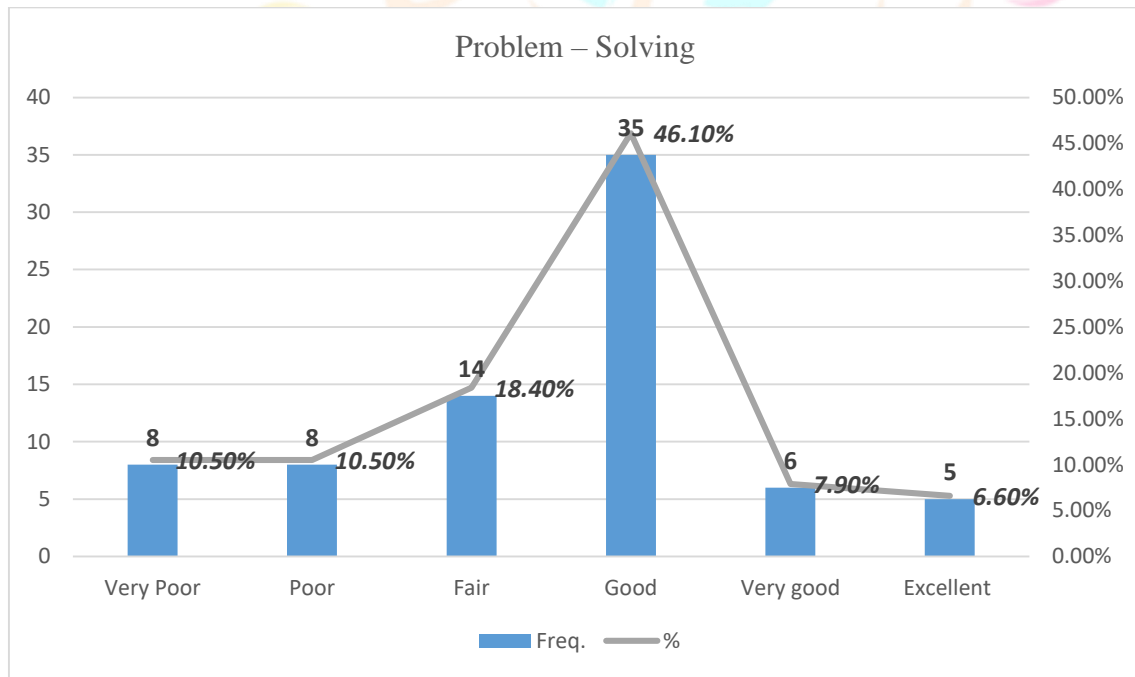
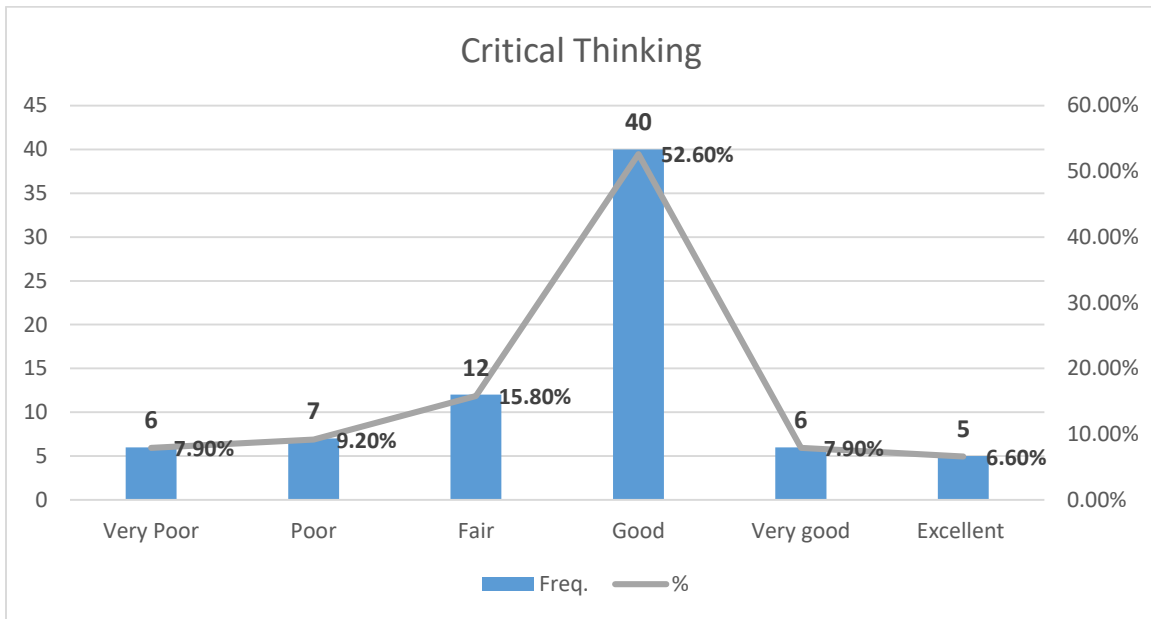
Research Through Innovation



