

The importance of soft skills in project management

Abdikarim Nor Osman

Reasercher, Department of Construction Management, Near East University / Nicosia Via Mersin 10, Türkiye

ARTICLE INFO

ARTICLE HISTORY:

Received: 05 December 2022

Revised: 23 December 2022

Accepted: 28 December 2022

Published: 31 January 2023

KEYWORDS:

Soft skills, project manager, communication, team

ABSTRACT

A complex project involves many people and organizations working to complete a task on schedule. Inadequately specified tasks and crucial processes, as well as confusion over duties, scope, and goals, may lead to the failure of construction projects. However, Current research has underlined the significance of soft skills not only in personal life, but also in cooperative teams, projects, and businesses. Therefore, Soft skills are important for project managers to have when they are running projects. Typically, when hiring new employees, especially fresh managers, businesses place more emphasis on soft skills than hard skills. Communication is one of the most important skills for the success of the project, as project managers are considered to spend approximately 85 percent of their time communicating. The main goal of the study is to find out how important soft skills are, and which ones are most important for a project manager to have for a project to be successful This research explores ways to enhance or develop "soft skills". Although this essay has demonstrated that there are two parts to developing interpersonal skills, there are other approaches that may be used to build soft skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

What are soft skills precisely? Soft skills are interpersonal behaviour abilities that help you to interact well with others and be successful in your profession. It emphasizes who individuals are rather than what they know. It makes the workplace extremely applicable and easy to manage through highly observable behaviour and communication.

Soft skills are also sometimes called non-technical skills, interpersonal skills, or transferable skills. Communication, leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, and creativity are all often described as soft skills. Soft skills are also essential, especially when cooperating and interacting with a varied group of people on a project team.

Soft Skills are not only essential for professional activities but also play a crucial role in everyday life. Possessing strong soft skills contributes to one's happiness.

Soft Skills are commonly viewed as a supplement to Hard Skills, which are the talents to perform a certain work or activity. Soft skills are qualities that assist people to adapt to the workplace, such as personality, traits, adaptability, objectives, motivation, and preferences. In contrast, hard skills refer to the qualities that enable individuals to compete in activities, such as scientific knowledge,

professional ability, and technological experience. While soft skills emphasize strengths and behavioural characteristics connected to collaboration with others, hard skills emphasize teachable talents related to technical tasks. Regarding the comparative value of soft and hard abilities, there is no unanimity in the prior research. Some academics argue that hard skills are essential for working successfully, particularly in engineering or multidisciplinary teams.

After that, soft skills are regarded as a vital component in every industrial company, and they warrant special attention from Human Resources management not only during the recruitment phase but also throughout employees' professional careers.

The industry's quality, in terms of product, organization, services, and workers' lives, is strongly relied on Soft Skills possessed by personnel at all levels. Soft Skills depend on the quality of Human Capital functioning in any organization, and consequently the results they can deliver.

2. IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS

Why are soft skills so crucial? In fact, researchers recently concluded that one of the most major causes of

project failure was an absence of soft skills (Bancino and Zevalkink, 2007). These extremely intangible skill sets have emerged to have long-term worth for businesses (Crosbie, 2005).

After spending so much attention on soft skills, it is still unclear why they are regarded to be so essential. There are several reasons to evaluate a person's soft skills critically.

The primary factor is the job market. A staff member's contribution can be correlated with their soft skills. According to research, the most significant abilities that managers possess and that the firm requires are soft skills (Rifkin, 2006). As a result, firm executives prefer to encourage applicants with stronger soft skills.

The current job market proves that hard skills are insufficient to help workers support their employment, particularly amid firm contraction and role elimination. The workplace is implicated in the second cause.

According to studies, soft skills account for three-quarters of long-term employment performance, while hard skills account for only one-quarter. In addition, research shows that hard skills contribute 15% to a person's success, while soft skills make contributions 85%. Similarly, Barlow showed that "Many projects fail because the project manager doesn't communicate well, doesn't follow the organization's rules, doesn't motivate the project team, and doesn't make clear, well-thought-out decisions."

Soft skills are not only necessary for enterprises to communicate with clients but also for an employee to interact with clients. Therefore, employees place a high value on soft skills to promote a productive and healthy atmosphere.

3. THE MOST IMPORTANT SOFT SKILLS FOR A PROJECT MANAGER TO HAVE

To manage the project, the project manager must possess a variety of skills. They are extremely important in all phases of a project. These are the most important skills for a project manager.

