A Project Manager's
Personal and Social Competencies

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ABSTRACT

Project manager's working in a hectic environment has to be efficient and leader-intensive. The skills that separate a successful project manager from an unsuccessful one can be examined through competencies. The thought of competencies' ontology is based on understanding that competencies represent individual's personal view and feelings of how he/she experiences him/herself. The objective of this article is to explore which are the important competencies in everyday activities of a project manager. In this conceptual analysis there are presented both the theoretical background of competencies and a project manager's 30 professional personal and social competencies based on empirical studies.

Keywords: Project manager, personal and social competencies

INTRODUCTION

Project management is a dynamic process of leading, coordinating, planning, and controlling a diverse and complex set of processes and people in the pursuit of achieving project objectives. A project manager is the heart and soul of a project. He/she has huge responsibility about budget and schedules. Project manager has to make decisions even with incomplete data and information. Relationship with the project team must base on trust and comfort with each other. A competent project manager has capacity to impact team building, generating enthusiasm and motivation, efficient time management and accurate target setting. Improving the competitiveness of companies by investing in human resources has become increasingly important. However, the key to success is recognition all the personnel's capabilities and utilise them. Therefore personal competencies in the end define how effectively the organisation really operates. (Liikamaa et al., 2003)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Webb et al. (1999) state that there are two perspectives in job skills: technical skills and enhancing performance skills. Technical skills are acquired through education, training, or apprenticeships and related systems, methods, tools and techniques. Enhancing

performance skills are learnt through life experiences including team building, generating motivation and enthusiasm, efficient time management, accurate target setting and an understanding of influence tactics and political behaviour (Pinto et al., 1995). All these skills are essential for project managers. A project manager represents one of the purest examples of on-the-job training. "Most project managers are project managers because they have been superiors to run a project: Having been so assigned, they are often thrown into the fray to sink or swim as they are able." Those who learn quickly will most likely succeed. (Pinto et al., 1995). Hersey et al. (2000) argue that people differ not only in their ability to do, but also in their will to do, or motivation. The motivation of employees depends on the strength of their conscious or unconscious motives.

Successful project manager
Flannes et al. (2001) emphasise that a project manager has many roles, where he/she must simultaneously be the leader, manager, facilitator and mentor. In the leadership role the project manager has to have the ability to conceptualise the vision to the functional managers, team members and various stakeholders. The role as manager ensures that the project is completed on time, within the budget and at the acceptable levels of performance. As a manager he/she has to create the administrative procedures and structures to monitor the completion of work including plans, schedules and software to control tasks and costs, and administer details throughout project completion. The role as facilitator provides the necessary emotional and logistic support that the team members need to complete the project. As a facilitator the project manager must have communication abilities, abilities for resolving conflicts, the ability to actively procure necessary supplies and resources for the team, and the ability to motivate individual team members and the team as a whole. In the role as mentor the project manager assists team members with the issues of professional growth, development and direction.

Pinto et al. (1995) have analysed a great many studies on project management. On the basis of these analyses they have found certain common features in the results of these studies. First, effective project managers must be good communicators. Much of their time is spent in one form of communication or another. Second, project leaders must possess the flexibility to respond to uncertain or ambiguous situations with the minimum stress. The third conclusion made by Pinto et al. (1995) is that strong project leaders work with and through their project teams. The fourth conclusion is that good leaders are skilled at various influence tactics. Effective project leaders must be well schooled in the art of persuasion and influence. Success of a project manager is based on achievement of his/her project goals within the definite limitations in terms of time, budget and resources, completion of the project within explicit criteria, standards and specifications and understanding the change in priorities that may occur (e.g. Ljung, 1999; Lock, 1998; Pinto et al., 1995; Barkley et al., 1994).

Kets de Vires (2001) argues that leaders are supposed to have charisma, but managers rely on their hierarchical position for power and authority. Leadership is a set of characteristics

that make certain people more effective in achieving a set of goals. Most effective leaders possess clusters of competencies in three areas:

- Personal competencies, such as achievement motivation, self-confidence, energy, and personal effectiveness
- Social competencies, such as influence, political awareness, and empathy
- Cognitive competencies, such as conceptual thinking

Competencies
Competencies are useful concepts when we try to explain why some people perform better than others or when we want to improve their performance and make decisions that will enable them to accomplish their objectives (Zwell, 2000). The effectiveness of an organisation's employees determines how the organisation will perform (Kerr, 2003).