#### 4.4 Key Skills of Operation Managers

Critical Thinking	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent	Total
Frequency	6	7	12	40	6	5	76
%	7.9%	9.2%	15.8%	52.6%	7.9%	6.6%	100%

Problem-Solving	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent	Total
Frequency	8	8	14	35	6	5	76
%	10.5%	10.5%	18.4%	46.1%	7.9%	6.6%	100%

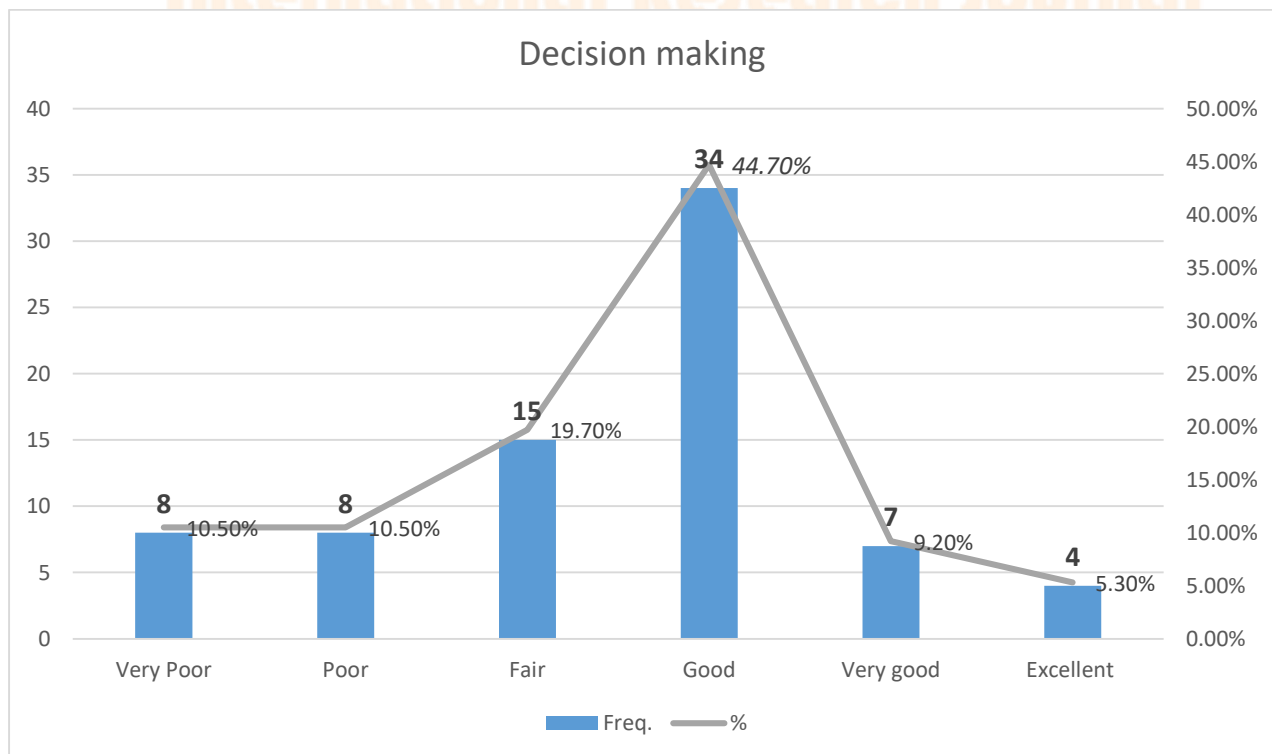
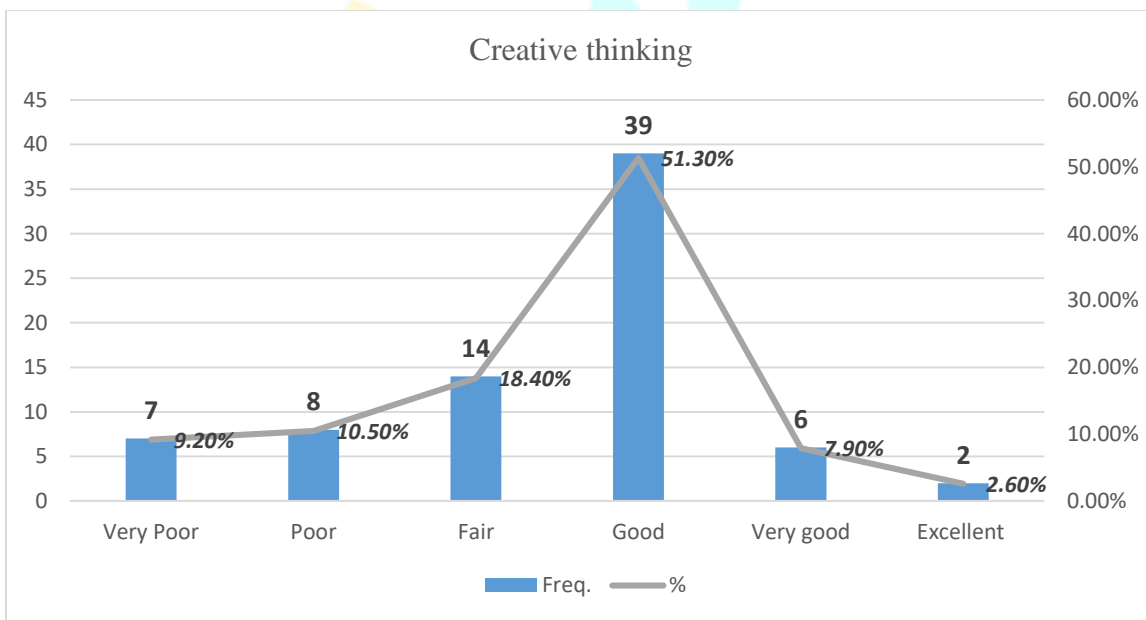


