

SOFT SKILLS OF A MANAGER IN LEADING PROJECT TEAMS

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Purpose: Within the scope of management and leadership processes, the leader of a group is responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of each endeavor (project/process) according to the defined criteria of success or failure. This article discusses the issues related to developing situational awareness among team members and the possibilities of motivating and communicating within a team using appropriate management competencies and techniques employed by individuals managing specific processes or projects. The essence of projects and processes, as well as the impact of soft skills on the effectiveness of such endeavors, are presented. Special emphasis is placed on communication techniques as fundamental tools for team leadership and creating a constructive atmosphere for achieving success.

Design/methodology/approach: The article has been developed based on observations, analysis, and experiences gained during the implementation of research and development projects. The presented conclusions and topics are supported by scientific literature.

Findings: The analysis and conclusions clearly indicate that actively improving soft skills and using a variety of communication techniques significantly improves the quality of organization, interaction and, above all, leadership of the selected project group.

Practical implications: Expanding one's skills in the area of soft skills directly enhances the effectiveness of teams managed by leaders. A well-functioning organization will achieve its goals more quickly and efficiently.

Social implications: Learning about, realizing the role of, and improving soft skills and communication techniques will significantly improve the understanding of the messages conveyed in society and influence empathetic relationship building.

Originality/value: The recipients of the paper should be primarily those in managerial, command and leadership roles in both technical project groups and any organization where effective management of personnel resources is required. The novelty of the work is primarily the presentation of the impact of soft skills on the achievement of organizational goals framed in the context of the project life cycle and the conditions of the management process.

Keywords: process and project management, leadership, communication, soft skills, situational awareness.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary, dynamic, and stimulus business environment, effective project management serves as a pivotal element for achieving organizational success. Both design and production-service processes, including leadership, are incessantly confronted with diverse challenges, necessitating managers (commanders) to concurrently consider technical and social aspects of work within executive teams. The environment in which an executive team leader operates is influenced by external factors independent of the manager's actions and internal factors, over which the managerial individual possesses genuine control if equipped with the requisite competencies and awareness to effectively utilize them. Within such a context, an important area is the comprehensive preparation of managers, both in the substantive area of the project to be carried out, as well as the possession of appropriate communication techniques and tools.

The tools mentioned, although they may initially appear as natural, innate abilities, when appropriately and consciously refined, can create an effective team management tool by fostering the ability to perceive and understand situations and project success. Consequently, skillfully conducted conversations, as the fundamental form of team communication, enhance the informational and decision-making process carried out by the manager at every stage of the management cycle. Supported by an appropriate set of informational and persuasive techniques, along with a solid and developed repertoire of soft skills, it increases the leader's chances of understanding team members (their needs and executive capabilities) and enables the establishment of relationships based on mutual respect and empathy.

The article presents the essence of a project and process as the domain in which a team leader operates. An attempt has been made to utilize a universal approach to project and process using the "project triangle" and the UMP (Universal Process Model) as substantive tools indicating important attributes in team management. Against the backdrop of these models, the full project/process management cycle is described, emphasizing relevant competencies at each stage of project implementation. Soft skills are described as a collection of interpersonal, social, and communication abilities, as well as personality traits and social skills. In the final section, the role that the mentioned techniques, tools, and competencies can play in project and process management is discussed. It is worth noting that the issue of human resource management addressed in the article (team management and team communication processes) is one of the essential knowledge areas in project management and closely aligns with management methodologies (such as the PMI/PMBok methodology). The article is profiled with the hypothesis that the implementation of soft skills strengthens the value of the project as well as the efficiency and execution potential of project teams. In order to verify this hypothesis, the analysis and criticism of the existing literature as well as a diagnostic survey based on multiple, direct observation of project contractors and the assessment of the effectiveness of the

impact of the competences in question (creating situational awareness) in various phases of the project implementation in a systemic perspective were adopted.

