

## Leadership Competency: A Tool for Project Success

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**Abstract:** Project management and project success has remained an interesting topic of various researches. Project success has been investigated with reference to finding out those factors which contributes more significantly to it and role project manager as leader is one of them. Despite of various literature on project success the importance of leadership competencies in the project management is still a topic to investigate. Considering this call, the present study is aimed to explore how leadership competency is important for the project success. For the purpose data was collected from the published articles from well-known databases. It was concluded that leadership competency has positive impact on the project success which was previously neglected due to some unknown reasons. Leadership is a universal topic and has been an effective source for organizational success yet in project management it is evolving. Finally, as per prior studies, it was concluded that project leadership competencies are similar to competencies of leadership in general management.

**Key words:** Leadership • Project success • Leadership competency

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### INTRODUCTION

**Competencies of Project Manager:** Leadership has been discussed through various aspects in organizational behavior but research on project manager as a leader and its competencies toward the project success is less robust. Rees, Turner and Tampoe (1996) [1] tried to identify traits of project manager and described the characteristics of project managers that effective managers are normally above average, intelligent and have possess an impressive ability to solve the problems. Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) [2] also identified some similar traits and discussed them as intellectual leadership competencies. Moreover, Rees *et al.*, (1996) [1] also identified some other traits which were related to behaviors and motivation such as energy and some were related to skills for example communication. In contract, they were unable to claim that was there any relationship between leadership traits and project success. Furthermore, Andersen, Grude and Haug (1987) [3] draw the intention of organizations toward some personal characteristics such as initiative while selecting project managers. In addition, Hogan (2002) [4] said that personality of leader can be the determinant of success of the project.

Likewise, Pinto and Trailer (1998) [5] conducted research on characteristics of project leaders and identified six characteristics such as: creative problem solving skill, credibility of the leader and tolerance for ambiguity, effective communication and flexible management style. They also discussed 3 broad skills desirable for the effective project managers like: technical skill (that a project manager should have sound technical knowledge in their particular field) administrative skills (planning and budgeting etc.) in addition, project manager should possess the leadership skills like vision and setting examples etc. According to them these skills are important for a project manager to perform well in organizational and project success. Similarly, they ignored the impact of project managers on project success.

Furthermore, Crawford (2007) [6] argued that project manager competencies are blend of knowledge such as qualification and skills to perform an assigned task and other important personality characteristics such as motives, traits and self-concepts that can lead to superior results toward the project and organizational success. According to him project success and project managers' competencies are closely interconnected. Nevertheless, his major attention was related to the competency factors of project manager, but he ignored to consider the factor as the most important category to project success.

Extant literature on project managers' competencies enabled the researcher to argue that competencies required for the project manager are similar to the competencies of leadership in the other organizations. Competencies like problem solving, flexibility, communication and personal characteristics are similar to the competencies of leadership discussed earlier in organizational behaviors [7]. However, in the light of extant literature it is further stated that the relationship of project manager leadership competencies and the success of the project needs also be discussed in detail. The next section explains relationship of project manager and project success.

**Relationship of Project Manager and Project Success:** In project management there are few topics which are frequently discussed and those discussed rarely agreed upon project success [8]. In recent studies the use of critical success factors for assessing the project success is common. During 1970s the most of the research was conducted on the measuring the project success on traditional factors such as time, cost to improve the functionality, later on quality of project was also added into the criteria during 1980s and 1990s [9]. In addition, project success traditional criteria should also be extended to recent factors such as; satisfaction of the stakeholders, success of the product, current and future benefit of the project to the organization and development of team [10, 11].

Likewise, some researchers also identified similar factors such as performance, time, cost and commercial success of project, successful termination of the project and satisfaction of clients [8,12,13]. In contrast, these studies missed to explicit a link between the relationship of project managers' leadership competencies and their impact on the project success. Moreover, Andersen *et al.*, (1987) [3] analyzed some hazards that may lead a project toward failures. These hazards were related to the planning of the project, the way the project is organized and controlled. Similarly, Baker *et al.*, (1988) [12] defined "perceived" success of the project as successful achievement of technical specification of project and to make the clients, users and project team satisfied. They also mainly focused on the planning of project other than leadership as an important factor in the success of the project.

Furthermore, Pinto and Slevin (1988b) [14] conducted a research on project success and identified ten most critical success factors important for project success. They concluded that project manager' communications skills and problem solving skills as most important factors

in project success. Interestingly project manager leadership and managerial skills were not included in those ten factors. However, they argued that the absence of project managers' administrative, human and influencing skills can lead to the failure of the projects.