The coefficient of correlation between critical thinking and problem-solving skills is highly positive which  $\rho = 0.994253$  reveal a perfect positive correlation. The manager who has a high index of critical thinking ability will be supposed to be the best problem-solving decision maker.

Research Through Innovation

Creative thinking	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent	Total
Frequency	7	8	14	39	6	2	76
%	9.2%	10.5%	18.4%	51.3%	7.9%	2.6%	100.0%

Decision making	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent	Total
Frequency	8	8	15	34	7	4	76
%	10.5%	10.5%	19.7%	44.7%	9.2%	5.3%	100.0%



The coefficient of correlation between Creative thinking and decision making is highly positive which  $\rho = 0.99807$  and correlation is perfect. Reveals that Creative thinking is a stimulus for decision making capability. Decision making starts with a single decision and passes through several stages of process with checking multiple alternates and finally ending up with the most plausible solution to satisfy, quality, quantity, organizational objectives, management happiness, customer satisfaction, and environmentally safe. A creative decision will lead to a new dimension of the company in the fourth-coming years as well as making mistakes will cost huge to the organization. Creativity in decision is blessed with future prospectus.

Matt Gavin (2020) from Harvard business suggested five important traits to be followed in the process of decision making with two mindsets of advocacy and inquiry are:

- Process oriented approach
- Team involvement in the decision-making process
- Fostering a collaborative mindset
- Crating and upholding a psychological safety
- Reiterating the goals and purpose of the decision.

