PROJECT MANAGER TYPE AND PROJECT SUCCESS

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Purpose: In the literature relatively little attention is paid to the project manager's background, i.e., to the importance of whether the project manager is a line manager, a line employee of the organisation in question who is no one's supervisor or whether the project manager is involved solely in project management. The purpose of this paper is to answer the question of how the type of project manager is related to project success.

Design/methodology/approach: The research hypothesis was formulated and the results of the empirical studies were presented. The empirical verification of the research hypothesis was accomplished through survey research in Europe and USA.

Findings: Based on the empirical data obtained, it was concluded that in terms of all three project parameters (scope, time and cost), the project manager, who is also a line manager, was the most successful. The empirical research indicated a possible relationship between project manager type and project success.

Research limitations/implications: In the analysis, it should be borne in mind that there are other several internal and external factors responsible for potential problems in meeting the project scope, schedule and budget.

Practical implications: Project management by line managers can be a sound basis for the interaction of processes and projects, manifesting itself, for example, in the transfer of knowledge between processes and projects during the activity of solving problems, especially those lying at the interface of one type of activity and another.

Originality/value: The results obtained should draw attention to the need to complement previous research characterising the ideal or effective project manager with a new variable, the type of project manager.

Keywords: project management, project team, organizational structure, power of project manager.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

In the literature, a great deal of attention has been paid to the person of the project manager. This is because the project manager is a key figure in the project management process as he/she is responsible for both the success and failure of the project. It is the project manager who, in order to be successful, must first and foremost select the appropriate members for the team and manage them effectively. As indicated in the literature (Spałek, 2004), significant success factors in project management include establishing a project manager and his/her high authority (93% and 85% impact on success, respectively). Thus, many studies focus on defining the requirements that characterise an ideal or effective project manager (e.g. Musioł-Urbańczyk, 2010; Marek-Kołodziej, Łapuńka, Jagoda-Sobalak, 2018; Wachowiak, Gregorczyk 2018). However, when there is a strong interest in the competences of project team leaders, relatively little attention is paid to the project manager's background, i.e., to the importance of whether the project manager is a line manager, a line employee of the organisation in question who is no one's supervisor or whether the project manager is involved solely in project management (i.e., he/she is not a line employee of the organisation or comes from outside the organisation). While in the first two cases, employees of a given organisation are project managers on an ad hoc basis (performing such a function only in the projects implemented in the organisation where they hold specific positions which differ in their names; a good case in point is a marketing specialist leading the design of a new advertising campaign), in the third case, the project manager is permanent. In other words, the project manager holds such a position in the organisation (e.g., IT project manager) or performs such a profession and works simultaneously even for several companies. Indeed, as Piwowar-Sulej (2013) notes, the criteria for selecting a project manager changed at different stages of project management. While, initially, it was his/her expertise that counted, later it was whether he/she belonged to the management team (e.g. he/she was a functional manager), today the project manager functions in the organisation as an integrator of resources, knowledge and processes on an equal footing with other line managers. As can be seen, in each of these cases, he/she will not only have different empowerment in the organisation and the associated authority but he/she will also be involved to a different degree in carrying out its recurring activities that are at odds with the unique nature of the projects. In this context, it is essential to ask whether the project manager's background is associated with project success. This question is vital because while, for example, a line manager's authority and experience should be conducive to, for instance, acquiring resources for a project, his/her activities as a project manager will require an entirely different mindset and behaviour from the one he/she is used to in his/her line position. Conversely, while a "permanent" (not *ad hoc*) project manager will focus exclusively on the work of the project team, he/she may often be forced, in the struggle for the necessary resources, to confront line managers concerned about the smooth functioning of their recurring organisational processes.

As can be seen, these different types of project managers may be an additional, hitherto under-researched, factor in project management success. Therefore, this research gap provides the rationale for undertaking the study that is the subject of this paper.

To sum up, in the context of the above discussion, the purpose of this paper is to answer the question of how the type of project manager is related to project success. The three above-mentioned cases are considered:

1. the project manager leads only the project team and is not a line employee of the organisation or comes from outside the organisation,
2. the project manager is also the line manager,
3. the project manager is a line employee without a management position.

Thus, in the first step, the research hypothesis will be formulated. Secondly, the results of the empirical studies will be presented and, finally, conclusions will be formulated.

