

# Theoretical Approaches of Project Management

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## Abstract

Our paper aims to critically analyze the scientific literature regarding the competencies of project managers and their role in creating and coordinating an efficient team. To carry out our research, we employed a qualitative research approach based on the study of secondary sources. As a result of the literature review, we have classified and analyzed the competencies of managers that lead to successful project outcomes. Furthermore, based on the particularities and competencies of managers, we have analyzed how the relationship between the manager and the team influences project outcomes. Furthermore, based on the particularities and competencies of managers, we have analyzed how the relationship between the manager and the team influences project outcomes. This research should be considered a starting point for future research by providing insights into the skills and competencies required for effective project management. The project managers and teams can use our findings to develop and implement a strategic vision to achieve project objectives. Moreover, creative skills and the ability to motivate the entire team represent relevant elements to conduct successful projects and strengthening team cohesion. This study is of great relevance to academics and practitioners in project management, as it offers the opportunity to identify areas for improvement and implement corrective measures to enhance project success. Therefore, future research should focus on developing and transforming the manager's skills into a true leader.

## Keywords

Manager, project management, team, motivation.

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## Introduction

Project management has grown in importance over the years as organizations have recognized the need for efficient and effective management of resources to achieve their objectives (Kloppenborg et al., 2017).

However, the success of a project depends not only on technical skills and knowledge but also on the competencies of the project manager and the ability to lead and coordinate a team toward the project's objectives. Therefore, the selection and development of competent project managers and leaders have become a priority for organizations seeking to succeed in their projects (Abyad, 2019; Alsagoff and Alqarni, 2019; Henkel et al., 2019; Imam and Zaheer, 2021).

Despite the growing literature on project management, the literature on the competencies of project managers and their role in creating and coordinating an efficient team still needs to be developed (Cuellar and Paradise, 2017; Karlsen and Andersen, 2019). Moreover, the literature focuses on technical skills and knowledge rather than the competencies that relate to the manager's ability to lead and coordinate the team. Therefore, there is a need to critically analyze the literature on the competencies of project managers and their role in creating and coordinating an efficient team.

Our research objective is to analyze project managers' competencies and role in creating efficient teams, identify the competencies that lead to successful project outcomes, and provide insights for future research and development of project management skills.

## 1. Review of the scientific literature

The competencies of the project manager have been extensively discussed in the specialized literature, analyzing the relationship between leadership and project performance (Ogunnaike and Jegede, 2017; Akindayomi and Akinsanmi, 2018; Dotsey-Brown and Effah, 2018; Burlea-Schiopoiu and Ferhati, 2021), communication skills and conflict management (Cuellar and Paradice, 2017; Davis and Neider, 2017; Potocan and Karmen Pažek, 2017), situational leadership (Mihai et al., 2016; Youker, 2016; Kuhnert and Lewis, 2017; Zhang and Gao, 2017), and the role of the leader in team development (Russell and Galli, 2015; Jugdev and Cooke-Davies, 2016; Hammad and Keil, 2018). Based on studies on the impact of the project manager's competencies on the team's success, researchers have concluded that the manager and their leadership style influence performance (Hamed, 2017; Kloppenborg et al., 2017; Dwyer et al., 2019).

Project management is a process independent of factors such as the size and type of project, the type of coordinating organization, and the market sector because, due to the complexity of the objectives, the management style must be adapted accordingly. Therefore, studies on project managers and their relationship with team members will continue to generate interest from an academic, economic, and industrial standpoint. Project management carried out through the manager, is more than just a need for improvement and represents a field that aims to improve itself through its impact on project success (Radujkovic and Sjekavica, 2017, p. 613). A good leader can also be a good manager without the mirror necessarily being valid: a good manager may not possess any leadership qualities. The manager must monitor the project's economic, legislative, and operational aspects and sample the team by reducing tensions, ensuring communication in both directions and providing constructive feedback towards achieving success through proposed parameters and maximum efficiency. Pells (2018) argues that project managers must possess both leadership skills and management competencies, which are complementary and essential for successfully managing projects. Moreover, researchers in the field generally accept that the ideal leadership model for a project team is the manager-leader (Grynchenko et al., 2018; Broadly, 2020).

