



Correlation between Project Leadership Competencies and Successful Project Management

Alia Mahmood¹, Fatima Al Nuaimi¹, Nasir Alabdouli¹, Rashed Alansari¹, Mounir El Khatib^{2, *}

¹Graduate Business Management, (200108745@hbmsu.ac.ae, 200106992@hbmsu.ac.ae, 200121369@hbmsu.ac.ae, Binabdullah@outlook.com)

²Associate Professor, School of Business & Quality Management, m.elkhatib@hbmsu.ac.ae

^{1,2} School of Business & Quality Management, Hamdan Bin Mohammad Smart University, Dubai. UAE.

* Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

One of the pillars in the success of project management is a successful leader. It's worth mentioning that the leader success is associated with possessing the best leadership competences. The research paper demonstrated multiple important competencies to achieve the success like Project Time Management, Resource Management and Communication. This is clear that such competencies are associated with Project Management Knowledge areas. The research paper introduced and defined the topic, demonstrated the research thesis statement and problem, gathered literature review and secondary data from recent sources and finally it derived the weaknesses and strength of the gathered leadership competencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, researchers thought about underlining the importance of exhibiting leadership tasks in the leader roles which, in turn, is affecting the project goals and achievement (Müller and Turner, 2010). Another article is emphasizing the importance of possessing leadership competencies in order to complete the roles and job tasks successfully. Leaders are expected to be innovative where this require certain competences to have by leaders to achieve the target (Elrehail, 2018). Despite the fact that leaders have some competencies, they should possess innovative competencies that need to be considered (Gerard and Bruijl, 2018). For this research paper, we aimed to identify the essential competencies of leader and its effect on

project management success. This topic is chosen to highlight leadership innovative competencies and recognize the contribution to the project success. The chosen research problem is stating that Issues with project performance in the organization require the development of effective leadership competencies which is the core pillar in the success or fail of project management. In the same way, the hypothesis is stating that the success in project management require a successful leader that have the needed leadership competencies and would be the solution to project failure. (Blooshi et al., 2023; Murray and Christison, 2012; Zubizarreta et al., 2021) noted in the article that, the issue in managing project successfully is directly linked to

the necessity of having the best leadership competencies. Today there is a lot of emphasis on research, and huge of researches are being generated on many focused disciplines, besides leadership theories (H. M. Alzoubi et al., 2022a; Kazmi and Naaranoja, 2015). leadership competencies are an important topic to be considered for the organization's strategy.

This research paper will demonstrate the project thesis statement, the results reviewed from literatures, recent secondary data, strength and weaknesses of the chosen leadership competencies. The research paper will focus on exploring the leadership competencies concept, show latest development on leadership competencies, and effects of leadership competencies on project management success.

- **Research Questions**

- a. What competencies should the leader have for effective leadership in project management?
- b. What are the leadership competencies associated with the project management knowledge areas?
- c. What is the effect of leadership on project management success?

- **Thesis Statement**

The project thesis statement is declaring that the project leadership have an impact on the efficacy of project management phases as a whole, hence, this is reflecting on project management knowledge areas.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Effective Leadership in Project Management

Leadership competency and style underlie the success or failure of a project. According to (M. Alshurideh et al., 2023; El Khatib et al., 2020b), project success is dependent on manager's ability to integrate technical and nontechnical expertise to align project goals with a business strategic outlook (Aljumah et al., 2023; Taher M. Ghazal et al., 2023). With an increase in cost, scope, and complexity of projects, leaders play a critical role in defining organizational goals and making major decisions regarding project budget, schedule, and scope (Amiri et al., 2020). These aspects bring into question the need to develop effective leadership competencies to address various project

performance issues (El Khatib et al., 2021). Thus, the analysis of effective leadership and its influence on key project indicators reveals that successful project management depends on the way a leader leverages specific competencies in relevant project management knowledge areas to create value.

2.2. Competencies of Effective Leadership

Among a range of skills and competencies required for a successful leader, some are more specific and essential for project management than others. According to (H. M. Alzoubi et al., 2022d; Aziz et al., 2023; Nuseir et al., 2021), over and above emotional, intellectual, and managerial abilities, people-oriented leadership competencies are also critical for project performance (Nuseir, 2021). Their elements are classified into three broad categories of contextual, behavioral, and technical (Alshurideh, M.T., Al Kurdi, B., Alzoubi, H.M., Sahawneh, N., Al-kassem, 2022). These competency models set the base and primary guidelines for project management to guarantee its success (El Khatib et al., 2022).

