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THE ESSENTIAL SOFT SKILLS OF PROJECT MANAGERS AND PROJECT SUCCESS

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Abstract: Soft skills are essential in Project Managers and have a great impact on the success of projects. A review of the literature and the results of this research support this idea, and show that project managers can improve the chances of project success by developing these skills. The purpose of this research was to identify the key soft skills required by project managers and their relationship with the success of projects, as lines that define their leadership style and fundamental scope of their management in relation to the areas of knowledge of project management. To this end, an exhaustive review of the literature was carried out, in order to recover all the possible evidence that would support the argument that project managers could increase the chances of project success, by applying their interpersonal skills to manage the project, project team and its performance. The quantitative approach and cross-sectional design were applied in the research, consequently, data collection is primary and is based on the survey method. The results of the research indicate that, among soft skills, communication skills, personal relationship skills and leadership and motivation skills are the most important, demonstrating in this research that there is a significant relationship between leadership skills, the ability to communicate, interpersonal skills and the success or performance of projects. Modern project managers must have the ability to understand situations, improve the ability to coordinate, and enlist the support of others.

Keywords: Leadership, interpersonal relationships, communication, project success; soft skills, project teams.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there is an ever-growing gap between the demand for project management skills and the availability of talent. This opens up a host of new job opportunities for project professionals and all change agents. Research by the PMI (Project Management Institute) reveals three reasons for the persistence of the talent gap since it began analyzing the data in 2008 [1]: An increase in the number of jobs requiring management-oriented skills of projects, increased demand for project professionals in emerging and developing countries due to economic growth and retirement rate of the active population.

SOFT SKILLS

In the world of business and project management, there is a lot of talk about the technical skills and experience that a project manager must have to successfully carry out their projects. However, there is another equally important set of skills that often goes unnoticed: soft skills. Soft skills, also known as emotional skills or social skills, are those non-technical skills that allow us to interact with others effectively and work as a team. Although they may seem less important compared to technical skills, soft skills are essential to the success of any project and, in particular, to the role of a project manager.

Project managers are key pieces in the success of any project. They are responsible for leading and coordinating all activities and resources to achieve established objectives. However, it is not only important to have technical skills in this position, but also soft or social skills. Soft skills are personal skills that allow you to relate to others effectively, work as a team and resolve conflicts. They are essential for any professional, but in the case of project managers, they are crucial to the success of their projects. Firstly, a project manager must have excellent communication

skills, effective communication is essential to ensure that all project stakeholders are aligned and working towards a common goal. A project manager with strong communication skills can clearly convey the project vision, set clear expectations, and keep everyone informed about progress and changes to the project. In addition, she must know how to actively listen to and understand the needs and concerns of the stakeholders, which will help maintain good communication and avoid misunderstandings that could affect the final result of the project.

Another important skill is leadership ability. A project manager must be an effective leader and have the ability to motivate and guide his or her team to achieve established objectives. This involves having conflict resolution skills, handling difficult situations, and making difficult decisions when necessary. There are several theoretical perspectives of soft skills that are investigated and discussed by different researchers, for Rao (2018) soft skills, from the essential perspective for a leader, are classified as: critical thinking skills, communication skills, conceptual skills, problem solving, conflict management skills, teamwork skills, etc. [2]. For Fisher (2011) soft skills have to do with: emotion management, confidence, communication, motivation, influence and cultural awareness [3]. According to Hussain, Ahmed and Zulqarnain (2015) communication, interpersonal skills, coordination, team building, delegation, problem finding, conflict analysis and resolution, leadership [4].

PROJECT SUCCESS

Project success is something that all leaders and entrepreneurs want to achieve. However, it is not always easy to achieve. In principle, the success of a project is not measured only in terms of meeting established deadlines and budgets. Of course, these are important aspects, but there are other factors to consider

as well. For example: the project achieves the stated objectives, there is general satisfaction on the part of the stakeholders or interested parties and positive long-term results are obtained. team members.

One of the keys to achieving project success is having a clear and well-structured plan from the beginning. This includes setting clear and realistic objectives and goals, as well as identifying potential obstacles and developing strategies to overcome them. A good plan also involves proper allocation of resources and effective communication between all stakeholders.

Another important factor for the success of a project is having a committed and motivated team. This means selecting the right people for each role, providing them with appropriate training, and establishing a culture of teamwork. A well-coordinated and collaborative team is essential to keep the project on the right track. According to Hoegl and Parboteeah (2017). For a project to be successful, there are several factors that play their role and the interpersonal skills of the project manager are one of them [5].