2. Essence and Systemic Attributes of a Project and Process

Management is an organized and coherent process understood as a series of actions aimed at achieving a defined goal in an orderly and controlled manner. The essence of every process lies in its transformative function, which converts specified requirements and input resources into expected outcomes. Therefore, a process is a dynamic component of any operational system (project systems, production systems, service systems, leadership systems, etc.) implemented for the effective organization of activities to achieve specific organizational objectives. Human resources constitute an input resource that determines the value of the obtained results (projects, products, etc.). The optimization of repeatable processes, in the context of resource management, focuses on their coordinated and efficient utilization. Project is typically regarded as a temporary/one-time undertaking that aims to achieve a specific goal within a defined time frame and with specific resources. Each of this is characterized by its uniqueness and non-repeatability, as it differs from others in terms of objectives, resources, and duration. Project management encompasses planning, organizing, directing, and controlling activities to effectively achieve the project's goals.

In the context of these concepts, it is valuable to utilize the "project triangle" and the UMP as holistic tools for a comprehensive approach to managing projects and processes. These tools indicate systemic criteria that determine the level of goal achievement in terms of team management effectiveness. The project triangle (Project Management Institute (PMI), 2017), also known as the constraint triangle or design triangle, illustrates three main dimensions of project design and management that are interconnected and mutually influential, determining the level of quality as a generalized criterion of action. These elements are scope, costs, and time. This method is used in project management (processes/undertakings) to visualize the relationships between these three key constraints, emphasizing that a change in one element affects the others, thus influencing the entire project (the outcome/output of each process). Figure 1 shows the project management triangle.

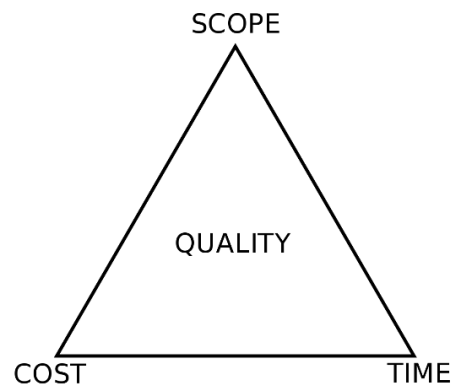


Figure 1. Project management triangle (Project management triangle, 2023).

The dimensions indicated in the project triangle include:

- **Scope**, which encompasses all tasks, objectives, and deliverables planned to be achieved within the project. It defines what exactly will be the subject of the design, and any changes to this dimension can impact costs and the time needed to complete the project.
- **Costs**, which include all financial resources required to carry out the project, including employee salaries, necessary materials, and other operational costs associated with the project. Changes in project costs can affect the scope and duration of the project.
- **Time**, which refers to the planned duration of the project according to the agreed-upon project schedule. Shortening the time can impact the project scope and costs.

The project triangle highlights the constant interaction between these three dimensions, and their values determine the level of quality. A thorough understanding of the project triangle is crucial for effective project management and achieving quality criteria in project or process management, as it enables managers to approach changes in a balanced manner and understand the resulting consequences.

The UMP model of the process is a methodological structure that focuses on three key stages: Understanding, Modeling, and Planning. The model provides a comprehensive tool to support project management and execution processes, enabling effective and purposeful operations (Project Management Institute (PMI), 2017):

1) **Understanding**, which includes:

- **Definition of Objectives and Requirements:** as seeking to fully understand the objectives of the project/process and any requirements associated with it.
- **Analysis of Context:** as an analysis of the broader context in which the project will be implemented, including stakeholder identification, risk analysis and understanding of the project's impact on the organizational environment.
- **Developing the Execution Strategy:** Based on the objectives and context, a project implementation strategy is created, defining the main lines of action.

2) Modeling involves:

- **Process Model Creation:** focusing on creating a detailed process model that illustrates the individual steps, dependencies, and interactions (such as workflow diagrams, schematics, etc.).
- **Resource Identification:** identifying the necessary resources, both human and material, as well as technological resources required for each project stage.
- **Process Efficiency Evaluation:** determining measures and criteria to assess process efficiency and identify potential areas for optimization.