On the basis of people-oriented leadership, trust stands out as an important element of project performance. (Bawaneh et al., 2023) say that a leader must display trusting behavior to create an atmosphere of confidence among the team members. An environment, in which every stakeholder can rely on each other and accepts some level of mutual vulnerability, inspires willingness to complete assigned tasks (Nadzri et al., 2023). Thus, the leader's ability to develop trust among all the interested parties has a direct influence on project performance.

On a different front, meaningful and a two-way communication among team members also underlies successful project management. (Al-Dmour et al., 2023; H. M. Alzoubi et al., 2020) accentuate that leaders must demonstrate a high level of project awareness for effective management. This competency element enables a leader to make sound decisions in light of a specific situation, properly identify priorities, and assign roles and responsibilities relative to individual skills and project objectives and demands (Akour et al., 2023; Ahmad Ibrahim Aljumah et al., 2022a). In general, the ability to establish trust, pursue clarity in communication, and employ consistent processes compliment the leadership competencies that facilitate the process of

motivating stakeholders in achieving project goals (I. Akour et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023).

From a more technical perspective, intellectual leadership competencies are essential for an effective project manager. (El Khatib and Ahmed, 2020; M T Nuseir et al., 2022a) define critical analysis and judgment as some of the core competencies in this category (M. Alshurideh et al., 2022). Another one is strategic perspective that enables a leader to define the project dynamics and plan accordingly. The last intellectual competency specified by (El Khatib and Oplencia, 2015; Kassem and Martinez, 2022) is vision and imagination. On this ground, such leaders can contextualize problems in specific situations and model short- and long-term solutions to guarantee sustainability in project management (Aityassine et al., 2022; M. T. Alshurideh et al., 2023a; H. M. Alzoubi et al., 2022b; Mohammed T. Nuseir et al., 2022). From an analytical perspective, the intellectual component of effective leadership inspires a goal-oriented approach to the entire process (H. M. Alzoubi et al., 2022e; Freeman, 2008). Overall, by anticipating various outcomes of project dynamics, a manager can plan corresponding strategic responses to smooth the project management curve (Kurdi et al., 2022b). On the other hand, the managerial aspect of effective leadership presents a different approach centered on human and capital resource management. According to one of the scales offered by (Aljumah et al., 2020; M. T. Alshurideh et al., 2023c; Khan et al., 2022), this category prioritizes teamwork and cooperation, directiveness, and team leadership. Teamwork and cooperation define effective communication and extensive engagement of the staff. Through information sharing, the manager clarifies roles, responsibilities and areas of cooperation, hence fostering teamwork (El Khatib, 2015). In its turn, directiveness and team leadership concern the capacity of a manager to leverage positional power to influence project team members positively, which may be manifested in job delegation, conflicting management, and task instruction (A I Aljumah et al., 2022a; H. Alzoubi et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022). Generally, the importance of managerial competency is to coordinate project functions (Kurdi et al., 2022a).

Personal effectiveness, which falls within the area of emotional competency, is also central to

effective leadership. (Nuseir, 2020) say that this category encompasses self-awareness, intuitiveness, and emotional resilience. It generally presupposes self-control, organizational commitment, flexibility, self-confidence, and capacity to connect with others at a personal level (Al-Kassem et al., 2022). The possession of emotional competencies makes leaders sensitive to staff and other critical stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, and shareholders. With such traits, project managers become highly responsive to the needs of key stakeholders and happenings around them with the potential to impact project performance.

2.3. Leadership Competencies Associated with Project Management Knowledge Areas

Knowledge management concerns the best ways of leveraging intellectual capital (IC) to maximize project outcomes (M. Alzoubi et al., 2021). For clarity, IC refers to “the sum of all the intangible and knowledgeable-related resources that an organization is able to use in its production processes in the attempt to create value” (Abudaqa et al., 2021; M. T. Alshurideh et al., 2023d; Hani Al-Kassem, 2021; Nuseir and Elrefae, 2022). Thus, knowledge management involves the capacity of leaders to merge the skills and capabilities of human resources with internal technological capabilities to create value for the customers. From a leadership perspective, the role requires leaders to possess emotional, managerial and intellectual competencies. As demonstrated above, intellectual skills concern the capacity of a leader to anticipate industry dynamics and change in key variables of a project to develop precise short-term and long-term strategic goals (Al-Awamleh et al., 2022; Alshawabkeh et al., 2021). Thus, these competencies define the right direction to follow, resources to deploy, and the process of integrating internal capabilities and intellectual capital to realize organizational objectives (H. Alzoubi et al., 2020).