A manager needs to be a leader in strategic vision and advanced creative abilities, from the team formation stage to completing project tasks (Grynchenko et al., 2018). The Project Management Institute in the PMBOK Guide (PMI, 2021, p. 70) argues that the manager keeps team members focused on carrying out activities according to plan through teamwork within the project and joint effort. A successful manager aims to coordinate project activities in such a way as to effectively manage the team's motivation level and maintain the concentration of team members at high levels when challenges, delays, or cost changes arise in the project.

## 2. Research methodology

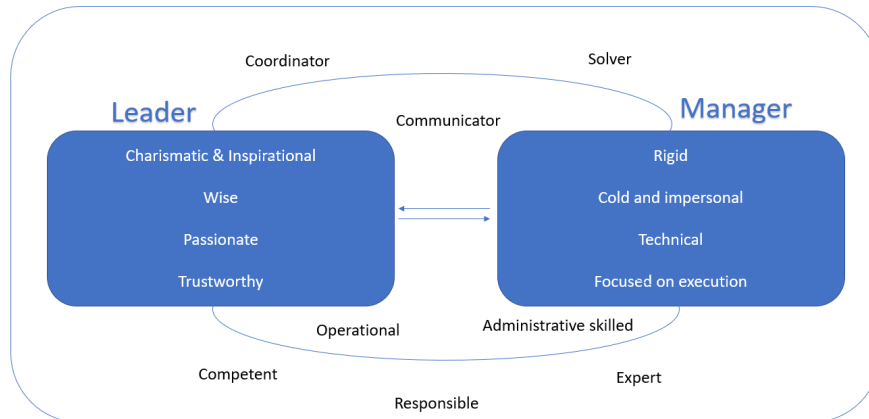
Our research methodology consists of comparative and descriptive analysis. Information was collected and critically analyzed from the scientific literature using various databases and public sources. We started by identifying and analyzing studies on the manager's competencies required for efficient project management and a successful outcome. The data utilized in this study is a comprehensive review of existing research, which allows us to identify managers' particularities and their relationships with the team.

## 3. Results and discussion

Project management is defined by the visions attributed to the project (Abyad, 2019, p. 8), and the project manager becomes the tool for achieving these visions. Opran (2013, p. 82) develops the idea that the manager's goal is to achieve project performance objectives and plans by using the capacity to adapt to available human, material, and intellectual resources. Since activities do not always follow the initial plan, a manager must apply risk management and thus pay close attention to the project's specifications, limitations, and specific characteristics (Lock, 2010, p. 99). Therefore, to minimize or eliminate the impact of an unforeseen event, the project manager must be able to redirect and replan activities and processes and estimate in detail all possible influencing factors (PMI, 2019, p. 16).

We can affirm that the project manager carries out complex and continuous work from the idea stage of the project until its completion. Therefore, the project manager ensures an exemplary implementation of the project, from the activity plan, budget, and initial specifications to achieving the objectives and reaching the proposed goal.

Shirley (2020, p. 153) argues that the differences between leadership and management have always been a topic of debate. For this study, an effort of literary research on the characteristics and leadership competencies of a project manager will be presented below. Recently, there has been an increasing differentiation between a manager and a leader, as highlighted in Figure no. 1 (Broadly, 2020, p. 11; Grynchenko et al., 2018, p. 16).



**Figure no. 1. Manager and Leader**

*Source: Grynchenko et al., 2018, p.16 & Broadly, 2020, p.1*

The project manager should be a charismatic, wise, trustworthy, and passionate person who attracts other participants .in achieve common goals (Broadly, 2020, p.1). Furthermore, the manager evaluates and balances the team's concentration level and the progress of established objectives quantitatively balances workloads and evaluates the motivation of team members in order to optimize project value and maintain their concentration. According to Kloppenborg et al. (2017, p.5), in recent years, society has concluded that communication and leadership play a vital role in project success. The competencies of managers represent a subject actively researched in terms of general competencies of different types of projects as well as the specific ones related to the exact typology of the projects (Moradi, et al., 2020).