There is much discussion about project success, but there are no agreed criteria or definition of project success among academics. Narayanaswamy, Grover, and Henry (2013) describe project success as a situation in which a project meets its expectations and is completed within the given time and cost [6]. Project success was initially defined by whether the final product of the project worked or not. It then evolved into the triple constraint of time, cost and quality [7]. According to the PMBOK, PMI(2013) instructs that success criteria must be established at the beginning of the project or before starting a new phase of the project. Doing so can improve deliverable acceptance, customer and stakeholder satisfaction [8]. Over time, approaches to defining project success

have become more strategic and holistic. But it is still somewhat debatable whether achieving project success relies solely on effective frameworks. According to Cserhati & Szabo (2014), there are several factors related to project objectives, stakeholders, work environment and risk that have an impact on the success of a project [9].

If a project fails to deliver the agreed upon product or service within a specific timeline and/or estimated budget, the project is considered a failure. In addition to this, a study by Hartman and Ashrafi (2002) identified several factors that contribute to the success of a project, however, none of these have identified what role a project manager plays in this success [10]. According to Bannerman, measuring the success of projects from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders must be done, after the closure of the project, according to the success of the process, the success of its management, the deliverables, the business and strategic success [11]. From the perspective of project managers, the following dimensions emerge; the continuity of the organization, the impact on the environment or sustainability, political or social factors specific to the project, following the correct processes, the corporate image and a good working relationship with contracting partners [12].

The purpose of this research was to identify the key soft skills required by project managers and their impact on the success of their projects. To this end, an exhaustive review of the literature was carried out, in order to recover all the possible evidence that would support the argument that project managers could increase the chances of project success, by applying their interpersonal skills to manage the project. project team and its performance.

According to an extensive review of publications carried out by Scott Young and Samson in 2008, related to interpersonal skills, effective and efficient management of team members and stakeholders, they found that one of the most important reasons for the failure of a project, is the lack of interpersonal skills in a project manager [13]. In a study published by Stevenson and Starkweather in 2010, the most important skills required by a project manager to complete projects successfully were identified. Among these six basic skills identified, four were social skills [14].

For Hussain, Ahmed and Zulqarnain, in a research carried out in 2015, on the impact of the project manager's soft skills on the success of the project, they sought to identify and evaluate the impact of the project managers' communication, relationships interpersonal, coordination, team building and delegation, problem finding, analysis and resolution skills in project success [4].

In the case of Swasti in the same year 2015, as results of his research, he explains the importance of soft skills in project management, which for him reflect the relationship of a person with other people through their character traits. and interpersonal skills, allowing the work environment to be more flexible and easier to manage through subtle behaviors and communication. They include attributes such as adaptability and flexibility [15].

To manage these skills in project managers guarantees better alignment with the contexts of complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity in which problems related to resources, time, scope, quality, change management and conflicts arise, allowing them to maintain team members motivated and satisfied, which could eventually be reflected in their performance. The project manager must be able to build trust and levels of loyalty within the project team.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative approach and cross-sectional design are applied in the research. Consequently, data collection is primary and based on the survey method. The type of deductive research, since it focused on studying reality and verifying or refuting the premise to be verified. The phases that allowed us to reach the results obtained consisted of:

1. Methodological phase
 - Design choice.
 - Study population.
 - Research variables.
 - Data collection tools.
2. Empirical phase.
 - Data collection.
 - Preparation of data for analysis:
 - Analysis and interpretation of data

POPULATION AND SAMPLING APPROACH

For ease of access to the information, the information was disaggregated and analyzed by the size of the company where the project managers had worked. More than 76 surveys were distributed, of which 62 were completed and delivered, of which a total of 52 were useful or usable.

DATA COLLECTION

A questionnaire developed through the Google form, which was shared electronically, was used to collect primary data.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

In this research, an instrument was applied as a source of data collection, using the Likert scaling method, which distinguishes between the best-known methods for measuring variables by scale [16].

SURVEY VARIABLES AND DIMENSIONS

For the interpersonal skills of project managers, which are related to the independent variable, a questionnaire was used that included 3 items for communication skills, 3 items for interpersonal skills, 3 items for coordination skills, and 4 items for work team, 3 items for emotional intelligence, 4 items for negotiation and conflict resolution, 3 items for leadership and motivation and 3 items for project success adapted from Narayanaswamy, Grover and Henry [6].

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

- 1) Communication skill.
- 2) Interpersonal skills.
- 3) Coordination ability.
- 4) Team work ability.
- 5) Emotional intelligence skill.
- 6) Negotiation and conflict resolution skills.
- 7) Leadership and motivation skills.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

- 1) Project success.

RESULTS

The research considered the experience of 52 project managers who worked in at least 64 companies, and who, in their extensive professional career, fulfilled the role of project director, in a total of 186 projects. The breakdown of project managers according to gender and experience behaves as reflected in table 1.

Dimensions	Gender and experience	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	34	65
	Female	18	35
		52	100
Work experience	Less than 1 year	5	10
	From 1 to 5 years	18	35
	From 5 to 15 years	23	44
	More than 15 years	6	11
		52	100

Table 1: Gender and experience

The sectors where the 52 project managers surveyed are currently assigned are described as follows: Transportation – 4, financial – 9, commerce – 16, construction – 13, mining and energy – 3, communications – 5, Health – 2.

