Chapter 16

Soft Skills as a Critical Success Factor in Project Management

Antonio Rodriguez Peña
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9433-2684
Universidad EAN, Colombia

Fernando Andres Muñoz
Universidad Militar, Colombia

ABSTRACT

Project management is a field of knowledge that presented a notable development as a means of impact on organizational competitiveness. About 30 years ago, this field was considered as a series of tools that contributed in some aspects of improvement in organizations. Over time, these tools were transformed into theory and in the same way their development at the scientific level increased. Now, project management is recognized as the means through which the strategic plans in the companies are managed. Therefore, they form the bridge of business sustainability. Among the different developments that have been made in the project management is the establishment of critical success factors. The current literature offers various approaches. One of the research trends as a critical success factor that is proposed in the future is the identification and measurement of the soft skills of the project manager. This is how this chapter of the book will address the identification and analysis of soft skills.

INTRODUCTION

The changing and accelerated global economic trends are compromising business survival, since the economic opening patterns have affected the competitiveness patterns and indicators with which companies have traditionally managed the achievement of their goals. “The growing dynamism of the economies Emerging Asians, in the displacement of the world’s wealth, represents a challenge for the competitiveness of many manufacturing industries in the region” (CEPAL, 2014). That is, Latin America faces a serious threat from Asian expansion, since its Development models do not allow you to boost your productive

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infrastructure. This translates into a clear threat against corporate sustainability and the consequences derived from this type of affectation, such as job losses and economic slowdown.

In the last decade, project management as a field of knowledge has presented a notable development as a means of impact on organizational competitiveness. Approximately 30 years ago this field was considered as a series of tools that contributed in some aspects of improvement in organizations, over time these tools became a specific field of knowledge, and subsequently there has been the emergence of a theory of projects, and as a result of this expansion, the knowledge of project management at the scientific level increased. Today the discipline of project management is recognized as the means through which strategic plans in companies are managed, therefore, they are configured as the bridge towards corporate sustainability. Among the developments that project management has had, is the establishment of critical success factors. Various scientific investigations have been carried out in order to establish the impact that soft skills have on project management and performance (Naoum, Fong, & Walker, 2004; Hussain, Ahmed, & Zulqarnain, 2015; Shi & Chen, 2006). These investigations have shown that there is a positive and significant relationship between soft skills and project performance. In the literature there are different approaches for the identification of factors, on which the success of a project depends, some of them are related to time, cost, objectives and interested parties, among others. One of these research trends in the field of critical success factors in project management is the identification and measurement of the soft skills of the project manager. Research conducted by (Bailey, 2014; Grieve, 2013; Gillard S., 2009; Moss & Tilly, 1996) established that different types of employers identified gaps in their workers consisting of the lack of essential soft skills, this same void it was established by (Allington & Fernández-Fuentes, 2013) when identifying that there is a difference between the training of students in universities and the requirements that at the level of soft skills employers require. The usefulness of this chapter focuses on determining the importance of soft skills as a critical success factor in project performance, and therefore, it is expected to make a contribution so that traditional paradigms that focus on hard skills or knowledge such as Critical success factors in projects, therefore, focusing on interpersonal skills as a criterion of success in projects transforms the traditional paradigm. Thus, this chapter will address the identification and analysis of soft skills, and their relationship with the performance of projects from a research gathering point of view, so that a cutting-edge research can be presented in this regard.

The methodology established for the development of this chapter was based on reviewing scientific databases such as emerald, sciencedirect, scopus, dialnet and ebscohost, in the same way books of the themes analyzed were reviewed. The topics that were searched were soft skills, project management, and project performance. Based on the information collected, the literature was reviewed in the following division of project management and background issues, characterization of soft skills, and soft skills as a critical success factor in projects.

**PROJECT MANAGEMENT: CONCEPTS, METHODOLOGIES AND CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS**

One of the most accepted definitions of what a project is, is recorded in the British Standard, which states the following: a single process consisting of a series of controlled and coordinated activities, undertaken to achieve a goal according to some specific requirements, including time, cost and resource limitations (British Standard, 2000). That is, starting from the previous definition, and having established