

Determining the Effect of Software Project Managers' Skills on Work Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing project managers' work performance, including decision-making, analytical, technical, interpersonal, and communication skills, with emotional intelligence as a potential moderator. Conducted within the Pakistani software industry, a comprehensive field survey using a well-designed questionnaire ensured reliable and valid data collection. The statistical findings confirm the positive impact of all five skill sets on project managers' work performance. Notably, emotional intelligence moderates the effects significantly for communication, interpersonal, and analytical skills. This research provides valuable insights into the critical attributes shaping project managers' effectiveness, offering a unique perspective by considering emotional intelligence as a potential enhancer or inhibitor of these skills' impact on work performance.

KEYWORDS

Emotional Intelligence, Managerial Skill, Project Managers, Software Industry, Work Performance

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, project management has been identified as a practice of creating and increasing the competitive advantage of companies. Organizations have started depending on projects to stay ahead of the competition (Ju et al., 2020; Anantamula, 2010), due to which the role of project managers has gained much attention. The project managers are constantly facing pressure to handle the challenges and several problems to meet the expectations of stakeholders. "By tradition, project management has concentrated on the management of projects on a single location either within one organization or between two or more organizations. At this moment, emerging trends are altering the way projects are structured and managed, creating new challenges in project management research and practice" (Mandson & Selnes, 2015). Our focus was captured by a recent report that delved into the essential skills and experience that will be required by Australia's prospective workforce in the forthcoming decades, as highlighted by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) in the year 2015 (CEDA, 2015).

DOI: 10.4018/IJITPM.333620

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A project manager has a diverse set of responsibilities and duties like coordinating customers, conducting meetings, preparing budgets, etc. (Shastri et al., 2021; Howard, 1999). In the case of software projects, both developing and mature countries have a high proportion of project failures (Ebad, 2016). As the project's success has been considered as a result of project managers' efficiencies and competencies. *"It is not just the technical factors in a project that impacts project performance but there are some behavioral attributes that practitioners need to have in order to cope with project difficulties and then add to project outcomes"* (Zaman et al., 2019). Hence, several skills set, and leadership styles have been studied to identify the critical success factors for a project manager's performance. Along with several hard and soft skills, the emotional intelligence of project managers has also gained importance. Emotional Intelligence is defined as *"...the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to differentiate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions"* (Salovey & Mayer, 1990)".

Due to the critical nature of projects across each industry and several problems and responsibilities faced by project managers, the question arises that how to combat these problems and what skills are necessary for a project manager to be equipped with to enhance their work performance? Researchers like Kerzner (2010), found that most of the project performance can be credited to the individual characteristics of the project manager e.g., behavioral features such as attitudes and interpersonal understanding and abilities (Lechler, 1998), are linked to project performance. Companies give the project managers complete obligations regarding guiding and conveying project results. Hence, the project manager's tasks are to assuming liability for planning and incorporating activities in different specialized and technical lines and communicating with stakeholders.

Project Managers' diverse skill set is essential for their work performance and ultimately project success. As, it has been observed in the previous research that the "project failure rates are high, and interestingly much of the project failure is not related to knowledge or know-how, but to project participants' lack of social intelligence, personal skills, poor leadership, inadequate communication and inability to solve conflicts" (Srica, 2009). This means that project performance is dependent upon human skills. Clarke (2010) identifies that the emotional intelligence of project managers helps them to enhance problem-solving skills of solving new challenges and problems. This trait may also help them to inspire and motivate their other team members.

There has been a plethora of research on identifying the skill set of a project manager for his successful project management. Still, there is more need to do empirical research. A set of characteristics has been outlined as desirable for an effective project manager, but a unanimous agreement on this list is lacking (Maqbool et al., 2017). This lack of consensus regarding the essential skillset for successful project management has prompted the initiation of this research, which seeks to explore the human dimension of project management. The study aims to delve into how specific managerial skills and emotional competencies impact the performance of individual project managers.

Even though it is realized that great administration abilities and project achievement are connected, usually overlooked or downsized in writing about project management. Writing on project management frequently manages specialized or technical components e.g., time administration, project structure, and so on. That could just be a direct result of the unobtrusiveness of the project managers. Ordinarily, project managers stress the significance of the group or team than the manager. Lipsanen (2017) expressed the view that though numerous writers "have an opinion that leadership style and competencies have a significant impact to the success of a project, it rarely shows in researches". Khan, Long, and Iqbal (2014) also found that previous studies have largely focused on project success, however, competencies and leadership skills of managers are still lagging in studies. Companies face the need to develop and strengthen competencies (more in particular, hard, and soft skills) for their projects to improve cost, time, and quality. Rarely have studies or empirical tests of the application of people skills in software projects been conducted (Elizalde & Bayona, 2018; Hilary, 2018;). Lack of empirical data makes it difficult to determine how soft skills interact to affect project complexity

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