2. Project manager type and project success – a research hypothesis

Project management is defined in Project Management Institute (2013) as a discipline concerned with the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to meet project requirements, that is, the expectations and needs of project principals. It also lists the work that the project team does during the various phases of the project life cycle, i.e., during the phases of initiating, planning, executing, monitoring, controlling and closing the project. What is also pointed out is that the simultaneous management of the scope, time, cost, risk and quality of the project are interdependent factors, which means that a change in one of them conditions a change in the others. In addition, it is assumed that contact will be established with the stakeholders of the project, which will entail getting to know their expectations and needs connected with the project. This is combined with making an attempt to meet and satisfy each group as much as possible. Therefore, meeting and identifying project requirements are critical to the success of a project.

According to Trocki (2009), the nature of project management creates a new world of work. It implies several changes in organisations that are usually engaged in conducting recurring activities (Table 1). Since the circumstances of project management differ essentially from the circumstances of managing the day-to-day recurring operations of an institution, what changes is the tasks and requirements for employees, including, as might be assumed, the project manager, the relationships between superiors and subordinates, their roles, the ways they are evaluated and compensated as well as the mindsets that underlie all activities.

In the case of any type of project manager, his/her authority by law, and thus the ability to direct the work of the project team, will be determined both by the organisational by-laws and, in each case, by the sponsor of a particular project (cf., e.g. Nicholas, Steyn, 2012; Project

Management Institute, 2013; Prosci, 2018). The rights of the project manager may thus relate primarily to:

- having the project budget at his/her disposal, which means having the possibility to incur expenses during the project implementation within the budget and reserve (e.g. estimate reserve) allocated to the project,
- possessing a schedule reserve; it refers to the time of project implementation,
- having a budget reserve at his/her disposal, which means that the project manager does not have to request a budget change from the project sponsor when necessary,
- making budget updates and implementing corrective and/or remedial actions (once the sponsor determines the timeframe and financial threshold),
- having other resources at his/her disposal; apart from people, money and time available for the project, this includes tools, machines, facilities (after determining which resources are involved and agreeing on access to resources with their administrators),
- having the decision-making rights concerning scope management; the project manager can make scope changes to the extent explicitly determined by the sponsor,
- selecting the project team and genuinely having people at his/her disposal (e.g. in confrontation with line managers) within the established workload of the team members in the project.

Table 1.
Comparison of recurring activity management and project management

Management field / Criteria	Recurring activity management	Project management
Tasks	recurring	non-recurring
Organisational structure	permanent	impermanent, time-limited
Execution time	short	long
Expenditures, costs	small, medium	large, very large
Funding	entity funding	subject funding
Risks	average	high
Expertise	average	high
Innovation	insignificant	significant
Changes	evolutionary	radical
Standardisation	high	low

Source: the author's study on the basis of (Trocki, 2009).

Thus, it can be assumed that any project manager who is entitled to make decisions regarding all of the above aspects will have much power and will be able to significantly influence the project team regardless of whether he/she is the first, second or third type of project manager.

Likewise, the authority of each type of project manager discussed above is also dependent on the support he/she obtains for the project. Involving key stakeholders in the project definition process and getting them to agree on all aspects of the project not only makes them feel co-responsible for the project but they also strengthen the project manager's position in the

organisation. Thus, he/she is not left alone – he/she can count on the support and real help, and his/her authority in the eyes of employees increases (Prosci, 2018).

However, the assumptions outlined above about how the project manager functions must be verified by the context created by the organisation where the project is implemented (e.g. Świętoniowska, 2015). Thus, in the case of the project manager who directs only the work of the project team and is not a line employee of the organisation or comes from outside the organisation, it should be noted that although he/she is responsible for the success of the project, he/she does not have direct authority over the resources (people, money, infrastructure) necessary for the proper performance of tasks. Thus, solving the slightest problem often requires the involvement of the sponsor. Whether the project manager has much or little authority is especially apparent when he/she shares responsibility for project team members with the line managers to whom they report on a daily basis. A line manager is usually closer to the employee than an "interim" project manager appointed to a single project. Good cooperation between the line and the project, and consequently the team's involvement in the project, depends mainly on the project manager's agreement with the line manager on the terms and conditions of his/her people's participation in the project. If this understanding is lacking, problems will likely arise at every step due to people's fears, frustrations and uncertainty about the future.

