

Applying a Core Competence Model on Swedish Job Advertisements for IT Project Managers

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ABSTRACT

Recruitments of IT project managers are costly and time-consuming, which makes it important to handle them effectively. IT project managers' key function in IT projects conveys that the prerequisites in such job ads become extensive and hard to satisfy because of overloaded descriptions. The organization's core competence (henceforth CC) requirements need to be decisive and explicitly expressed. Hence, each recruitment process should involve the defining of what the CC qualifications are. Advertisements were collected (2010-2013) and a CC lens was tested for assessment of CC criteria in order to get an indication of its value. The study's practical implication is an added understanding of the importance to discern what core competence/s a specific project requires and furthermore to match those with the job requirements during the recruitment process. The implication for research is an inspiration for further development of methods for determining core competence criteria for recruiting IT-project managers.

Keywords: Core Competence, Core Competence Lens, Project Education, Project Experience, Project Knowledge, Recruitment of Swedish IT Project Managers

INTRODUCTION

An increasing amount of assignments carried out as projects makes it critical to understand how to recruit the *right* project manager for a specific assignment. Appointing *wrong* project manager is since long ago a well-known factor that may cause projects to fail (e.g. Avots, 1969). Besides,

recruitment processes are time-consuming and costly in themselves, nevertheless critical and momentous for the project outcome. A wish to hire the *right* individual for the job often brings about extensive lists of prerequisites in the job ads. (henceforth ads.), which should reveal the employers' opinions about what qualities a certain IT project manager job requires. Con-

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sequently, it could be quite demanding to grasp which qualifications and attributes to seek for in the applicants, and likewise difficult to clearly express the requirements in the ads.

A study carried out in the UK, by Den Hartog (2007), stresses the fact that "...the vocabulary used is often also somewhat ambiguous, raising issues about what exactly is being looked for" (p. 72). An example of this phenomenon is that in a fifth of the leadership ads. no leadership-oriented terminology was used, even though they advertised vacancies for leading positions as CEOs, chairmen and directors. So those terms were actually expected to be prominent in the ads. Den Hartog (2007) studied. The task of appointing an IT project manager should be carefully accomplished because of this role's high importance for the project's processes and outcome. Besides, the IT project managers' competence profiles differ depending on project type as well as the rating of success criteria; furthermore, project management requires specific tools and techniques (Munns & Bjeirmi, 1996; Müller & Turner, 2007, 2010).

The organizational context that today's project managers must deal with in their everyday work situation is described by Ruuska and Vartiainen (2003, p. 307): "Today's organizations are often multi-project environments, where projects constitute a major part of business, and several project assignments are realized simultaneously". However, Peslak (2012) found that the size of the organization did not influence the IT project management success. Also Gillard and Price (2005) seem to have hit the head on the nail regarding the project managers' exposure by concluding that it is the project manager who is praised in times of success, but also the one who is blamed when things did not work out as well. Another weighty issue is that the role as a project manager is mostly a temporary assignment without comparable opportunities for advancement that are available for traditional leadership posts (Hölzle, 2010).

El-Sabaa (2001) took a standpoint in Katz' (2009) three administrative skills during a

study about project manager's assignments and found that regardless of what business/sector the project belonged to, the project manager's human skills were the most influential whilst the technical skills were the least influential. Nevertheless, it could be difficult to lead and manage projects in the IT sector without, at least, basic knowledge of technical requirements and conditions for those projects. Apart from that, technical specialists who take on project management assignments could instead of having trouble with technical issues being influenced by the "fundamental tension" between management and technology (Hodgson, Paton & Cicmil, 2011, p. 381). However, prospect project managers' knowledge and experience from the practical field are often presumed as they are presupposed as fundamental to their work performance and also to project success.

There is no single road that leads to becoming an IT project manager; therefore there are several conceivable opportunities for people who aim at those positions. The alternatives stretch between formal and informal education and training, of which the latter often imply workplace learning. Irrespective of what type of education/training a future IT project manager has experienced, the matching between an individual and a certain project is critical for the project outcome. Furthermore, the fact that IT projects are known to be particularly unsuccessful when it comes to delivering project outcome in time and on budget (KPMG, 2005) adds further to the problematic recruitment situation. Hence, it is important to facilitate the recruitment process, not least regarding how the *right* qualification requirements are discerned and expressed.

This study aims at studying recruitment of IT project managers on the Swedish labour market and took a starting point in how ads. for IT project managers were worded, and how the qualification requirements were expressed. According to the literature (cf. Antvik & Sjöholm, 2006) search criteria that are adjusted to the project outcome, and adapted to the specific project, generally provide a better basis for finding the right individual.

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