The project manager must possess cross-functional and practical skills, often having more responsibilities than authority, and the managerial skills trio is composed of technical, behavioral, and strategic business management skills (Kloppenborg et al., 2017, pp. 6-7). To demonstrate efficiency, a manager holds the minimum competencies necessary to achieve the project. These refer to skills such as communication, team building, and organization, sensitivity to multicultural preferences, and the ability to understand the meaning of emotions and how they influence personality types or are influenced by leadership styles, negotiations, and goal-setting (Watt, 2014, p. 75).

The skills of a manager must be congruent with their personality so that the effectiveness of project leadership can be generated. In this sense, Dwyer et al. (2019, p. 15) found that among the critical factors that determine project success are the manager's competencies. Likewise, Dulewicz and Higgs (2003, pp.8-9) have identified three dimensions of leadership and 15 general competencies that are relevant to project management, as follows:

- *Managerial (MQ):*

- Resource management – plans ahead, efficiently organizes and coordinates resources, monitors and provides feedback to the team, so that project objectives become action plans;
- Development – believes in the potential of others and invests in coaching sessions and constructive feedback for their development, identifies new tasks, and encourages team members to develop their skills;
- Empowerment – encourages the team to become autonomous and creates the right environment for thinking in perspective, critical thinking, and problem-solving;
- Engaging communication – involves and encourages stakeholders in the communication process enthusiastically, communicates objectives and visions clearly, adapting the communication style depending on the audience (public or project personnel);

- High achievement – determined to achieve objectives, willing to make calculated but high-risk decisions that bring significantly more significant benefits.

● *Intellectual (IQ):*

- Critical analysis and judgment – present critical thinking, analyzing facts, and making correct judgments and decisions based on analysis hypotheses of advantages and disadvantages of proposed situations;

- Vision and imagination – have a clear vision of the priorities and future direction of the organization, is innovative and imaginative in their own and the team's work;

- Strategic perspective – sensitive to the broader implications of emerging issues, needs, relationships with stakeholders, and the implications of decisions taken, thereby predicting threats and opportunities.

● *Emotional (EQ):*

- Self-awareness – aware of their feelings, capable of recognizing and controlling emotions experienced so that the professional impact is kept under control;

- Sensitivity – aware of the expectations and perceptions of others, adapts decisions and solutions according to these, is open to proposals, and actively listens, thus achieving the commitment of others in activities;

- Motivation - achieves precise results through dynamism, energy, and the ability to balance and pursue short- and long-term objectives regardless of challenges and rejections;

- Emotional resilience - maintains focus under pressure and in the face of personal challenges, adapting behaviorally to new situations and individuals involved;

- Influence - convinces those involved to change their opinions based on recognition of their position and the need to listen to a new perspective;

- Intuitiveness - uses rational and intuitive perceptions to adopt and implement clear decisions even when information received is incomplete;

- Conscience - demonstrates a commitment to adopting ethical decisions, facing challenges, and implementing what is decided verbally in practice.

These competencies are frequently used in research in the field. For example, Podgórska and Pichlak (2019, pp. 869-887) used these competencies (Dulewicz and Higgs, 2003) to study the leadership competencies of project managers, as well as the impact of these competencies on project success and arrived at the following conclusions:

● Leadership competencies, such as communication skills, team management, and technical skills, are essential for project success;

● Project managers with more experience and higher levels of education tend to have stronger leadership competencies, and those who have good communication skills and can effectively manage risks tend to have more success in project implementation;

● Developing leadership competencies can be beneficial for project success and career development in project management.

The management style is reflected in the team's work and project activities. Therefore, the project manager's soft competencies, communication skills, and self-education skills are considered very important for the final result by Podgórska and Pichlak (2019). Turner (2019) also argues that in project management, in addition to having an overall vision, a successful project manager must also exercise leadership skills such as communicating, inspiring, and motivating team members.