3) Planning includes:

- **Action Plan Development:** creating a representation of the goals, process model, and available resources, reflected in the schedule, budget, and responsibilities in each phase of project implementation.
- **Monitoring and Control:** an inherent process of improvement and utilization of monitoring and control principles and systems to assess the progress of the project, identify any delays or risks, and take corrective actions.
- **Plan Adaptation:** a significant phase of managing change in the project (a common phenomenon in project management), involving flexible adjustment of the action plan to meet new requirements, limitations, and challenges.

The UMP process management model provides a structured approach to managing projects/initiatives, enabling a focus on understanding, modeling, and planning for effective goal achievement. In a holistic perspective of projects and processes, this means that project managers must simultaneously consider and manage scope, costs, and time, while also having a full understanding of the project's context and objectives. Within the project triangle, a change in one element necessitates adjustments in the others, requiring flexibility and efficient response to variable conditions. On the other hand, the UMP process model demonstrates that understanding, modeling, and planning are interconnected steps, each playing a significant role in effective project management.

An important perspective for perceiving not only the management process but also transformative processes (project, manufacturing, service, etc.) from a systemic standpoint is the substantive knowledge of artifacts and tasks that are necessary for execution, as well as the allocation of roles to performers, based on an assessment of their experience and suitability for achieving the designated goals. In the case of human resources, this entails evaluating the level of professional competence and experience in managing executive teams. A comprehensive understanding of the essence of a project and process enables managers to accurately anticipate, comprehend, and respond to challenges, ultimately leading to the effective achievement of organizational goals.

Each process and resource used in the execution of various project-production processes requires a comprehensive evaluation, which allows for the determination of the actual state of the chosen stage of process/project/product realization. This evaluation is provided by universal systemic criteria. The evaluation of coherence and completeness of actions, as well as their integrity, effectiveness/efficiency, and the quality of products/results, is particularly important. Systemic criteria constitute a key structure of analysis, enabling a holistic view of the project/process and the entire system of operation at each stage of the designated initiative's implementation. These criteria include, among others (Kossiakoff, Sweet, Seymour, Biemer, 2011; Kelly, Male, Graham, 2004; Zaskórski, 2015; 2012):

- **Usability** informs how the project or process meets user expectations, including an assessment of overall user satisfaction with the results of the given process. Functionality is an evaluation of whether the project meets its intended goals and requirements, including its potential for expansion or adaptation to constantly changing needs.
- **Reliability** is a measure of the stability and effectiveness of the project/process and its outcomes in various conditions and situations, with a focus on minimizing the risk of failures or other malfunctions.
- **Efficiency** is a criterion for achieving intended goals with minimal resource consumption, both in terms of time and cost.
- **Risk** focuses on identifying, analyzing, and managing potential threats to project implementation, as well as the need to understand and effectively control and mitigate risks.
- **Quality** is a generalized systemic criterion that has a product perspective (ex-post, quality of outcomes/results) and a process perspective (ex-ante, aspects related to the resources used, time of implementation, and project/process requirements/scope/complexity), with reference to standards.
- **Viability** is a criterion for analyzing and assessing the durability and adaptability to changes over time, with the value of a project, for example, increasing if it is oriented towards long-term benefits.
- **Readiness** is a criterion for evaluating the manner and preparedness of the organization (executive team) to adopt and effectively implement new solutions.
- **Developability** is a measure of the ability to adapt and expand solutions in response to changing environmental or technological needs.
- **Safety** is closely associated with the level of risk and ensures an adequate level of protection for the entire system of operation, including users, data, and the environment.
- **Completeness** is a systemic characteristic that confirms whether a specified component is a system, such as whether the executive team is complete to undertake a given

initiative and whether the project includes all necessary elements to effectively fulfill its goals.