The managerial aspect describes the way a leader integrates human and capital resources to realize the strategic outlook of a business (Al-Kassem, 2017). Together with emotional competencies (Al-Marroof et al., 2022b; M. T. Alshurideh et al., 2023b), it allows proper management of human capital for the benefit of an organization (El Khatib et al., 2019). In this case, the underlying factors concern

proper coordination of effort, management of conflicts, and adequate employee guidance, the synergistic combinations and interactions of intellectual capital and internal processes and resources underlie value creation and proper project management (Muhammad Turki Alshurideh et al., 2022b; T M Ghazal et al., 2023a; Nuseir and Aljumah, 2020). In this regard, emotional, managerial, and intellectual leadership competencies play a crucial role in knowledge management (Al-Kassem, 2014; R. S. Al-Marroof et al., 2021b).

2.4. Effect of Leadership on Project Management Success

Holding other factors constant, project management success is subject to effective leadership. According to (I. A. Akour et al., 2022; Farrukh et al., 2023), project success is manifested in four critical aspects, which include time, cost, quality, and stakeholder satisfaction. Time is a critical success factor that influences both the stakeholder satisfaction level and cost performance (Khatib et al., 2016). Delays in project completion add to cost overruns and quality control issues. Therefore, it is necessary for leaders to accurately define project timelines to ensure seamless coordination of efforts (M T Alshurideh et al., 2022; El Khatib and Ahmed, 2019; Nuseira and Aljumahb, 2020). Equally, role clarification establishes the expectations of each player and areas of shared responsibility. These aspects enable workers to understand and perform their respective roles within the group, leading to timely delivery of the project (Ahmed and Nabeel Al Amiri, 2022). Essentially, project scheduling is a leadership function that requires collaboration among stakeholders to harmonize project schedules, estimates, and control mechanisms (Al-Marroof et al., 2022a). If this aspect of leadership remains uncoordinated, there is a likelihood of experiencing project overruns in terms of cost and time due to the lack of coordination of effort (M. El Khatib et al., 2022).

Leadership also influences the quality dimension of project performance. According to (A. Al-Marroof et al., 2021; Ahmad Ibrahim Aljumah et al., 2022b), quality performance is achieved if the project meets or conforms to specified requirements. At this stage, the role of the project leadership is to ascertain whether all parameters and

requirements are met and workers follow due processes (Almasaeid et al., 2022). Besides, to ensure quality, a project manager is required to oversee interpersonal processes and problem-solving activities. In this case, the idea is to create coordinated teamwork to guarantee maximum output. According to (A I Aljumah et al., 2022b; Sakthivel et al., 2022), mediating interpersonal processes is necessary for fostering teamwork skills and mutual supportiveness, which enhances the quality of output due to greater coordination of effort (Alhamad et al., 2021). On the other hand, problem-solving within group dynamics helps members of a project team to identify potential problems, generate relevant reports, and brainstorm remedial solutions (AlDhaheri et al., 2023; M. El Khatib et al., 2021).

. Collectively, these activities will enhance the quality of output from such teams (Aljumah et al., 2021a).

Cost performance is the most problematic project management factor. (Ahmed et al., 2022; T M Ghazal et al., 2023b; Louzi et al., 2022a) postulate that for a project to be considered successful, it must be completed within budget. As indicated earlier on by (Yasir et al., 2022), the increase in cost, scope, and complexity of projects necessitates leaders to be proactive in defining project budget estimates, schedule, and scope and working within established project limits. Perspective (Alzoubi et al., 2019; El Khatib et al., 2020a; Louzi et al., 2022b), cost overruns are indicators of poor planning, ineffective cost estimates or inefficient cost control measures (R. S. Al-Marroof et al., 2021a; Mubeen et al., 2022). In this regard, leaders must step up and provide sound leadership to avoid periodical budget adjustments, which reflects inefficiency on the part of the project leader (T M Ghazal et al., 2023c; Gulseven and Ahmed, 2022). Lastly, stakeholder satisfaction is another critical indicator of project success. A satisfactory project not only meets the design specification of the customers, but is also completed on time and within the set budget (Al-Marroof et al., 2022b; Aljumah et al., 2021b). In this regard, (Abudaqa et al., 2022) say that project managers must show leadership right from the initiation to the implementation phase. Throughout the process, they must emphasize customer benefits and needs and stakeholder expectations (Akour et al., 2021; H. M. Alzoubi et al., 2022c). In the absence of these

elements, the project will ultimately fail (Al-Kassem et al., 2013; Varma et al., 2023). Consequently, processes and resources to create value for the customers (Muhammad Turki Alshurideh et al., 2022a). In general, the interplay of sound leadership and the effective utilization of both human and capital resources will guarantee project success.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Secondary data – Case Study