Researchers have noticed recently a special attention on the influence of some of the social sentiment variables on decision making. A literature found that both individuals and companies reveal a high degree of social and/ religious display in their decision making that lowers the level of risk exposure in decision making (Hilary and Hui, 2009). Similarly, another researcher noticed that outcomes from the individual as decision maker in the operational areas faced outcomes of difficult situations. Both good and bad were in some kind of attributes in the vision of religious, spiritual of value characteristics (Fernando and Jackson, 2006)

Researches in Human resources about managerial skills depicted that creativity itself is a process that denoted personal discovery, partially unintentional that produces new ideas, relevant annotations and knowledge. Creativity depends on the capability of generating new and organized thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and insights in a new way to make new relationships amongst the existing components. This may create a new, different and even better understanding of a situation or subject in the decision-making process resulting in problem solving.

#### 4.5 Training for managers

HR managers in the UAE suggest three key strategies for operation managers to be a good problem-solving decision maker: Think aloud, discuss the problem and give enough time for ideas to get together. That's why the managers who delay decision making till the last minute are more proficient than others.

The HR department arranges special training programs for managers annually and whenever they need. Operation Managers naturally shelters various aspects including effective communication, Interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, team development, strategic planning and compliance with organization policies and government regulations. The Main aim of the operation managers training programs is to empower leaders to enrich team performance to comply with operational excellence and to nurture a positive, happy work environment and culture amongst the employees and within the organization and to contribute to achieving organizational goals. Team work and team management is an important skill and an art for operation managers. Holding the spirit of the team and capitalizing the same to meet the organizational goal is the task for operation managers.

#### 4.6 Ethical Decision Making

Ethical decision making is the fundamental principle for efficient management. It is mandatory because it fortifies an organization's reliability, reputation, integrity and long-run sustainability. Training operation managers in ethical decision-making prepares them with knowledge, skills and addressing potential conflicts and ways to compromise ethical

standards. Withholding the strong Ethical framework in organizational culture, managers uphold and ensure organizational values.

The HR department makes training sessions for operation managers under special leadership training sessions. The number of days and sessions and duration of the training program varies organization to organization. But Training is mandatory for every individual including super forming operation managers. Training covers many topics based on the need, objectives and new initiatives etc. The following findings are from the HR Managers about their organization's operation managers.

#### 4.7 Post Training Feedback from HR

##### 1) Number of Managers took training

Need Based / Compulsory	Booster (Annual)	Total
24	52	76
31.6%	68.4%	100.0%

HR managers use a four-point scale to measure the post training quality of the managers to appreciate, accept or to repeat the training and the managers will be under probation. Few of the key characteristics are measured to identify the significant necessary changes in managers personal and organizational behaviors and those are tabulated below.

##### 2) Accountability in the workplace

Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
4	12	50	10	76
5.3%	15.8%	65.8%	13.2%	100.0%

##### 3) Interpersonal skills

Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
5	13	50	8	76
6.6%	17.1%	65.8%	10.5%	100.0%

##### 4) Team management

Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
5	11	52	8	76
6.6%	14.5%	68.4%	10.5%	100.0%

##### 5) Efficiency and Productivity

Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
3	15	48	10	76
3.9%	19.7%	63.2%	13.2%	100.0%

## 6) Critical Thinking

Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
7	10	49	10	76
9.2%	13.2%	64.5%	13.2%	100.0%

## 7) Emotional Intelligence

Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
5	10	51	10	76
6.6%	13.2%	67.1%	13.2%	100.0%

## 8) Creative Problem-Solving Skill

Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
5	12	48	11	76
6.6%	15.8%	63.2%	14.5%	100.0%