Each competence affects a person's performance, but competences form synergic groups, which in turn affect the individual's performance. (Boyatzis, 1982; Wood et al., 2000; Lock, 1998). Spencer et al. (1993) define a competence as 'an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation.' (Boyatzis, 1982) 'Underlying characteristic' means that the competence is a fairly deep and permanent part of a person's personality and can predict behaviour in a wide variety of situations and job tasks. Competencies indicate 'ways of behaving, thinking and generalising across situations, and enduring for reasonably long periods of time.' Competence characteristics can be defined as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Competence characteristics (Boyatzis, 1982)

Motives	The things a person consistently thinks about and wants, and which cause action
Traits	Physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information
Self-concept	A person's attitudes, values or self-image
Knowledge	Knowledge a person has in specific content areas
Skill	The ability to perform a certain physical or mental task

Competencies always include intent, which is the motive or trait force that causes action toward an outcome. Behaviour without intent does not define competency. Behavioural and individual competencies represent the capability that a person brings to the job situation (e.g. Boyatzis, 1982; Wood et al., 2000; Lock, 1998). Motives, traits, and self-concept competencies predict skill behaviour actions, which in turn predict job performance outcome (e.g. Kets de Vries, 2001; Spencer et al., 1993; Zwell, 2000). All these competencies are hidden and central to the personality (Spencer et al., 1993). As shown in Figure 1 motives, traits, and self-concept competencies predict skill behaviour actions,

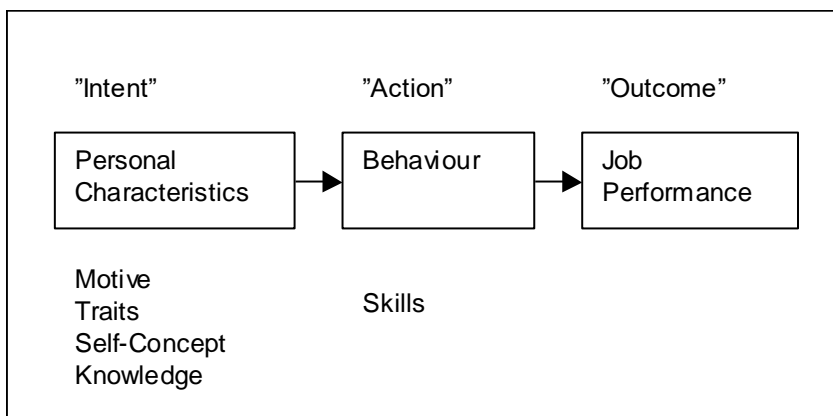which in turn predict job performance outcome (Kets de Vries, 2001; Spencer et al., 1993; Boyatzis, 1982).

Figure 1. Competence Causal Flow Model (Spencer et al., 1993)

Personal competencies are intrinsic to the individual, and reflect the traits and characteristics that are related to what individuals believe, how they think, how and what they feel, and how they learn and develop. These competencies affect people's ability to complete tasks and people's relationships with others, because they are related to their sense of self-identity (Zwell, 2000). The competencies associated with relationships are critical to individual and organizational success. The individual's competencies component reveals what a person is capable of doing and why he/she acts in a certain way. (Boyatzis, 1982)

Competencies can be taught. The improvability of competencies has important implications for organizations, and is central to decisions regarding hiring and development. (Zwell, 2000). Even core motive competencies such as achievement orientation can be modified. Knowledge and skill competences tend to be visible characteristics of people.

Emotional competencies
Emotional competencies are learned and they are based on emotional intelligence that results in excellent performance at work. The emotional intelligence determines our potential for learning the practical skills that are based on self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy, and adeptness relationships. Our emotional competencies show how much of that potential we have translated into on-the-job capabilities. (Goleman, 1998)

People have to get to know their own emotions, because a person who does not know him/herself finds him/herself in a deadlock situation. (Kets de Vries, 2001) To manage learning, emotions help people to understand how to acknowledge and deal with their feelings. Developing one's emotional intelligence is learning to understand how others feel.

