“THE IMPACT OF PROJECT MANAGERS’ SOFT SKILLS ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE IN JORDAN” A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to identify and assess the impact of project managers’ soft skills including; communication, interpersonal, problem solving, team building and leadership skills on project management performance. Previous studies have shown that there is a significant positive relationship exists between each of identified soft skills and project management performance. However the purpose of this study is to highlight the importance of project mangers’ soft skills and its effect on project performance in Jordan, hopefully the results and will provide organizations and individuals concerned with projects an overview of the key skills especially soft skills to improve the performance of projects in Jordan.

Keywords: Project management performance, project managers’ soft skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership, team building, delegation, problem solving, Jordan.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of projects, regardless of the industry, is to accomplish projects in a proper sequence and on time, within budget, meeting their quality goals. Project managers all around the globe are striving to accomplish such a goal and are in continuous search for methods to enhance project performance (Adhikary et al., 2013). A study on the nature of soft skills training programmers’ impact on the soft skills development of management students indicated that hard skills contribute only 15% to project managers’ success, whereas 85% of success is due to soft skills of project managers (John, 2009). The top reason for project failure listed above is inadequately trained or inexperienced project managers (Marando, 2012). Soft skills, being largely intangible, are hard to measure (Awan et al., 2015).

1.1. Significance of the Study

This paper has both theoretical and practical importance of project managers’ soft skills. In previous studies, a compression between soft skills and technical skills of project managers was conducted; this study merely investigates the impact of project managers’ soft skills on project management performance in Jordan. First, the theoretical importance is achieved by providing a concise preview of literature concerning the relationship among project managers’ soft skills and project management performance. Second, the practical importance is providing decision makers with vital insights that affect project management performance. Moreover, this paper highlights the importance of involving soft skills in project management performance in Jordan in order to improve project performance.

1.2. Research Objectives

The study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- To investigate if project managers’ communication skills affect project management performance.
- To investigate if project managers’ interpersonal skills affect project management performance.
- To investigate if project managers’ problem solving skills affect project management performance.
To investigate if project managers’ leadership skills and team building affects project management performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
In this section, four key skills of project managers are discussed; including communication skills, interpersonal skills, and problem solving skills, leadership and team building. Project management performance is affected by soft skills and hard skills of project managers; in this study the impact of soft skills is merely investigated.

2.1. Project Managers’ Soft Skills
As the field of research regarding project management keeps growing, it is becoming more evident that success in the role of project manager cannot be attained with a technical skill set only (Gillard, 2009). The skill sets required for success in workplaces have changed dramatically in the past few years. In today’s competitive global market and changing work environment, demand for soft skills along with technical skills has been increased. Project managers must be able to understand project goals and have the ability to accomplish them with available resources (Kumar and Hsiao, 2007). Project manager needs 50 percent strategy and understanding of dynamic environment, 40 percent management and only 10 percent technical applications (Alam et al., 2010).

2.1.1. Project Managers’ Communication Skills
As defined in Business Dictionaries: is the ability to convey information to another effectively and efficiently. From the definition, effective and efficient are two aspects of communication. Referring to PMBOK (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2015), success or failure of a project can rely on one important factor, the communication skills of the project manager, and it says that communication is one of the biggest reasons for the result of the project. Also it is required to guarantee effective communication among project team members, as well as with the project manager and other project’s stakeholders. It was proved that successful project performance needs trustful interaction and communication between all project stakeholders. (Frank et al., 2013) Communicating effectively between stakeholders depends in many interpersonal skills, which are openness, listening and knowledge. A study conducted at Brandeis University showed that project managers spend around 85% of their time communicating (Marando, 2012). The impact of ineffective communication on all aspects of the project life cycle are listed as information fails to get to the people who need it in time for them to use it, false or incomplete information is distributed and used as the basis for decision-making, assumptions are confused for facts, information distributed becomes a spark that ignites politics and conflict, crucial information is withheld, huge amounts of time are spent in unfocused, ineffective meetings.

2.1.2. Project Managers’ Interpersonal Skills
Interpersonal skills include being able to deal with people of different backgrounds, which means the skill of developing relationships with different types of people (Brenton and Levin, 2012). Interpersonal skills also involve persuading motivating and incentive skills. Persuading skills include project managers’ skill to persuade and influence others to support in realizing projects’ objectives (Cornelius, 2012). Motivating and incentive skills mean implementing special strategies to motivate team members to work hard by identifying their needs, feelings, and expectations (Brenton and Levin, 2012; Cornelius, 2012).

2.1.3. Project Managers’ Problem-Solving Skills
Brophy (2000) I identified problem solving skills as the process of working to achieve a goal under unknown circumstances. In addition Isaksen and Treffinger (2004) examined three stages for this process, beginning with understanding the problem generating ideas and planning the implementation of ideas. Simon (2005) pointed out that problem-solving involves information regarding a deviation from the desired state as a result to develop and choose among actions in order to decrease the deviation from intended state.