When indicating the project manager's authority, we should also remember the frequent crossing and overlapping of hierarchical ties. As Lichtarski (2011) rightly writes, if, for example, the manager of a project team is an employee of a given department, and this team includes people occupying positions higher up in the hierarchy, perhaps of his/her direct supervisor, there is a situation of mutual linking of two units by hierarchical relations of the opposite direction (or turn). In this case, sustained hierarchical dependence will significantly weaken or nullify task dependence. Although the team leader is entitled to give instructions in the project area and enforce their implementation, he/she will not exercise this right because the team member reporting to him/her is also his/her superior in the home unit. Therefore, this points to the need to view the project manager's authority in a broader context – beyond the project team. However, this does not change the original premise that the project manager with more authority also can effectively manage the project regardless of what type of manager he/she is. Conversely, the project manager who does not have this authority (e.g. even as a line manager) will not be able to influence the project team effectively and will struggle to achieve project goals. As might be assumed, privileged in this situation, however, will be the project manager who is also a line manager. This indicates that while the project manager who solely directs the work of the project team may be very well-equipped thematically to direct the project, these power issues within the organisation may make it very difficult for him/her to execute the project with the project team entrusted to him/her.

In the context of the above discussion, it is important to note the second type of project manager who is also a line manager. Combining recurring work with unique projects is not an isolated phenomenon. This may be due to the fact that, firstly, the growing importance of changes and projects in the organisation's activities – referred to as *projectification* – has also forced line managers to acquire project management skills (cf. e.g. Brzezińska (2016) or Christensen, Innstrand, Saksvik (2019)). Thus, project management is apparently no longer the domain of specialised project managers only. Secondly, projects can be characterised by different intensity of project features. If they are, for example, not very innovative, simple, their deadline is not tight and the level of technology is low, they can be managed using knowledge, skills and tools also used in the process-related part of the organisation performing recurring activities (Shenhar, Dvir, 2008). This will naturally privilege line managers. What can serve as an example here is the form of project organisation in a line structure appropriate for small projects with a scope that fits within a single organisational unit. The project team comprises the employees of only one organisational unit and the project manager is their existing supervisor (Trocki, 2009). Thirdly, a clear separation of the roles of project manager and line manager is more likely to be afforded by larger organisations. In small organisations, the roles of line manager and project manager often overlap. Fourthly, as Nowosielski (2018) rightly notes, the functioning of projects and processes side by side does not need to and may not be viewed in isolation. This means that project management by line managers can be a sound basis for the interaction of processes and projects, manifesting itself, for example, in the transfer of knowledge between processes and projects during the activity of solving problems, especially those lying at the interface of one type of activity and another. Finally, as the author of this paper's research has shown, the project team is also often characterised by a specific organisational subculture that is reinforcing in contrast to organisational culture (Kamiński, 2021). This means that the project team's norms and values differ from those adopted by the organisation; however, they do not challenge them. Thus, in a project team, the autonomy of employees is higher, the degree of formalisation of activities is lower, the superior's support of subordinates is stronger, people identify more strongly with the project team than with the organisation, the reward for achieved results is weaker than in the rest of the organisation, conflicts between employees or teams are more accepted and risk is more accepted. Functioning in such a subculture containing elements of organisational culture will, as might be suspected, be easier for someone who is familiar with both aspects of organisational functioning –the execution of both recurring processes and unique projects.

The arguments in favour of the special role of a line manager who also serves as a project manager are further strengthened by his/her stronger position in the organisation in relation to line managers, from whom he/she must obtain the resources necessary for project implementation. He/she also has a greater ability to influence project team members, which comes from a better knowledge of the participants in an organisation and how they respond to

different leadership styles. While, according to Frame (2001), an experienced project manager will apply a laissez-faire style to his/her closest colleagues in the creative planning phase and a democratic approach in the more routine implementation phase before deciding on the choice of the leadership style, he/she should take into account the other "dimensions" of the situation, i.e., the characteristics of the team members, the current phase of the team's development, the time remaining to complete the task and the nature of the task itself, etc. Ultimately, the line manager is likely to take longer to build his/her personal authority among the organisation's employees who may become members of the project team and is more familiar with the characteristics of the organisation's operations than a project manager coming from outside the organisation. This strong embedding in the organisation in which the project takes place and the authority that the line manager wields lead to the belief that, in many ways, the line manager can lead the project team more effectively and efficiently than a project manager who only leads the project team and who is not a line employee of the organisation or who comes from outside the organisation.