Emotional intelligence skills are synergistic with cognitive ones: top performers have both. The more complex the job, the more emotional intelligence matters, if only because a deficiency in these abilities can hinder the use of whatever intellect a person may have. People need emotional competencies to reach the full potential of their talent. (Goleman, 1998)

The great divide in competencies lies between cognition and emotions. All emotional competencies involve some degree of skills in the realm of feelings. People can score well in IQ tests and other measures of cognitive ability, but in their jobs they can fail at emotional arts that make people like flight attendants so efficient. (Goleman,1998; Zwell, 2000). The divide between those competencies that are purely cognitive, and those that depend on emotional intelligence as well, reflects the parallel division in the human brain.

As work becomes more complex and collaborative, the companies where people work best together have a competitive edge. The crucial set of emotional competencies is becoming increasingly essential for excellence in every job. Emotional competencies determine how people manage themselves whereas social competencies determine how people handle relationships. (Goleman, 1998)

RESULTS
Professional organizations (e.g. PMI, 2000) and different commercial organizations aspire to identify skills, knowledge and behavioral habits, which according to them, a qualified project manager should possess. Several researchers (e.g. Thamhain et al., 1977; Posner, 1987) have endeavored to define the competencies of a project manager.

As a result of this article a project manager's 30 competencies are presented. The competencies are result of the wider study of project managers' competencies which had 50 engineers from forest industry, energy industry and offshore industry participating. The following work-role-based competencies have been customized to fit the requirements of a project manager's job (Liikamaa, 2006).

Competencies			
1. Emotional awareness	Ability to recognize, realize and specify one's feelings (Goleman 1998, 26, 54-61)	**Self-Awareness**	**P E R S O N A L C O M P E T E N C I E S**
2. Self-confidence	A strong belief in one's capability, competence and self-esteem (Goleman 1998, 26, 68-82); Boyatzis 1982, 101-105 Spencer et al. 1993, 80-83, 207-208)		
3. Self-assessment	Knowing one's limits and strengths (Goleman 1998, 26, 82-83; Spencer et al. 1993, 78-80)		
4. Trustworthiness	Behaving honestly and ethically (Goleman 1998, 26, 89-94; Zwell 2000, 40)	**Self-Regulation**	
5. Maintaining order	Concern for order, quality and accuracy (Spencer et al. 1993, 29-31)		
6. Flexibility	Ability to adapt to changes (Goleman 1998, 26, 95-104; Zwell 2000, 30-31; Spencer et al. 1993, 83-86)		
7. Innovation	Being comfortable and open with new ideas, approaches and data (Goleman 1998, 26, 95-104; Zwell 2000, 31)		
8. Responsibility	Being conscientious and responsible for one's own personal performance		
9. Seeking information	Satisfying one's curiosity and desire for knowledge (Spencer et al. 1993, 34-36, 209-210)		
10. Production efficiency	Getting work performed quickly and with a high quality (Zwell 2000, 30)		
11. Decision quality	Making decisions based on high principles, purposes and values (Zwell 2000, 42-43)		
12.Stress management	The ability to handle adverse, tiring and stressful issues and situations (Zwell 2000, 43-44)		
13. Analytical thinking	Breaking down problems into sub-problems and their systematical diagnosing by rational principles (Zwell 2000, 45; Spencer et al. 1993, 68-70, 205-206)	**Cognitive skills**	
14. Conceptual thinking	Identifying, applying and defining concepts (Zwell 2000, 45-46; Boyatzis 1982, 111-117; Spencer et al. 1993, 70-73, 210-211		
15. Language proficiency	Ability and courage to use foreign languages		
16. Achievement drive	Willingness to aim at more effective performances (Goleman 1998, 26, 113-118; Spencer et al. 1993, 25-31, 203-204)	**Motivation**	
17. Commitment	Adopting the goals of the group or organisation (Goleman 1998, 26, 118-121; Spencer et al. 1993, 86-89)		
18. Initiative	Recognizes and acts on opportunities and possesses an ability to create opportunities (Goleman 1998, 26, 122-129; Zwell 2000, 29-31; Spencer et al. 1993, 31-34, 206)		
19. Optimism	Pursuit of goals in spite of obstacles and setbacks (Goleman 1998, 26, 122-129)		