To investigate problem solving in organizations, a more focus is needed on what happens when human beings confront problems in organizational contexts (Tucker et al., 2002). Illustrated Problem Solving as a six-stage process. Including:
1. The initial stage: Forecasting and perceiving the threats, in this stage sensitivity is increased, possible threats are evaluated and priority is given to one of them.
2. Gathering information about the threat; the factors impacting the threat most are identified precisely and accurately.
3. Detecting and defining the problem clearly.
4. Creating opinions: solutions are produced regardless the final decision.
5. Determining the solution: choosing the right solution is specified at this stage.
6. Applying the solution: appropriate measures are taken to apply the right solution.

The most important stage at problem solving process is detecting the problem. While there are many different detecting concepts in literature, the most well-known are system; contingency and field of strength analyse approaches (Rosen et al., 2008). In the system approach, It is assumed that a partial problem affects the whole system eventually. It is important to illustrate the relevance between processes to evaluate the system as a whole.

System approach used to develop models through determining interdepartmental processes within a scope of simple cause effect relationship as well through focusing the mechanism which generates unwanted results (Bayraktaroglu and Kutanis, 2002). According to contingency approach organizational structure and processes are constantly in interaction with internal and external factors and are continuously renewed. Different cases must be solved considering their own specific context. Field of Strength Analyzing Approach indicates that within the stage of detecting and defining problems, the forces that help or resist against change and progress activities concerned at solving organizational problems have to be determined clearly.

2.1.4. Project Managers’ Leadership Skills

Verma (1996) Identified that “Project leadership is the ability to get things done well through others”. Zhu et al. (2005) examined that a manager’s leadership style is one of the most critical factor to successful performance of an organization in implementing its mission. In addition, it has been suggested that different leadership styles should be used throughout the project lifecycle (Turner R. J., 1999).

Leadership is defined as “the conduct of an individual which aims at guiding the activities of a group for achievement of a shared goal” (Gregoire and Arendt, 2004). Leadership is also defined as the use of non-coercive influences to direct the activities of the members of an organized group towards the accomplishment of group objective. Research concerning leadership has showed that effective leadership is essential for the success of projects (Fox et al., 2012). Effective leaders are charismatic and can maintain an optimistic viewpoint, use passion to boost others’ enthusiasm, inspire others to bring out their potential.

Project managers usually lead their teams by using their particular leadership styles developed primarily through their experience (Alam et al., 2010). Project managers personal leadership attributes, which are considered as intangible factors and its impact on project success is generally lacking (Shi et al., 2006).

2.2. Project Management Performance

During the last 25 years, practitioners have tried to predict the factors that will enhance and increase the chance of project success (Jugdev and Müller, 2005; Turner J. R. and Müller, 2005). Early work focused on identifying the tools and techniques in which the project managers could use to increase the chance of success (Wateridge, 1995).

Project manager plays the most critical role towards success of any project (Huang et al., 2010). According to Almar et al. (2010) project as endeavor in which human, financial and material resources are recognised in a novel way to progress a unique scope of work, of a given specification, among constraints of cost and time, so as to achieve beneficial change defined by quantitative and qualitative objectives. Carvalho & Junior indicated the dimensions for measuring project success; schedule compliance (time), budget compliance (cost), and economic-financial measures of the project: ROI, ROE, cash flow, Etc, compliance with human resource dimension target, reduces deviations and risks CII, reduce issues with suppliers and regulatory approval (Carvalho and Rabechini, 2015).

2.3. Project Managers’ Soft Skills & Project Management Performance

The role of project manager is broader than the sole management of project processes. Managing project successfully therefore essentially require soft skills including interpersonal ability, technical
competencies, and cognitive aptitude, along with the capability to understand the situation and people and then dynamically integrate appropriate leadership behaviour's (Baroudi and Pant, 2008).

According to Ireland (2004) realising the importance of soft skills is on the increase, as the research and reviews on various aspects of project management. Turner J. R. and Müller (2005) conducted that leadership styles as critical success factors, reveal the importance of soft skills in one way or the other. Association of Project Management (APM, 2006), highlights the significance of “people” as the ones managing project and performing the work, directly impacting the project outcomes.

Experience shows that people are the one who deliver successful projects, not methods and tools, and it the people ability to be involved intelligently with the complexity of projects (Winter et al., 2006). PM practice is seen as a social conduct and interaction occurring among people working together to deliver the objective (Cicmil and Marshall, 2005).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based on the proposed model that was adopted from Awan et al. (2015). The independent variables in this model are project managers’ soft skills while the dependent variable is project management performance. The model considers the impact of these skills on project management performance as well how the interference between the skills as whole will impact project performance.

![Figure 1. Research Framework](image)

Source: (Jeffrey and Pinto, 2009)

3.1. Hypotheses

According to theoretical framework and previous studies, numbers of null hypotheses are proposed:

- **H10**: There is no significant relationship between project manager’s communication skills and project management performance.
- **H20**: There is no significant relationship between project manager’s interpersonal skills and project management performance.
- **H30**: There is no significant relationship between project manager’s problem solving skills and project management performance.
- **H40**: There is no significant relationship between project manager’s leadership skills and project management performance.

4. CONCLUSION

The field of research concerning project management continues to grow; it is becoming more recognizable that project manager cannot succeed with technical skills only. Technical skills are being considered as the minimal requirements for a project manager. The need for effective soft skills, including communication, interpersonal, problem solving, team building and leadership skills became a key factor for project success, and these skills can be taught as well as genetic.

REFERENCES