In the research it was necessary to know the level of skills of the project managers who participated in the research according to the direct experience accumulated in project management and the learning curve achieved. See table 2.

Statistics indicate that 100% of the participants are, or have been, project managers in one of the companies where they worked, show a level of skills above average, including communication skills (M = 3.51); interpersonal skills (M=3.81); coordination skills (M=3.23); teamwork skills (M=3.20); negotiation and conflict resolution skills (3.78) and leadership and motivation skills (M=3.56). Finally, project success was also above average (M=3.76). The data were analyzed to verify the correlation of the variables and determine the existence of a correlation between soft skills as independent variables and project success as a dependent variable.

The SPSS program was used to generate the Pearson correlation coefficients and the level of significance, as indicated in Table 3, 4 and 5. The values obtained from the Pearson correlation coefficient and the level of significance for each independent variable and the dependent variable, allowed us to

determine the correlation between them.

Model	Correlation and significance level	Interpersonal skills	Project success
Interpersonal skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.425
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.029
	N	52	52
Project success	Pearson Correlation	.425	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	
	N	52	52

Table 3: Relationship between communication skills and project success

The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Through this research, it was found that there is a significant correlation between communication skills and project success. This is evidenced by a Pearson correlation value of 0.425* and a p-value of 0.029, and this value is less than 0.05. Therefore, from the two Pearson correlation values and the level of significance obtained, it can be concluded that communication skills have a significant effect on project success.

Model	Correlation and significance level	Interpersonal skills	Project success
Interpersonal skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.351
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.021
	N	52	52
Project success	Pearson Correlation	.351	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	
	N	52	52

Table 4: Relationship between interpersonal skills and project success

The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The research found that there is a significant correlation between interpersonal skills and project success. This is indicated by a Pearson correlation value of 0.351* and a p value of 0.021 and this value is less than 0.05. Therefore, from the two Pearson correlation values and the level of significance obtained,

Number of Items		Minimum	Maximum	Half	Deviation Standard	Cronbach Alpha
Communication skills	03	1.39	5.00	3.5146	.96321	.877
Interpersonal skills	03	1.23	5.00	3.8108	.91542	.766
Coordination skills	03	1.76	5.00	3.2307	.77183	.813
Teamwork skills	04	2.10	5.00	3.2081	.75155	.900
Negotiation skills and conflict resolution	04	2.10	5.00	3.7804	.68134	.860
Leadership and motivation skills	03	1.67	5.00	3.5677	.91809	.895
Project success	03	1.38	5.00	3.7660	.93540	.895

Table 2: Skill level

it can be concluded that interpersonal skills have a significant effect on project success.

Model	Correlation and significance level	Leadership and motivation skills	Project success
Leadership and motivation skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.410
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.027
	N	52	52
Project success	Pearson Correlation	.410	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	
	N	52	52

Table 5: Relationship between leadership and motivation skills and project success

The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

According to previous information, there is a significant correlation between leadership and motivation skills and project success. This is indicated by a Pearson correlation value of 0.410* and a p-value of 0.027, and this value is less than 0.05. Therefore, based on the two Pearson correlation values and the level of significance obtained, it can be concluded that leadership and motivation skills have a significant effect on the success of the project. In the case of the independent variables such as: coordination skills, teamwork and negotiation, with a p value greater than 0.05, it did not allow us to conclude that there was a significant difference. The results were not statistically significant.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the study was to identify soft skills that had a significant influence on project success. The research was based on the perception of 52 project managers who analyzed their role in 64 companies and the information collected in the project. The results indicate that, among soft skills, communication skills, personal relationship skills, and leadership and motivation skills are the most important.

Despite the fact that, in most projects, the focus tends to be mainly on hard skills, when implementing their applications, managing the progress of the projects and in the final evaluation of the delivered result, it happens that in many projects within the world business, the issue of dealing with people

seems to be one of the main focus points of project managers, in addition, the importance of soft skills has been established; This research demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between leadership skills and project success, and that there is also a significant relationship between the ability to communicate and better performance in the project.

Due to the correlations explained in this research, it is expected that project managers will continue to appropriate and apply soft skills adjusted to each context and challenge of the environments in which they work, in close relationship with technical/hard skills. Modern project managers must have the

ability to understand situations, improve the ability to coordinate, and enlist the support of others. An appropriate leadership style, accompanied by interpersonal skills, that allow effective listening, persuading, motivating and generating empathy, have a significant influence and greatly lead to the

success of the project.

Interpersonal skills stand out in the execution of projects, the research results show that the soft skills of project management can contribute a lot if training sessions in appropriate social skills are prepared, which allow the standardization of behaviors.

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