3.1. Leadership

Leadership, according to Mullins (1996), is a relationship in which one person affects the conduct of others. A project leader must be able to learn, adapt, and overcome new difficulties via the exchange of information, questions, and answers with other members of the project team. Good leadership qualities may help the project leader in releasing the energy and skills of a project team that are larger than the sum of the individual members. A project leader who is accountable for group efficiency improvement can understand how much group efficiency increases and record it sequentially, instantly, and accurately when they have leadership qualities.

Leadership, in project management, is essential to guarantee that a project will be successful. The leadership abilities of project managers vary from those of enterprise managers. Typically, the features of a project, -such as new team members, an unclear framework, the project's setting, etc.- have a negative impact on the efficiency of the group and the performance of the project leader. This means that, although unsatisfactory, leadership research and experience in corporate management cannot be at once applied to project management.

The leadership roles in project management comprise a vast range of responsibilities, having effective planning, motivating team members, project observation, task coordination, and making crucial decisions for project execution.

A project manager's leadership qualities should be differentiated by honesty in accordance with defining ethical norms and supporting communication openness. Integrity and honesty are two critical project management leadership attributes that project managers should adopt to create confidence with customers, stakeholders, and other members.

3.2. Communication

The term "communication" refers to the process of acquiring all the pertinent information, analyzing it, and properly distributing it to others who would need it. Could you manage a project from beginning to end without any communication? Not possible. Both written and verbal communication skills are essential for all positions, but especially for project managers. Solid communication skills will allow your project team to conduct their best work while keeping stakeholders informed and everyone on the same page.

You may become a more successful project manager by refining your communication skills via email updates, project documentation, and stakeholder presentations. The project manager must say the appropriate thing to his team members at the right time, which requires him to listen carefully to the customer.

Communication is one of the most critical components that must be implemented horizontally and vertically within the project organization, as well as externally with the customer/client, because most difficulties in a project setting can be linked back to a communication breakdown (Verma, 1995).

The project manager's communication skills are the one solitary influential element impacting the success of a project. It is true that everything depends on communication and leadership, then it makes sense that leadership communication is the most important talent a project manager must have to be effective.

Communication is so vital to the success of a project that many practitioners refer to it as the project's blood. Team

members must communicate, discuss, analyse, and integrate information and knowledge to meet project aims. So, it is important to know the communication process.

According to Steyn, H (2008), Communication consists of three components at its most fundamental level: a transmitter/sender, a transmission channel/medium, and a receiver. The fourth part, the communication channel, is the code used to send a message. Consequently, ineffective communication can also result in misunderstandings about building projects.

The sender starts the communication cycle and contacts for a specific reason. In project management, the purpose of communication can be a request for information, the transmission of information, the asking of questions, or the distribution of instructions.

3.3. Team building

The project's success is not only dependent on the project manager. Instead, the project team manages the project's success. Therefore, collaboration and the ability to direct people toward a shared aim and product are crucial. If you want your team to be efficient and effective, its members must be pleased and able to collaborate on similar goals. However, every group is made up of several individuals, each of whom has a different personality.

As a basic requirement for a project's success, A project manager should also take part in team-building efforts. For each choice made by a project director or a supervisor, their co-workers should be informed, as people must exactly what is needed from a leader, as well as during the process of selecting the first team leader. (Raiden et al., 2004).

As a project manager, if you can encourage collaboration, you will be able to contribute to the project's prompt completion, the individual members of the team will feel happier, and a pleasant work atmosphere with high morale will be kept.

3.4. Motivation and training

The tendency of a person to put out effort toward a particular set of behaviours is referred to as motivation. In a training environment, motivation can affect an employee's readiness to participate in the training program, their commitment to the program, and how they apply what they learn on the job. Because of this, trainees cannot fully profit from training unless training motivation is considered.

Managers are suggested to implement a system that recognizes and bonuses employees who perform well to increase employee participation. For instance, Construction workers may be rewarded financially for recommending ways to improve the quality of their company's operations. Money is a powerful incentive, according to Olomolaiye et al., and a well-designed reward system will "lead to improved productivity for the company and further remuneration for the employee efforts."

Nesan and Holt note that "positive reinforcement" is more effective when used to groups as opposed to individuals, and they recommend recognizing the "Crew of the Month."

Training and development are described as the process of acquiring job-related knowledge and skills in order to gradually improve performance. Managers, directors, and supervisors can significantly improve knowledge and skill transfer.