Ultimately, in the case of the third type of project manager, the line manager, who already has experience in managing his/her subordinates and his/her organisational unit, can use this experience when managing the project team. This, of course, puts him/her in a position that is an advantage over the line employee, for whom project management may be just the first place where he/she will learn what management is all about and how to act as a project manager. Project execution under the guidance of a project manager who is also a line manager should therefore run more smoothly because of his/her ability to use at least basic management tools. In contrast, a project manager who is a line employee without a management position, lacks the authority that comes from a traditional hierarchy, has his/her own line supervisor and is often not delegated to the project for a full-time job, will have to reconcile many conflicting demands without having a strong position in the organisation. Therefore, it might be anticipated that this will hinder the effective and efficient leadership of the project team and reduce the chances of project success.

In summary, the requirements for a project manager are fundamentally different from those of a line manager. In addition to a number of other competences, to meet these requirements, the project manager must have sufficient authority, which depends largely on the type of project manager. Thus, firstly, the line manager has an established position in the organisation and already accumulated management experience, which should be conducive to the success of the project. Secondly, while a project manager who is solely in charge of the project team and is not associated with a line in the organisation is fully capable of focusing on project management tasks and specialises in this area, he/she has less authority in the organisation compared to a line manager. As might be suspected, it will be more difficult for him/her to achieve the goals of the project successfully. Ultimately, a project manager who is a line employee without a managerial position will be the least likely to succeed in a project. While a person delegated to manage a project may more or less (e.g. when working on a given project takes up 100% of

his/her working time) focus on completing project tasks, it will be difficult for him/her to successfully manage a project from the standpoint of the authority held in the organisation and due to a possible lack of management experience. As might be thought, the functioning of the three types of project managers discussed above will translate into the probability of project success, as shown in Figure 1.

	Type of project manager		
	The project manager is the line employee who does not occupy a managerial position on the line in the organisation	The project manager leads only the project team and is not a line employee of the organisation or comes from outside the organisation,	The project manager is also the line manager,
Project success	Less likelihood of project success	Greater likelihood of project success	

Figure 1. Type of project manager and project success. Source: the author's study.

Thus, on this basis, the following research hypothesis can be formulated:

Hypothesis: Projects managed by project managers who, as line employees, are not line managers are less likely to be successful than projects managed by line managers or project managers who only manage the project team and are not line employees of the organisation or come from outside the organisation. Conversely, projects managed by line managers are more likely to be successful than projects managed by managers who manage only the work of the project team and are not line employees of the organisation or come from outside the organisation or are line employees without managerial positions.

3. Research method

The empirical verification of the research hypothesis was accomplished through survey research. In the case of the research object, it was considered that the study could include any organisation whose core business is recurring in nature and which has project teams using classical project management methodologies (e.g. PRINCE2, PMI, IPMA). What was thought as the main reason for choosing the traditional approach to project management was the clearly defined project objectives, a well-defined organisational structure or the restrictiveness of management in terms of how key project processes are carried out (cf. e.g. Wyrozębski, 2007; Kopczyński, 2014). Therefore, the questionnaire was addressed to project managers of different organisations (by industry, size and form of ownership). However, only the data coming from the questionnaires meeting the above-mentioned limitations were used to verify the hypothesis. The objects of the research were organisations operating in Europe and the USA. The questionnaire addressed to project managers in Poland was written in Polish whereas the questionnaire directed to other project managers in Europe was in English. Thus, the study

conducted *via* LinkedIn, involved mainly project managers from Poland, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and France. In the case of the USA, surveys were conducted through SurveyMonkey, a company that professionally carries out enterprise surveys. The survey requirements were the same as in Europe, both in terms of organisation and respondent characteristics. The study was conducted between 2019 and 2020 and the results were obtained from 106 project managers operating in Europe and 281 project managers from the USA. A total of 387 surveys were obtained from Europe and the United States.