- **Complexity** takes into account the complexity of the project and its interaction with the environment, which is crucial for effective management of multi-aspect projects.
- **Coherence** relates to the logical and harmonious connection of all its elements to create a cohesive whole (an absolute condition of status: a system).
- **Synergy** is a measure of the growth potential of the system (project team) through the value of relationships between component objects and allows assessing whether the project brings additional value through the integration of different elements in a way that enhances efficiency and effectiveness.

Relying on systemic criteria in the analysis of a project/process at each stage of implementation forms the foundation for a comprehensive evaluation throughout its entire life cycle, enabling a comprehensive view of effectiveness, efficiency, and value in terms of the organization of the executing entity and the need for utilizing soft skills competencies.

3. Full Management Cycle

The full management cycle encompasses a series of stages, starting with project initiation, where goals are defined and stakeholders identified, followed by the planning phase, where detailed schedules, resource allocation, costs, and risk management are developed. The next stage is execution, during which the project plan is implemented and tasks are assigned to the team, with a focus on effective quality management. Subsequently, in the monitoring and control phase, the project undergoes continuous oversight, problems are identified, and corrections are made in line with planned actions. The final stage is closure, where the project is formally concluded, results are evaluated, reports are prepared, and the product or service is handed over for use. The aforementioned stages mainly focus on the substantive dimension, which does not consider the equally important aspect of project management - the soft skills of project leaders. It is the project managers who, utilizing their competencies, guide the team throughout the full project or process lifecycle. Soft skills can be defined as a set of interpersonal, social, and communication abilities that enable individuals to effectively interact with others in various contexts. These skills include verbal and non-verbal communication, empathy, leadership abilities, conflict resolution, teamwork, and adaptability to changing situations. Soft skills are crucial for effective team management and achieving professional success (Latham, Pinder, 2005). In a different perspective, soft skills can be seen as personality traits and social abilities that influence an individual's effectiveness in interpersonal relationships and teamwork. It includes aspects such as emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication skills, stress management, empathy, assertiveness, and effective

time management. Soft skills are essential both in the context of professional career and personal development, contributing to creating a positive work environment and achieving organizational goals efficiently (Robbins, Judge, n.d.). Figure 2 illustrates an example project lifecycle (Project Management Institute (PMI), 2017; Project Management Life Cycle, 5 Project Management Phases, 2019).

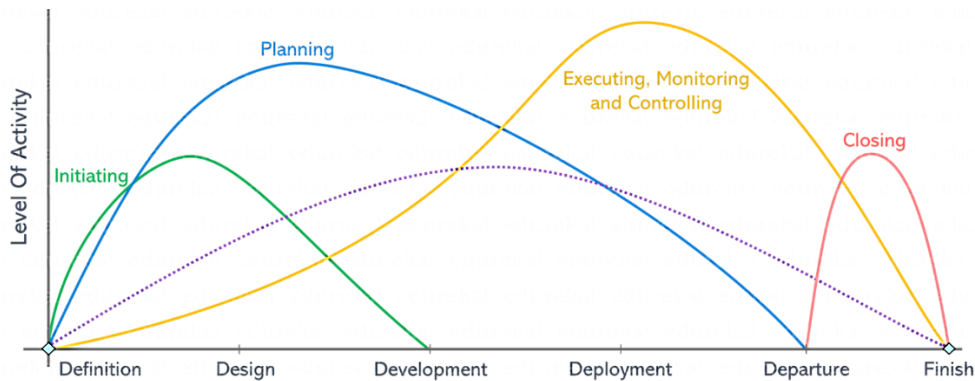


Figure 2. Project Life Cycle (Project Management Institute (PMI), 2017; Project Management Life Cycle, 5 Project Management Phases, 2019).

Therefore, it should be understood that soft skills, such as effective communication, team motivation, conflict and problem resolution, and the ability to adapt to changes, play a crucial role at every stage of the management cycle in any project. Moreover, in each stage, communication techniques and tools can be supported by processes for monitoring, recording, reporting, and standardizing team activities. This comprehensive approach enables the effective achievement of project goals and the establishment of a sustainable organizational culture.