Training must begin with the identification of training needs, as determined by job analysis, performance evaluation, and organizational analysis. Effective training is one of the most critical aspects of integrating HRM in the construction business. Managers must also establish methods for measuring employees' performance. On-the-job and off-the-job training are two key approaches for training construction workers.

Workers in the traditional model of on-the-job training would obtain a pre-planned class on the new laws, procedures, or processes, frequently in a varying area than their workplace, they would be asked to apply this abstracted knowledge later in their workplace to promote new practices. Managers may want to provide some off-the-job training techniques to employees.

The most common tactics include classroom lessons, videos, and simulation exercises. There are numerous examples of successful construction businesses incorporating training and motivation principles into HRM operations. A construction company's success is heavily reliant on the quality and morale of its employees.

3.5. Problem-solving and decision-making

As a project manager, you must have the ability to think on your feet and solve any challenges that may arise during the project's lifecycle. Actually, each project will have its own unique challenges. To keep things moving, you must have the necessary problem-solving skills to meet and overcome these obstacles.

Decisions are typically classified as routine, strategic, operational, or emergency. Project managers often have various types of criteria that are relevant when deciding to depend on the sort of decision that must be made, and how they assess the individual options may vary.

Managers should always think about how their decision-making will affect other people, and if they aren't sure, they should talk to their peers or colleagues. Most of the time, Employees are more likely to trust a project manager who makes smart decisions by clearly defining problems, generating alternatives, assessing the benefits and disadvantages of each type, and bringing together the necessary individuals to implement a solution.

A leader must understand how to handle an issue, determine the root of the problem, and then implement effective solutions. The problems to be solved are included among the elements in problem-solving, and judgments

must be taken to fix the difficulties that have happened (Odusami, 2002).

3.6. Conflict management

Typically, a construction project's most significant impediment is a dispute, which should be controlled by the project leader. As a project manager, you will meet conflict often. Whether a dispute occurs inside your project team, with relevant parties, or with other foreign factors, it is essential to your function that you know how to deal with and manage conflict.

Due to differing personalities, opinions, goals, and beliefs, conflict is often unavoidable, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution for addressing these situations. There are, fortunately, a variety of conflict resolution tactics that may be used to effectively manage conflict in the project situation.

Gray and Larson (2000) propose the use of the following measures to oversee it: Conflict mediation, conflict arbitration, conflict management, conflict acceptance, and conflict resolution.

As a project manager, it is hard to keep things running smoothly when there are disagreements. This chapter defines this conflict as a dispute between two or more trusts, an intellectual collision in problem-solving, or a conflict of interest in managing projects. (Yui & Cheung, 2006).

3.7. Time management

One of the PMI (2000) reports identifies time management as a necessary ability since it ensures that projects are completed within the specified timeframes. Time management is associated with several soft skill characteristics. Planning, delegating, organizing, directing, and supervising are included. Typically, these qualities improve with time and experience. If a thorough list of timelines and deadlines is created, the elimination of elements or work procedures that contribute to time loss or inefficient use of time may be avoided, according to this piece of advice.

According to Remo's (2002) research, time is an essential part of the construction process. Inadequate time management by a project manager can result in delays in the execution of a project. Delays in the completion of a building project might entail additional expenses. In addition, as the project's leader, the manager must be able to define and control strategies in time to produce a Critical Path Method-designed progression via phases.

4. WAYS TO DEVELOP SOFT SKILLS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

There are two ways to learn or improve soft skills. One method is to join in formal training, such as attending

evening classes in Rhetoric, languages, presentation skills, conflict resolution, or cultural management. Self-training, often based on literature, is another method of gaining soft skills. Personal attribute modification frequently necessitates long-term practice; thus, self-training may be more beneficial for improving this area of soft skills.

Soft skill development begins within the family and continues even before the child enters school. It is extremely difficult to forecast the future of the labour market; only short-term forecasting makes sense.

Educational programs should attempt to explore probable future scenarios to educate young adults on how to obtain work, but this is difficult to do because the future is often unpredictable. (Hautamäki, 2015).

However, because Soft Skills are not only required for the job but also for everyday life, academic institutions must concentrate on approaches and techniques to assist students in developing transversal competencies that will be valuable to them in any setting.

Self-Awareness, which is essential to begin the process, corresponds to the foundation, after which Self-Control, Directed Motivation, Social Awareness, and lastly Social Influence can be attained (Engelberg, 2015).

5. CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that soft skills are critical for project success these days. Soft skills are hard to define in a straightforward manner. Soft skills research has yielded fruitful findings in recent years. Although hard skills are indispensable in assessing applicants, soft skills should be emphasized more in college curricula so the students have a better knowledge of the value of soft skills in advance and can better prepare for their future careers.

The purpose of this study is to educate project managers on soft skills. Self-awareness is one of the most effective strategies to develop the soft skills required of a project manager. It is obvious that any organization must choose human resources with the best Soft Skills accessible in the labour market and continue to nurture their growth for employees once hired.

Soft skills are important for a person's career growth, which is why they are said to show who a person really is. We can understand if we pay close attention that your hard skills show what you know, and your soft skills show who you really are.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ahern, T., Leavy, B., & Byrne, P. J. (2014). Complex project management as complex problem solving: A distributed knowledge management perspective. *International journal of project management*, 32(8), 1371-1381.

- [2] Azim, S., Gale, A., Lawlor-Wright, T., Kirkham, R., Khan, A., & Alam, M. (2010). The importance of soft skills in complex projects. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 3(3), 387-401. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538371011056048>
- [3] Barlow, A., Barlow, C.G., Boddam-Whetham, L., Robinson, B. (2016). A rapid assessment of the current status of project management skills in the conservation sector. *Journal for Nature Conservation*, 34, 126-132.
- [4] Barrett DJ. Leadership communication. Boston: McGraw Hill Education, 2006.
- [5] Boogaard, K. (2021). What soft skills do project managers need? Wrike. <https://www.wrike.com/blog/an-essential-soft-skill-for-project-managers-recognizing-and-beating-productivity-killers/#What-are-soft-skills>.
- [6] Zakaria, I. B. B., Mohamed, M. R. B., Ahzahar, N. B., & Hashim, S. Z. B. (2015). A study on leadership skills of project manager for a successful construction project. *International Academic Research Journal of Social Science*, 1(2), 89-94.
- [7] Cimatti, B. (2016). Definition, development, assessment of soft skills and their role for the quality of organizations and enterprises. *International Journal for quality research*, 10(1), 97. <https://doi.org/10.18421/IJQR10.01-05>
- [8] Duggal, N., (2022). Understanding the Role of Leadership in Project Management. *Simplilearn*. <https://www.simplilearn.com/role-of-leadership-in-project-management-article>.
- [9] Heckman, J. J., & Kautz, T. (2012). Hard evidence on soft skills. *Labour Economics*, 19(4), 451-64.
- [10] Jena, A., & Satpathy, S. S. (2017). Importance of soft skills in project management. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management*, 5(7), 6173-6180.
- [11] Laker, D.R., Powell, J.L. (2011). The differences between hard and soft skills and their relative impact on training transfer. *Hum Resour Dev Quart* 22(1),111-22.
- [12] Lyu, W., & Liu, J. (2021). Soft skills, hard skills: What matters most? Evidence from job postings. *Applied Energy*, 300, 117307.
- [13] Patacsil F.S., Tablatin C.L. (2017). Exploring the importance of soft and hard skills as perceived by IT internship students and industry: a gap analysis. *J Technol Sci Educ*, 7(3),347.
- [14] Rabindranath, S. (2016). Soft skills in project management: A review. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 10(4).
- [15] Robles, M.M., (2012). Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*. 75(4), 453-465.
- [16] Schulz, B. (2008). The importance of soft skills: Education beyond academic knowledge.
- [17] Shi, Q. (2006). The human side of project management: leadership skills. PMI.
- [18] Steyn H. (ed.). Project management: a multi-disciplinary approach. 2nd ed. Pretoria: FPM Pub; 2008.
- [18] Tabassi, A. A., & Bakar, A. A. (2009). Training, motivation, and performance: The case of human resource management in construction projects in Mashhad, Iran. *International journal of project management*, 27(5), 471-480.
- [20] Tian, J. (2020). What does a project manager need to know about soft skills. *In Modern Economics & Management Forum I*(1).
- [21] Varajão, J., Cunha, M., Bjørn-Andersen, N., Turner, R., Wijesekera, D., Martinho, R., & Villanueva, J. (2014). . CENTERIS 2014 - conference on Enterprise information systems / ProjMAN 2014 - international conference on project Management / HCIST 2014 - international conference on health and social care information systems and technologies analysis of the success factors and failure causes in information & communication technology (ICT) projects in Spain. *Procedia Technology*, 16, 992-999