20. *Understanding others*	Perceiving, considering and understanding the feelings and viewpoints of others (Goleman 1998, 26, 138-146; Spencer et al. 1993, 37-40, 208-209)	**Empathy**	**S O C I A L C O M P E T E N C I E S**
21. *Developing other people*	Perceiving the development needs of others and reinforcing their abilities (Goleman 1998, 26, 146-150; Zwell 2000, 46-47; Spencer et al. 1993, 54-57, 206-207; Boyatzis 1982, 143-148)		
22. *Leveraging diversity*	Creating opportunities for cooperation with different kinds of people (Goleman 1998, 26, 154-159)		
23. *Organisational savvy*	Understanding and utilizing organisational dynamics in order to achieve objectives (Zwell 2000, 36-37)		
24. *Communications*	Listening openly and conveying (Goleman 1998, 26, 174-177; Zwell 2000, 38-39)	**Social skills**	
25. *Conflict management*	Arbitrating and resolving differences (Goleman 1998, 26, 178-183; Zwell 2000, 38)		
26. *Management*	Concentrating on things (Spencer et al. 1993, 73-77)		
27. *Leadership*	Concentrating on people (Goleman 1998, 26, 183-192; Spencer et al. 1993, 64-66, 210)		
28. *Relationship building*	Building, cultivating and developing useful relationships and informal networks (Goleman 1998, 26, 206-211; Zwell 2000, 37-38)		
29. *Collaboration*	Working with others towards common goals (Goleman 1998, 26, 122-129)		
30. *Team capabilities*	Creating group synergy in order to achieve collective goals (Goleman 1998, 26, 216-231; Zwell 2000, 33-34; Spencer et al. 1993, 61-64, 204-205)		

The requirements of the job can be regarded as the job's demands on the person in the context of the organization, with its physical, financial and technical resources, as well as its traditions and culture. Different competencies are not, however, totally different. Hence each of them must be described through texts or examples of behaviour. There are many competencies that are the same within several professional groups, but each of these groups also has very special characteristics that have to be determined based on the requirements of each task in an organization. (Liikamaa & Vanharanta, 2003b; Liikamaa, 2006)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
The skill that distinguishes successful project managers from those who are not so successful do not include special know-how, but consist of competencies which are not taught at all. Technical skills are acquired through education, training, or through related systems, methods and techniques. Enhancing performance skills are learned through life experiences. The success of a project depends not only on interaction and personnel

commitment but also on project managers' personal and social competencies. (Liikamaa et al., 2003)

The world and the circumstances change all the time. However, in the future more and more project managers are needed, as tasks become more project based and organisations become more flexible. That is why identification of project managers' personal and social competencies is important. An organisation which recognizes that identification and development of a project manager's competencies has a huge impact on the project success, can reduce the business risks and improve the success of the project. (Liikamaa et al., 2003) The identification of the individual's competencies leads to increase the employees' transition of experience-based knowledge, skills, commitment, motivation and productivity, and thus the enterprise's competitive advantage. (Liikamaa & Vanharanta 2003a)

Competencies can be exploited in many human resources functions like recruitment, selection, placement, compensation, performance management, succession planning, and training and development. Recruiters select the competencies necessary for jobs. Training is focused on the competencies that lead to superior performance. By comparing employees' competencies with the competency requirements of future job a successful plan can be made. (Zwell, 2000; Boyatzis, 1982; Liikamaa &Vanharanta, 2003b)

In addition to competencies subconscious factors are important because they affect a project manager's performance. Individual's subconscious factors such as motives, values and attitudes contribute to behavioral situations defined by competencies, which affect the subconscious factors as a continuous interaction. (Liikamaa, 2006).

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