According to Lee-Kelley and Leong (2003) [15] there is significant link between the personality of project manager and their perception of project success. In addition, self-confidence and self-belief of projects manager facilitate them in project success.

In addition, Morris (1988) [13] Morris and Hough (1987) [16] discussed the important aspects of project managers for project success such as managerial skills, industrial relations, teamwork and leadership. Moreover, Turner (1999) [17] argued that implementing a project strategy successfully plays an important role in project success and elaborated that leadership is one of the important factors in the formulating and implementing the project strategy successfully. In contrary, Cooke-Davies (2001) [18] focused on "iron triangle" as predictors of project success and argued that instead of impressive research on the project management and project success the final outcomes of the projects cannot satisfy the stakeholders. He also neglected the project managers' managerial and leadership competencies.

Moreover, Jugdev and Muller (2005) [19] determined four necessary but not enough conditions for the success of the project. They argued that firstly, criteria of success should be discussed and agreed upon among the project stakeholders in the early start of the project. Secondly, intensive working relationship should be maintained between the project manager and sponsor/owner of the project. Thirdly, the project manager should be given some powers to deal with unexpected situations and finally project sponsors and owners should take continuous interest during the implementation of project. Moreover, they argued that "the literature has largely ignored the impact of the project manager and his/her leadership style and competence, on project success" (p. 59). They concluded that leadership in general management is one of the widely discussed topics; in contrast, impact of leadership style in organizational and project success has been largely ignored. Therefore, the role of project managers' leadership competencies should be paid more attention to clearly understand the concept and its contribution to project success.

**Theoretical Framework:** Project leadership competency is an important element in the success of the project. Accordingly, Atwater and Yammarino (1992) [20] argued that management and leadership symbolize two entire

different concepts. Therefore, for a project manager it is essential to be a good manager along with leadership competency skills. Many attempts have been made to define leadership, commonly it is referred to establishing a clear vision and transforming that vision into others and having conflict resolution skills between individuals, responsible for achieving that vision [21]. While, Robbins and Coulter (2007) [22] defined as management is majorly involved in planning, organizing, leading and controlling.

Project leadership competencies can significantly and positively affect the project success as well as organizational success. Researchers have affirmed belief that project leadership competency is the most influential factor in project success, despite of that little research has dealt with the issue [23]. Hence, in the light of extant discussions, it is proposed that project leadership competency positively and significantly influence the project success.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

According to extant literature leadership has been discussed from various aspects in general management still there is need to discussed role of project managers as leaders and their competencies required for project success. Most of the prior studies focused on the three technical objectives of the projects i.e. cost, time and scope. In addition, these were considered as enough criteria to declare the project successful. However, it has been found in recent studies discussing leadership competencies to be the most effective and important factors for project success.

In addition, previous studies focused on technical competencies of project managers such as administrative and technical skills and few studies discussed the project manager role as leader and their competencies for project success. Recent studies discussed the project leadership so far, concluded that project leadership competencies are positively related with the project success, for example, [7] discussed that leadership competencies were found positively correlated with the project success. Another important reason is that project management was considered as technical field, but now most researchers have realized the behavioral aspect of the project leaders [19].

However, Porthouse and Dulewicz (2007) [24] argued that project managers should possess leadership qualities because leadership is significantly related with the project success. In addition, the organizations have realized that project is integral part of the organization success; likewise, project leadership is the key factor for project

success [9]. Therefore, the organizations should focus on developing leadership competencies among project managers through training and development [2]. In short, the organizations dealing with projects should focus on behavioral aspect of the project along with technical competencies of project managers. Extant literature enabled the researchers to argue that project leadership competencies are similar to competencies of leadership in general management.

**Limitations of the Study:** The only limitation of the study is lacking any empirical support therefore; the studies empirically conducted may produce contrary results. The concept needs further attention of researchers to discuss the project managers' leadership competencies quantitatively in different industries and sectors. As leadership has been found a well proven tool for organizational success, still role of project managers as leaders needs to be discussed with more empirical support.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is concluded that leadership competency has positive impact on the project success which was previously neglected due to some unknown reasons. Leadership is a universal topic and has been an effective source for organizational success yet in project management it is evolving. Finally, as per prior studies, it was concluded that project leadership competencies are similar to competencies of leadership in general management.

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