Survey respondents were asked to select one completed project they managed, participated in or knew very well. In the survey, they were asked to answer questions such as what type of project manager was in the project in question and whether the project was successful. It is assumed that a successful project should be completed within the planned time, fit into the assumed budget and the actions taken should lead to the achievement of the defined objectives (the effectiveness of the project is expressed by the degree of fulfilling all the assumptions that are important from the point of view of the customer) (Spałek, 2004). While, in project management methodologies, the success of a project is associated primarily with the degree to which the expectations of stakeholders (including mainly the project principal) are met, followed by the scope, cost and timing of the project (Bukłaha, 2012), meeting stakeholders' expectations was not considered because it would involve much subjectivity and could be a source of much misunderstanding. In measuring the success of the project, it was also assumed that future potential benefits related to project execution, organisation's goals or any other factors would not be taken into consideration. The project was treated as a separate endeavour, the success of which meant that the initial objectives were met.

How often the project scope, budget, and schedule were achieved in conjunction with the type of project manager is shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Achieving the project scope, budget and schedule vs the type of project manager

Project scope			
	The project manager was a line employee who did not hold a line managerial position within the organisation.	The project manager was also the line manager.	The project manager managed only the project team and was not a line employee of the organisation or came from outside the organisation.
Number of projects	n = 102	n = 132	n = 141
Most or all of the defined components of the project scope were achieved.	81.9%	90.9%	84.6%
Project budget			
Project execution was within budget or project costs were lower than anticipated.	62.8%	66.9%	66.4%

Cont. table 2

Project schedule		
Project implementation was on schedule or project time was shorter than anticipated.	53.3	57.1%	51.0%

Source: The author's study.

Based on the empirical data obtained, it can be concluded that in terms of all three project parameters (scope, time and cost), the project manager, who is also a line manager, was the most successful. In contrast, the project manager who managed only the project team was better than the project manager who was a line employee in terms of project scope and budget and worse than him/her only in terms of completion date. Thus, the results obtained allow accepting the research hypothesis and seem to draw attention to the relationship between the type of project manager and the success of the project.

Thus, in the case of the project manager dedicated solely to project management, his/her knowledge of project management and of how to focus on a specific project does not seem to compensate for the lack of authority and influence in the organisation. First, this is due to his/her lack of a strong formal embedding in the process part of the organisation, which limits his/her ability to influence the project team. This is especially likely when employees in the project team are also line employees and must not only consider the process nature of their organisation but also respect the instructions of their line supervisors. When confronted with these line supervisors, the project manager will have less authority because the project team work is transient in nature and the employee will find his/her line position with which he/she is permanently attached more important. Second, the project manager dedicated solely to project management will have low authority among the rest of the "non-project" organisation, which may hinder his/her ability to deliver the project when, for example, he/she is struggling to secure the resources necessary to complete the project. Uncertainty about the successful project delivery can further undermine people's willingness to engage in project work within a given team.

In contrast, in the case of the project manager who is simultaneously embedded in the line structure, his/her authority is based not only on the authority he/she has been given to implement the project but also on the potential power he/she enjoys in the line structure. Thus, he/she is not a "temporary" figure to the project team members; he/she can often be their line supervisor and is able to seek the resources necessary to complete the project effectively. As a result, he/she has a greater impact on his/her subordinates than a project manager dedicated solely to project management. Furthermore, by increasing the chances of project success, he/she also makes people more involved in the team.

Finally, it is essential to note that, as predicted, project managers who were regular line employees were the least likely to meet the project scope and budget. This may be confirmed by their lack of (project) management experience, their inability to focus entirely on the project at hand as well as their relatively low authority in the organisation, which prevents them from, for instance, obtaining resources for the project effectively.

4. Concluding remarks

The empirical research indicates a possible relationship between project manager type and project success. In the analysis, it should be borne in mind that there are several internal and external factors responsible for potential problems in meeting the project scope, schedule and budget. Thus, some of those problems may be related, for example, to the fact that the workload for a task may be poorly estimated, some expenses were not included in the original scope of work and budget or there are work and tasks performed by the team that are outside of the scope approved in the project definition. External factors can include, among others, a lack of employees in the labour market or delays on the part of external suppliers. Therefore, the results obtained should draw attention to the need to complement previous research characterising the ideal or effective project manager with a new variable, the type of project manager.

Additionally, what would also need to be analysed is how the type of project manager may correlate with project success, depending on the project maturity of the organisation. A fully project-mature organisation is characterised, among other things, by a defined division of the roles of individual people in the project. In such an organisation, the person of the project manager enjoys the recognition and support of other managers.

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