

Chapter 56

Greek Construction Project Managers' Cognitive Abilities, Personality and Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

The tasks performed by a project manager are of special importance to the well being and economic prosperity of construction companies. This paper is aiming at defining the Greek project managers' dominant cognitive abilities, personality characteristics, skills and knowledge. An effort is made to identify available attributes associated with successful management performance and career development. The survey was conducted based on a structured questionnaire. The effort led to 102 responses, originating from engineers and construction professionals, throughout the Greek Construction Industry, including Public-Work Authorities. The questionnaire was based on international management literature and interviews. The study discusses the results of the survey and provides a comparison with those attributes identified in the international literature and correlates the participants' profile with their responses.

INTRODUCTION

Muller and Turner (2007a) emphasize that different types of projects require project managers to be selected with appropriate competencies. According to Smyth and Morris (2007), a unified theory of the management of projects does not exist. Projects are context-specific and located in open-systems. Nevertheless, Crawford (2000), Stevenson and Starkweather (2010) suggest that the

importance of the project manager in the delivery of successful projects has generated a considerable amount of rhetoric and a smaller body of research based literature. Crawford (2000) emphasizes that literature focuses on the knowledge, skills and personal attributes required of an effective Project Manager (PM).

Sayles and Chandler (1971) cited in Pheng and Chuan (2006) listed five critical success factors for a project. These are project manager's com-

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petence, scheduling of activities, control systems and responsibilities, monitoring of project and continual involvement in the project.

It is the nature and type of projects that define the required attributes of the manager. Thus, it is important to focus on the special characteristics of construction projects. The latter ones are increasingly multidisciplinary and the role of a project manager has become critical for success (Wolf & Jenkins, 2006; Jha & Yger, 2006). The effectiveness and productivity of organisations have been always depended heavily on the quality of their workforce, or their human capital, and there is general agreement that its importance relative to financial capital is steadily increasing (Wolf & Jenkins, 2006). Typically a large multidisciplinary project needs coordination among the personnel of different departments. The difficulty any project manager would have in coordinating resources for sites can easily be imagined. The complexity of the task will be demanding and the project manager may not be able to attend to other important project requirements (Jha & Yger, 2006).

Furthermore, over the last decade, changes in organizational structure, through mergers and acquisitions as well as through decentralization, have encouraged the review of management responsibilities (Druker, White, Hegewisch & Mayne, 1996). At the conceptual and feasibility stages of a construction project, a project manager needs to understand and to apply, the basic principles of investment and business finance in the context of the potential owner's current financial situation. The important relationship between time and money must also be understood (Pilcher, 1994).

It is apparent that project managers' field of expertise is quite extensive. This fact creates difficulty in defining the manager's responsibilities and required attributes. Part of the problem of defining the project manager's role lies in the assumption that managers need only a single set of skills that help them manage any situation (Carter, 1988).

Trying to define Project Managers' agenda, one should bear in mind that project management is no longer just a sub-discipline of engineering, the management of projects – including programme management and portfolio management – is now the dominant model in many organisations. Project management practices are becoming increasingly important, as more and more work is organized through projects and programmes (Winter, Smith, Morris & Cicmil, 2006).

At the same time in projects, crisis, uncertainty and suspense are continually recurring to test the quality of project managers. They always face the challenges of figuring out what to do with the implementation of their projects, despite uncertainty, great diversity and an enormous amount of potentially relevant information. Project managers try to get things done through a large and diverse set of people despite having little direct control over most of them (El-Sabaa, 2001).

Similarly, Fryer (1997) cited in Haynes and Love (2004) suggests that the job of a manager has been defined as demanding, complex and varied. It includes the management of people, information and decision-making processes, and therefore is a critical human resource. According to Anderson (1992) project managers who have high-quality or above-average managerial skills and experience are more often associated with better performing projects, because they tend to use key project management practices at higher levels.

Nowadays, there is also a growing awareness and understanding of the relationship between achieving project success and construction project managers' (CPMs) competences (Ahadzie, Proverbs & Olomolaiye, 2008; Cheng, Dainty & Moore, 2005).

The paper presents a literature review with the common held views of the project managers' attributes, then the research methodology is analyzed and its results' discussed. Finally, conclusions and future work are highlighted.

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