In the first stage (*Definition*), strong soft skills in communication and relationship building are crucial. The ability to effectively monitor stakeholder expectations and record their needs forms the basis for properly defining the objectives of the project. Additionally, reporting and standardizing actions help in effectively communicating goals to the team and adapting the plan to changing needs.

In the next stage (*Design*), planning and resource allocation skills are key. Soft skills such as effective task delegation and the ability to motivate the team are essential for creating a detailed project plan. Monitoring project progress and recording key plan elements aid in aligning team actions with the established goals. Reporting is important in identifying any issues in team management.

In the third stage (*Development*), the leader should focus on aspects related to conflict management and team motivation. Monitoring work quality and documenting progress are crucial for maintaining a high standard of performance. Reporting allows for tracking the effectiveness of team management strategies, and standardizing actions influences the effectiveness of development processes based on experience (norms/standards).

In the *Deployment* stage, soft skills in change management and effectively responding to unforeseen situations. Monitoring the implementation process and recording results and any issues allow for ongoing adaptation of team actions. Reporting in this phase facilitates the communication of progress to stakeholders, and standardizing actions ensures team cohesion during dynamic situations.

In the project *Departure* stage, soft skills related to summarizing experiences, sharing knowledge, and appreciating team work play a leading role. Monitoring project results and documenting lessons learned contribute to process improvement. Reporting in this phase enables the communication of key project information, and standardizing actions supports an organizational culture conducive to continuous improvement.

In the final stage (*Finish*), soft skills related to building an organizational culture that fosters further process improvement are important. Monitoring, documenting results, and reporting effectively influence the direction of development. Standardizing actions in this phase assist in building a long-term team and organizational development strategy.

The full management cycle effectively integrates monitoring, documenting, reporting, and standardizing project activities while developing key soft skills in team management. Collaborative work on these elements allows for the effective achievement of project objectives and the establishment of a sustainable organizational culture conducive to improvement.

4. Identification of Soft Skills

The fundamental tool for every leader is communication, which allows for effective interaction among team members, both on the same level and when the level changes vertically, such as during a conversation between a superior and a subordinate, or vice versa. Conversations, or rather, communication within a team, can serve multiple functions, particularly in flat/process-oriented, networked/virtual, or even matrix structures. This article focuses on two fundamental functions: the persuasive function, where the sender aims to convince the receiver to perform a specific action, and the informative function, where the sender intends to convey a message to the listener. Figure 3 depicts the basic elements of the conversation

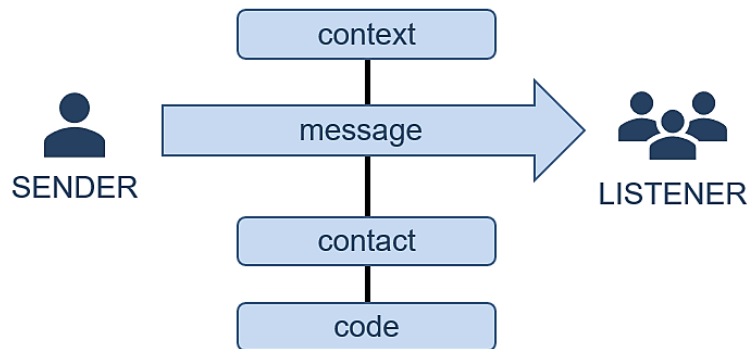


Figure 3. Basic elements of a conversation, adapted from personal observations: (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler, n.d.; Rosenberg, n.d.).

The communication model depicted in Figure 3 consists of four fundamental elements: context, message, contact, and code.

Context refers to the awareness of the purpose and situation of both parties, including the sender, who should reflect upon and recognize and evaluate the circumstances in which the conversation will take place. Failure to consider the location, environment, and individuals involved in the conversation may result in the speaker's statements being inadequately understood or ignored by the recipient. Enhancing the effectiveness of conveyed information requires adjusting the level of conversation, language, and vocabulary to match the recipient's familiarity and accurately assessing the entire discussion situation. Evaluating the situation also involves considering the specific topic to be discussed. A thorough understanding of the topic helps to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and facilitates the conveyance of essential information. Awareness of the emotions and tone of the conversation is another aspect, as the manner of expression can influence message reception. Additionally, adapting the speaking pace to the recipient's information assimilation capabilities, while avoiding excessively fast or slow dialogue, is important.