Competency refers to the ability of an individual to mobilize and combine resources to implement an activity. Therefore, the Project leadership competency is an important skill and trait that project managers should apply toward the success of the project. For that, based on research performed under the title “Human Competencies of an Effective Project Manager”, interviews were conducted with people involved in projects, by which main responses perceived that there is no specific standard in place for an effective project manager leadership but there are specific characteristics such as professionalism and having necessary people skills. The following reflects the different point of view of the interviewees:

- Interviewee 1: The importance of human skills in selling the projects, engaging the team within the project phases.
- Interviewee 2: an effective project manager should reach beyond the project aim with limited resources and manages the strategic goals of the company and effective negotiation skills.
- Interviewee 3: Project manager effectiveness is measured through pursuing the value proposition of the project as well as obtaining the satisfaction of stakeholders, clients and project’s team & effective negotiation skills.
- Interviewee 4: To ensure project is delivered within the planned timeline as well as full satisfaction of the stakeholders and the project team.
- Interviewee 5: Effective project manager should have the skills to listen and talk, as well as administrative skills to track the project.

4. DISCUSSION

All the interviewees have agreed that the project

managers skills are important toward delivery of the project, though each one have different point of view pertaining the profile of the project manager effectiveness but certain skillsets should be in place to fulfill the purpose of the project.

Also, the researchers identified that the project manager main skillsets include being open minded, fair, adaptable for new ideas, risk taker, and show strong commitment to project success. With main competencies addressed which is communication, conflict management, negotiation, leadership, delegation and influencing.

Another research conducted, states that project leadership competencies is an important element in the project success, since the personality of the manager reflect of the effectiveness of the project phases. The research conducted reflected project participant point of view which stated that based on his experience the project manager was qualified, well experienced and ensured everyone fulfil their roles within the project. The study focused as well on the importance of having the top management support to establish project structure and purpose as required. Also, for the project manager to provide the necessary support and guidance for the team to perform the tasks assigned (Mat Som and Kassem, 2013).

According to a study under the title “Project leadership: skills, behaviors, knowledge and values”, the main aim of the research and the interview is to obtain an overview of the participants feedback of project manager leadership and the competencies of a good project leader. One of the participants stated that the there is no major difference between project leadership and organization leadership as the only difference is having the project or technical knowledge such as planning, measuring and controlling project delivery. The main competencies that any project manager should have behavioral, knowledge and personal skills for the project managers leadership to be considered effective.

Another research performed described that it is important for a project manager to have a situational leadership approach rather than one type leadership to ensure successful project completion, for that project managers will tend to adopt a more favorable attitude by having an open-minded approach when it relates to managing a project. Therefore, a project manager should have a well-balanced soft skills as well as the technical

skills needed to manage a project. By which, they urged the importance of having a well-designed leadership courses to train on the different leadership styles and skills that can be learned based on a high level of self-knowledge and awareness (Al-Kassem et al., 2012; E. Khatib et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a research under the title “The project manager core competencies to project success”, results revealed that communication, commitment and leadership is the important aspects for a project success (E Tariq et al., 2022). Therefore, the main competencies that any project manager should have includes self-management, interpersonal, communication, technical, productivity and managerial. Therefore, based on the results obtained there is a growing trend toward the soft skills which will enhance that the project management education to ensure the all gaps are filled between the theory and the existing practice (El Khatib and Ahmed, 2018; M T Nuseir et al., 2022b; Emad Tariq et al., 2022).

To address the main competencies that a project manager should have to lead a project, a survey was conducted in Serbian Public Sector to 110 respondents. The results revealed that the following are the main competencies in knowledge and skills identified:

- Project Time Management
- Resource and Cost Management
- Stakeholder Management
- Risk Management
- Analytical skills
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Leadership and Delegation

Results perceived illustrates that people involved in project management from different background and experience comes to one conclusion that communicating effectively is one the most important skill for an efficient project management (Muhammad Alshurideh et al., 2022; Caniëls and Bakens, 2012).

Another research performed titled “Leadership Competencies for Sustained Project Success”, stated that project success does not depend only on leaders who determine the technical factors but also application of the best leadership practices to ensure sustainability of project practices (Nuseir et al., 2020). Therefore, this study identified that the main leadership skills a project manager should

have skills including being equitable, servant, collaborative and transformative, which includes the following leadership competencies under each category:

- Equitable Leadership: social justice, power knowledge circuits, and education
- Servant Leadership: Team members relationships, project technical skills, communication and problem solving
- Collaborative Leadership: customer satisfaction, stakeholder engagement, and cultural awareness
- Transformational Leadership: Motivation, resource management, emotional intelligence, and trust

The results from this research indicated that the above identified characteristics contributed to the study advances the body of knowledge if these leadership competencies are applied within the project the same will impact positively and will lead to sustainable success on projects (Nuseir and Aljumah, 2022).