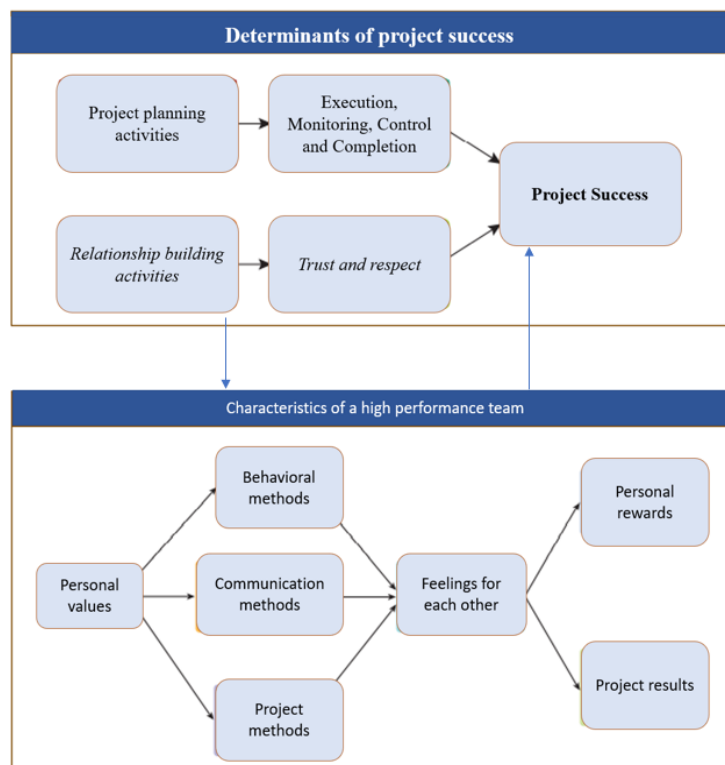
Müller and Turner (2010) use Dulewicz and Higgs' (2003) set of competencies to analyze the leadership competencies of successful managers, depending on the particularities of the project type. This list of competencies was supplemented with specific domain and technology knowledge, as well as practical experience in project management. According to their study (Müller and Turner, 2010, p. 446), leadership skills are one of the essential points of a project manager. Thus, developing leadership skills and technical and managerial competencies must be a vital component of the training and development of project managers. Additionally, Burlea-Schiopoiu and Lefter (2011) have concluded that in Romania, the most common leadership practices are paternalistic and charismatic leadership. They recommend developing emotional intelligence, encouraging innovation and creativity, and promoting a more participative leadership style to improve the leadership process. The practiced leadership style may vary and prove to be

more effective depending on external and internal elements of influence on a project, such as culture, geographic area, or the preferred style of the project team leader.

The different approaches to leadership (i.e., task-oriented or relationship-oriented) can influence the project's success and the team members' satisfaction. However, a situational leadership approach instead of a one-size-fits-all leadership style presents increased chances of completing projects (Henkel et al., 2019, p.9). Although all skills are essential, a good project manager must combine leadership and management skills to successfully lead the team and achieve the proposed objectives (Müller et al., 2014). Therefore, it cannot be claimed that there is a unique management style or one that works regardless of the situation. Instead, efficient project management is reflected in the leader's ability to realistically assess the situation and cope with challenges that may arise during the project's implementation.

Project teams are a group of stakeholders involving other stakeholders to understand, consider, communicate, and respond to the interests, needs, and responses of projects (PMI, 2021, p. 33). Within projects, the team acts as a complex social system in which individuals with high professional competence usually need to fulfill a specific set of interrelated functions. Although more challenging, a successful project team requires close cooperation. This cooperative action requires allocating time to express ideas, debate them, and arrive at decisions and strong leadership to coordinate the group (Harned, 2017, p. 121). Project managers who adopt a leadership approach can be advantageous in creating a balance between the needs of the team and those of the project (Alsagoff and Alqarni, 2019; Burlea-Schiopoiu, 2009).