Furthermore, assessing the situation entails understanding the purpose of the communication and the sender's expectations of the recipient. It is crucial to ensure clarity of goals, which enables focus on relevant issues and organized information transmission. A common mistake made by conversationalists is the lack of awareness regarding the goals to be achieved in the planned conversation. This leads to misunderstandings and conflict situations. Recognizing the appropriate context allows for the creation of an atmosphere of mutual understanding and acceptance, facilitating effective information exchange. Therefore, the ability to flexibly respond to changing conversation conditions is a key element in assessing the situation, enhancing communication effectiveness.

The **message** is essentially the information conveyed during the conversation, with the understanding that the information is interpreted within a specific context. The context serves as a set of references in which the conveyed data hold specific meanings and can be understood in the manner intended by the sender. It is particularly important for the sender to be aware of their expectations from the recipient and the specific information they wish to convey.

This enables greater motivation, willingness, and empathy, which are essential elements of professional communication. Defining the data within the recognized context organizes the conveyed information into a logical whole and promotes accurate inference and the generation of useful knowledge for future interactions.

Contact facilitates the exposure of non-verbal communication. Proper behavior towards the other person allows for the creation of a good atmosphere and effectively increases the recipient's awareness, including understanding, interest, and also determines the sender's credibility. It has long been emphasized in literature that non-verbal communication is not just a backdrop for linguistic communication, as it has a greater impact on the additional value of information. The SOLER procedure is an effective technique for improving conveyed information. It is an acronym that stands for five basic principles of effective communication with another person:

- **Stand** facing the interlocutor – allows you to establish rapport with the recipient.
- **Openness** – maintains a good relationship with the speaker.
- **Lean** slightly forward – significantly arouses a sense of interest.
- **Eye contact** – ensures proper communication.
- **Relax** – allows for a comfortable conversation.

Code is the final component of conversation and is based on a vocabulary resource and the correct pronunciation presented by the message sender. Continuous improvement of skills in this area significantly enriches the language used by the interlocutor. As a result of enhancing language skills, vocabulary range, and knowledge of word meanings, not only respect but also attention and respect are gained from potential recipients. Pronunciation correctness is also crucial, and it can be shaped by independently performing a series of exercises that affect different parts of the human speech apparatus. Not every word, despite its superficially neutral character, has a positive impact on the conversation and conveyed information. Therefore, it is important to use words conservatively in the conveyed sentences, such as:

- **Why** – often assumes a hostile attitude and causes irritation.
- **But** – often contradicts the previous statement.
- **I will try** – this expression often implies failure or partial success of an endeavor.
- **No** – negatively predisposes the recipient and triggers a defensive attitude.

In addition to a fundamental understanding of communication principles, a professional leader should possess the ability to interpret basic emotional expressions presented through non-verbal communication by the other person (Kwong et al., 2018). These expressions include Joy, Fear, Sadness, Disgust, Contempt, Surprise, and Anger. Figure 4 shows the basic expressions of emotions.

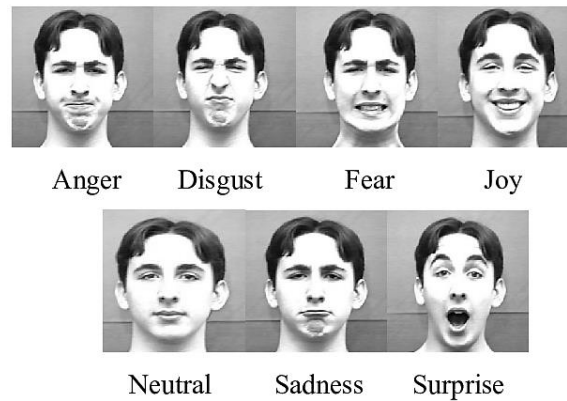


Figure 4. Seven basic expressions of emotions (Kwong et al., 2018).