Based on the aforementioned and the different studies conducted, project managers should ensure that all skills needed either technical or soft should be in place for project success, stating communication and negotiation skills to be the most important competencies that any project leader should implement effectively toward the project success.

4.1. Strengths and weaknesses

From the different skills and competencies of project managers around the globe, there are number of competencies that they are strong in and others that they lack and are weak in. And from the above mentioned cases, it is clear from the project managers interviewed that most projects leaders lack 3 areas: the ability to engage project teams, negotiation, and communication. On the other hand, most project managers are flexible, adaptable to changes, risk takers, and are committed to achieve the project intended goals.

To elaborate, one of many strengths on emerging project management is adaptability. The current working leaders are working in an agile environment which makes them more and more flexible when it comes to changes. They adapt to new status and situations while keeping up with the new methods and technologies used to help achieve the required project objectives. Another

strength is project managers' commitment to achieve project goals and objectives (Khatib, 2022). A project manager commitment to the organization has a very strong and positive influence on the outcome of the project. One key to achieve this is to allow project managers to select the projects they are interested to work on instead of obligating them to work on projects that they have no interest in, this is because the level of interest has a clear impact on the projects potential outcomes. Moreover, project managers who are risk takers can encourage their teams to collaborate with each other, share skills and knowledge, and hence bring new ideas into their projects. Risk taking also help with different issues resolutions through the continuous various forms of discussions to improve the progress of work (Arshad et al., 2023).

From weaknesses perspectives, one of the most common reasons to project failure is lack of communication. Communication is one of many important competencies that a project manager should have, which is around 80% of the project manager role (Bhatti et al., 2022). When project managers lack the skill to be a communicator, it affects the entire project and it could lead to project failure. Poor communication can lead to critical consequences such as rework, poor quality, time and budget overrun, disputes, customer dissatisfaction, and finally project failure. To elaborate, Kuwait University had a project to construct a new campus and they experienced poor communication as a result of lack of knowledge, inexperienced project manager, and unclear project stakeholder identification. In addition to communication, negotiation is one crucial competency that should be present in a project manager as it helps in conflict management, stakeholder management, and contract management (Association for Project Management, 2020). A negotiator project manager can also use his skill in negotiating proposals, defining project scope, acquiring resources, and risk management (E. Khatib et al., 2022). Another weakness point is the inability to inspire project team members to stay committed to the project. Such competency can help improve the team performance which consequently can lead to project success (Gaytan et al., 2023). To be able to inspire and engage the team and make them feel as an important part of the project is done through assuring the project

manager's trust in them, gaining their respect, crediting them for their excellent performance, and engaging them in decision making.

Moreover, Poor leadership skills can also lead to bad project consequences. A project manager must know how to lead a project and its resources to be able to achieve the required goals. Leadership is something that a person possesses and not a trait that is held in a job title or a position (Madsen, 2019). Leaders' innovation is another project management weakness. Most of project managers do not have the innovative skills while managing the projects, which is also based on logic and available data. According to Gallagher, Innovation is a core competency where a project manager has to ensure different metrics are met beside meeting the cost, scope, and schedule. These metrics are assessing feasibility, analyzing causes, and providing and recommending creative solutions. Project managers can use different techniques in order to improve their innovation skill such as brainstorming with a team to get better ideas, The 6-3-5 method which means 6 in a group with 3 ideas found in 5 minutes, The pool method, and the Pin card method. The reason behind project manager poor creativity and innovation is that the time is a precious element in the project manager's hand, therefore, they would rather start executing instead of using these techniques.

5. CONCLUSION

Although the effective leadership competencies have an obvious impact in the success of a project, there are possibilities to possess poor leadership competencies that can lead to bad project consequences. From the literature review, the outcome declares that having effective leadership competencies will result in a successful project management and its knowledge areas. The knowledge management areas are clearly affected by emotional, managerial and intellectual competencies which may lead to achieving the knowledge area core output. The project thesis statement is stating that project management success is highly associated with having effective leadership competencies which would affects project management knowledge area accordingly. The literature review emphasized on this statement and explained that project manager effectiveness is crucial in order to have a successful project management. This cannot be achieved

without obtaining the essential competencies like negotiation and communication. This research could be a reliable resource for starting up a project with possessing the strong leadership competencies and avoid undertaking the unusable once. This research project aimed to identify all the core competencies for a successful project management, and this was achieved after relying on recent literatures.

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