Effective project management requires a set of personal and professional competencies designed to manage both the team and its interpersonal dynamics, as well as the internal and external challenges of the project. Creating a project team, as well as coordinating the objectives and interests of its members, are much hindered by the psychological traits (i.e., distinct interests, ambitions, aspirations, values, and ideals) of each member of the team (Grynchenko et al., 2018, p. 14). Since project performance can be influenced by the characteristics of the team (Figure no. 2), it is essential to monitor them both in the selection stage and throughout the implementation stages (Kloppenborg et al., 2017, pp. 145-146).



**Figure no. 2. Determinants of success-team characteristics**

*Source: Kloppenborg et al. (2017, p.102; p.145)*

Since project performance can be influenced by the characteristics of the team (Figure no. 2), it is essential to monitor them both in the selection stage and throughout the implementation stages (Kloppenborg et al., 2017, pp. 145-146).

Kloppenborg (2017, p.107) introduces norms of human management that influence project success, including collaboration, intercommunication, and team relationship. Imam and Zaheer (2021, pp.2-3) suggest that knowledge exchange, cohesion, and trust within the team are critical factors that must be addressed in project management.

Rarely does a project unfold as anticipated, and new opportunities to generate value arise when unforeseen elements arise (PMI, 2021, pp.55-56). As a result, the ability to motivate others is a skill that the project manager must possess or acquire. The project manager manages communication, motivates the team, identifies and evaluates warning signals to ensure they do not become real problems, and encourages a supportive environment (Harned, 2017, p.23, Podgórska and Pichlak, 2019, p.882).

Managers, in a positive sense, are considered to be master manipulators because it is vital for a manager to accurately establish the position in Maslow's hierarchy that a team member falls under in order to manipulate motivational factors based on the particularities of each team member (Shirley, 2020, pp. 141-149). The management style has a strong influence on the team and the project. For example, transformational and transactional management styles help create and maintain project team cohesion, encourage collaboration and innovation, and evaluate and improve individual performance. Transformational managers encourage team members to exceed their limits and become innovators, while transactional managers focus on managing and developing individual performance. Both approaches can increase team cohesion and project performance by increasing employee engagement and encouraging collaboration. However, the interaction between the manager and team members can negatively affect team cohesion, such as the autocratic leadership style, which is more significant for virtual teams than traditional teams (Burlea-Schiopoiu, 2007; Wang et al., 2018).

Developing team cohesion is essential for the performance of team members and the overall project performance. Podgórska and Pichlak (2019, p.882) emphasize the importance of personnel in achieving a successful project, considering that a strong and well-managed team is essential for achieving goals, and managers should focus on the effective development and management of their team. Thus, the manager facilitates the team's accommodation with the tasks at hand and the other members, thereby increasing team cohesion and the chances of project success.

## Conclusions

Lately, researchers are directing their efforts toward studying the relationships between human resources because they are a factor that influences the project's outcome.

There are situations where project results cannot be successfully achieved, but the project manager is the one who can change this outcome. Therefore, this paper emphasizes the importance of considering technical competencies, efficiency, professional expertise, and soft skills in choosing a project manager. Although there are various management styles in the literature, none of them is defined as the ideal style that works regardless of the type of project. Our research has found that while a leader's ability to assess the situation and apply relevant skills is crucial, leadership is situational. The roles of manager and leader have become laborious processes composed of different qualitative actions and activities, two different skills or personalities with intermittent applicability.

Our work concludes that although both managerial and leadership skills are crucial for project management, a qualified project leader should be able to combine both skill sets with leading the project team and achieving the project objective effectively (Müller et al., 2014).

Our conclusion shows that when the project manager has leadership skills, the chances of completing a project are greatly improved. Moreover, it is known that both the technical skills and the expertise in the field of the leader should be addressed. However, the skills of the project team, leadership, cohesion, and the interaction between these elements lead the project to a successful conclusion under normal and abnormal conditions. Therefore, it is essential to invest in skills training at both the project management level and the team level.

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