This down-to-earth skill of recognizing emotions in another person allows for empathetic and effective communication, not only in conversations with individuals but also in effective team management. Despite the simplicity of this skill, it becomes apparent from the outset that it is not innate but rather requires specific intellectual preparation when attempting to decipher human emotions. Proficiently probing the current psycho-physical state of the conversation partner opens up possibilities for making various decisions that influence the implementation process of a given project. Moreover, during the evaluation phase of the management process, proper team management considering and understanding the emotions of its members will impact the effectiveness and realism of the conducted analysis.

It should also be emphasized that blatant mistakes in relationships with others include judging individuals, disregarding them, engaging in nonconstructive criticism, and making comparisons, often leading to a negative attitude towards recipients and a poor assessment of their current state and behavior. This overall impression affects the created situation (context) and translates into an ineffective form of conversation. It is important to distinguish feelings from thoughts and emotions from observations. What others do triggers our feelings, but it is not the cause of them. Unmet needs imply the emotions we experience. Proper understanding of these emotions allows for maintaining rationality and composure, which are essential elements of professional leadership behavior (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, 2002; Riggio, Murphy, Pirozzolo, 2012).

The synthesis of these presented skills, awareness of their significance, and the selection of appropriate communication tools by a leader constitute the foundation for effective management and leadership, directly influencing the results of undertaken actions (processes/projects, etc.). Therefore, continuous improvement of knowledge and qualifications in the field of soft skills is vital if efficient and accurate execution of assigned tasks is expected, while ensuring an adequate level of situational awareness among all synergistically cooperating entities. Soft skills significantly support such a role.

5. The role of soft skills in the performance of executive teams

A critical analysis of the literature on the subject and dedicated literature studies (points 2-4), as well as research based on direct observation of a number of project teams and a diagnostic survey confirm the following statements regarding the role of soft skills in the effective management of executive teams, with particular emphasis on interpersonal communication strengthening the potential of these teams. The research and observations have been conducted over the past three years in a variety of project teams, mostly technical. In the full cycle of project and process management, soft skills play a crucial role in managing executive teams with the assumption of internal team coherence and assessing the individual characteristics and capabilities of each team member. The effective use of these competencies has important implications in many functional areas (Pink, n.d.; The Arbinger Institute, n.d.), such as:

- **Motivation:** influencing the ability to understand team reactions and effectively motivate its members. The capability to identify individual needs and preferences allows for adapting motivational strategies, which can significantly impact engagement and work effectiveness.
- **Ensuring quality and effectiveness of actions:** enable leaders to not only evaluate current progress but also identify potential threats to the quality and effectiveness of actions. The ability to recognize warning signs, anticipate problems, and react promptly contributes to risk minimization and maintaining high standards.
- **Effective communication:** play a key role in the efficient functioning of executive teams. By employing various communication techniques, leaders can effectively convey essential information, build understanding within the team, and resolve conflicts. Their ability to clearly communicate goals and expectations creates a foundation for harmonious team functioning.
- **Creating team situational awareness:** soft skills ensure the recognition of team reactions, the analysis of motivational implications, and the assessment and understanding of team preferences, which can enhance situational awareness. The ability to perceive threats, understand them, and anticipate the needs and behaviors of the team enables effective adaptation strategies, leading to flexibility and adaptability in dynamic operating environments.
- **Conflict resolution:** encompass the ability to effectively manage conflicts, resolve disputes, alleviate tensions, and mediate between team members in a manner conducive to collaboration and team development.
- **Building interpersonal relationships:** involve recognizing the role of interpersonal relationships in effective management. Strong relationships foster open communication, mutual trust, and collaboration, thus enhancing team performance.