## 9) Decision making skills

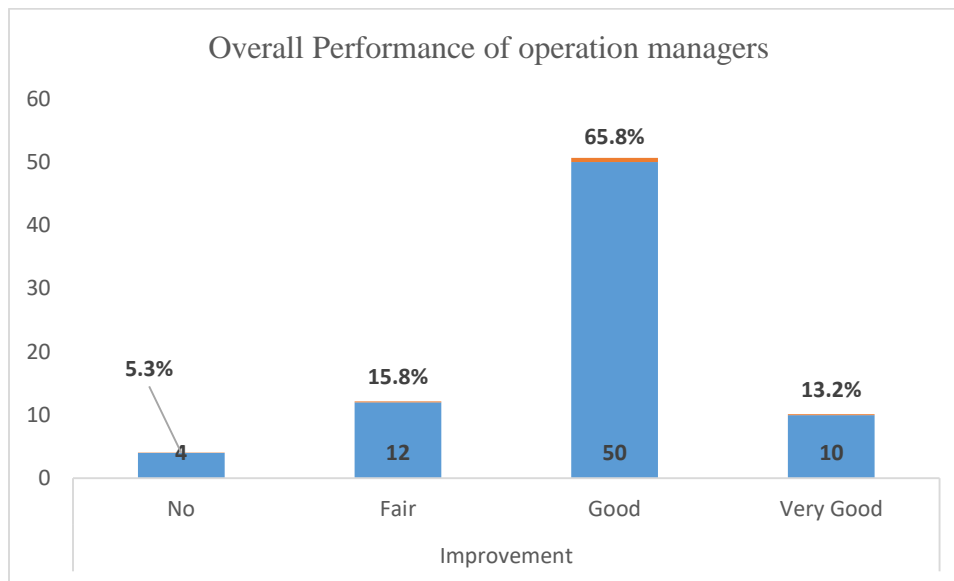
Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
6	16	44	10	76
7.9%	21.1%	57.9%	13.2%	100.0%

## 10) Overall Improvement of Operation Managers

Improvement				
No	Fair	Good	Very Good	Total
4	12	50	10	76
5.3%	15.8%	65.8%	13.2%	100.0%

HR managers use a four-point scale to measure the post training quality of the managers to appreciate, accept or to repeat the training and the managers will be under probation. Few of the key characteristics are measured to identify the significant necessary changes in managers personal and organizational behaviors and those are tabulated below.

HR managers have identified that five percent of the managers are performing poor and not up to the mark. Their individual efficiency is not improved after necessary training sessions and the productivity and efficiency of the organizations are reduced. Hence those managers are kept under probation and the HR department is looking for a new manager to recruit and replace them. The efficiency of the young managers is 95% in the UAE. It is clear that out of 76 managers, five percent of managers showed no improvement in any of their personal and organizational behaviors and they were kept on probation further. And 13% managers were recommended to take additional training and improve their performance and efficacy of work with attitude. About 16 % of the operation managers' performance is significantly commendable and they are rewarded with benefits and promotions.



Evidently training has developed performance improvement significantly among the managers and helped to identify the block spots among the workforces. Literature discusses the nature of decision-making by males and females in many aspects. But as a role of operations managers in any organization, the decision-making ability of male or female managers really needs to be discussed. Recent years women are playing incredibly and increasingly important roles in business management and as managers they are tested and evaluated by interns of their success in decision making and problem solving. In non-managerial populations, many have not taken proper training in job and management resulting in a difference in decisions. But as far as managerial positions are concerned, they are well educated in business management and well trained and experienced too, and the 'managerial' sub-population of males and females display similar risk propensity and make decisions of equal quality. (J.E.V. Johnson, P.L. Powell 1994) Another study focusing on female managers underrepresentation depicted that, gender-stereotypical traits are not important for becoming a successful middle manager. (Isabel Cuadrado 2015). Operation managers' decision-making style mostly depends on the four traits: analytical, directive, conceptual and behavioral. All other characteristics are falling under any one of these four traits.

## 5.0 Findings and Discussion

This study depicted that

- Critical thinking and Decision making has a positive effect on proactive cognitive skills. This positive correlation shows that efficiency and productivity have increased.
- Creative decision making has a positive impact on proactive personality traits. That has increased interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, team building effects and significant improvement on personality and professionalism.
- Training has a significant impact on the manager's personal and professional behavior, resulting in a positive approach, courteous with team members, professional decision-making skills, problem-solving skills and increased confidence.
- The survey results from HR managers confirmed that performance of operation managers showed a significant increase in their proficiency. The training fine-tuned the effect of decision-making on proactive cognitive skills depends on the participants' professional decision-making experience and responsibility to make (or analyze) decisions professionally.

## 6.0 Conclusion

This study shows that the young operation managers hail in the early forties, evidencing sound knowledge in the workflow, efficiency, gender equality, better productivity, and expertise in their field and proved their efficiency at par with senior professionals and managers in the UAE. The decision-making and problem-solving skills of the young operation managers have 75% efficiency. In addition, HR managers have confirmed that training has a significant impact on creative problem solving and decision-making skills positively at 95% efficiency with increased professionalism and productivity.

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