- **Time management:** soft skills related to prioritizing tasks, delegating responsibilities, and effective planning can influence team efficiency and the achievement of intended goals within established deadlines.
- **Innovation and creativity:** supports an open approach to new ideas, encourage experimentation, and stimulate the creativity of team members, facilitating better adaptation to changing conditions.
- **Delegation skills:** eliminate errors associated with ineffective task delegation by managers. It avoids the extremes of assuming all tasks or relinquishing control over their execution. Recognizing the strengths of individual team members allows for assigning tasks according to their abilities and potential, promoting action efficiency. Striking the right balance in decentralizing management is essential.
- **Adaptation to changes:** in dynamic project environments soft skills, such as flexibility, openness, and willingness to learn, enable leaders and teams to effectively respond to unpredictable situations.
- **Perception of threats:** managerial competencies enable the identification of potential threats and challenges during project implementation, analyzing the environment, anticipating potential difficulties, and evaluating risk factors. This allows for the effective development of remedial strategies and the implementation of preventive actions, minimizing the impact of potential challenges on project progress.
- **Assessment and understanding of team preferences:** competencies related to assessing and understanding the preferences of the entire team and the competencies of each team member. A conscious leader can recognize individual predispositions, needs, and expectations of team members and adjust management approaches, tasks, and communication, creating a work environment that enhances individual strengths within the team.
- **Forecasting team needs and behaviors** using appropriate tools and analysis: Leaders can anticipate changes in team dynamics, anticipate potential difficulties or development needs, and adjust management strategies accordingly. The ability to forecast allows for flexible and effective adaptation of team actions to variable project conditions.

The role of soft skills is closely linked to creating an appropriate level of situational awareness within the team and the ability to respond to threat and crisis situations.

6. Summary

Analysis of the essence of soft skills in managing executive teams leads to the conclusion about the important role these skills play in shaping appropriate interactions between the team leader and its members. This article focuses on the significance of effective project management in a dynamic business environment, highlighting the importance of simultaneously considering technical and social aspects in working with executive teams. Communication skills play a crucial role in the project and process management, supporting leaders in understanding team needs and building relationships based on mutual respect and empathy.

The limitation of the conducted research was the observation of various project groups, primarily technical and engineering ones. There are plans to expand the discussed topic to include other social groups in the future. The analysis conducted unequivocally indicates that despite the widespread and readily available knowledge on soft skills among most leaders, the described skills and techniques are rarely utilized. Leaders often remain unaware of their skill development areas and rarely invest in enhancing these competencies. The primary goal of the research is to raise awareness among future and current project group leaders about the opportunities to learn and apply the described techniques and skills related to utilizing soft skills in managing project teams.

The article extensively discusses the essence of project and process management, drawing attention to the project triangle that illustrates the interdependencies between scope, cost, and time in relation to the planned level of quality outcomes. The full cycle of project management includes stages of initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, control, and closure, and soft skills contribute to the materialization of the principles of effective functioning of executive teams throughout the management cycle. Leaders, possessing desired competencies, effectively motivate the team, ensure the quality and effectiveness of actions, and communicate efficiently, contributing to the harmonious functioning of the group. The role of the leader also encompasses creating situational awareness, resolving conflicts, building interpersonal relationships, and skillful time management. Innovation, task delegation, and adaptability to change are key in a dynamic project environment. Additionally, the leader's ability to perceive threats, assess team preferences, and forecast needs contributes to flexible adaptation of team actions to variable project conditions.

Effective communication with the team, developed emotional intelligence, leadership capabilities, and tools are necessary for successful management of any endeavor. The lack of these skills can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and loss of trust within the team, directly affecting the accurate assessment of actions and, consequently, the success of their implementation. Therefore, it is important for the team to not solely rely on purely technical procedures but also develop their soft skills. Placing significant emphasis on awareness and development of these skills allows for effective collaboration with the team and achieving

success in various projects. Furthermore, even the most comprehensive understanding of the essence of projects and processes, conscious application of the models and tools mentioned in the article, may be insufficient if the project team leader has not developed soft skills and is not aware of their usefulness.

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