Key Aspects of the Project Manager's
Personal and Social Competences

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Abstract: Often in newspapers and speeches the term "Competence" is used to describe a person's comprehensive ability when it is wanted to emphasize the requirements of nowadays' working life. Anymore it is not enough to concentrate merely on an individual's knowledge. But what does the term Competence actually mean and why is it so important? The thought of competences' ontology is based on understanding that competences represent an individual's personal view and feelings of how he/she experiences him/herself. The objective of this article is to describe the theoretical background of competences and examine which are important competences in everyday activities of a project manager. In this conceptual analysis there are presented both the theoretical background of competences and a project manager's 30 professional personal and social competences based on empirical studies.

A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT MANAGER

Project management is a dynamic process of leading, coordinating, planning, and controlling a diverse and complex set of processes and people in the pursuit of achieving project objectives. A project manager is the heart and soul of a project. He/she has a huge responsibility about budget and schedules. A project manager has to make decisions even with incomplete data and information. Relationship with the project team must be based on trust and comfort with each other. A competent project manager has a capacity to impact team building, generating enthusiasm and motivation, effi cient time management and accurate target setting. Improving the competitiveness of companies by investing in human resources has become increasingly important. However, the key to success is recognition of all the personnel's capabilities and utilise them. Therefore personal competences in the end defi ne how effectively the organisation really operates. (Liikamaa et al., 2003) Competences are useful concepts when we try to explain why some people perform better than others or when we want to improve their performances and make decisions that will enable them to accomplish their objectives (Zwell, 2000). The effectiveness of an organisation's employees determines how the organisation will perform (Kerr, 2003).

Webb et al. (1999) state that there are two perspectives in job skills: technical skills and enhancing performance skills. Technical skills are acquired through education, training, or apprenticeships and related systems, methods, tools and techniques. Enhancing performance skills are learnt through life experiences including team building, generating motivation and enthusiasm, effi cient time management, accurate target setting and an understanding of infl uence tactics and political behaviour (Pinto et al., 1995). All these skills are essential for project managers. A project manager represents one of the purest examples of on-the-job training. "Most project managers are project managers because they have been superiors to run a project: Having been so assigned, they are often thrown into the fray to sink or swim as they are able." Those who learn quickly will most likely succeed. (Pinto et al., 1995). Hersey et al. (2000) argue that people differ not only in their ability to do, but also in their will to do, or motivation. The motivation of employees depends

on the strength of their conscious or unconscious motives.

Flannes et al. (2001) emphasize that a project manager has many roles, where he/she must simultaneously be the leader, manager, facilitator and mentor. In the leadership role the project manager has to have the ability to conceptualize the vision to the functional managers, team members and various stakeholders. The role as manager ensures that the project is completed on time, within the budget and at the acceptable levels of performance. As a manager he/she has to create the administrative procedures and structures to monitor the completion of work including plans, schedules and software to control tasks and costs, and administer details throughout project completion. The role as facilitator provides the necessary emotional and logistic support that the team members need to complete the project. As a facilitator the project manager must have communication abilities, abilities for resolving confl icts, the ability to actively procure necessary supplies and resources for the team, and the ability to motivate individual team members and the team as a whole. In the role as mentor the project manager assists team members with the issues of professional growth, development and direction.

Pinto et al. (1995) have analysed a great many studies on project management. On the basis of these analyses they have found certain common features in the results of these studies. First, effective project managers must be good communicators. Much of their time is spent in one form of communication or another. Second, project leaders must possess the fl exibility to respond to uncertain or ambiguous situations with the minimum stress. The third conclusion made by Pinto et al. (1995) is that strong project leaders work with and through their project teams. The fourth conclusion is that good leaders are skilled at various infl uence tactics. Effective project leaders must be well schooled in the art of persuasion and infl uence. Success of a project manager is based on achievement of his/her project goals within the defi nite limitations in terms of time, budget and resources, completion of the project within explicit criteria, standards and specifi cations and understanding the change in priorities that may occur (e.g. Ljung, 1999; Lock, 1998; Pinto et al., 1995; Barkley et al., 1994).

COMPETENCES REQUIRED TO SUCCEED

Boyatzis & Saatcioglu (2008) state that developing human talent breaks down to three categories which are; helping people to learn knowledge, helping them to develop what to do with that knowledge, and learning why they would use their knowledge and competences. Development of knowledge means helping people to develop the functional, declarative, procedural, and meta-cognitive knowledge needed. This knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for the leader, manager, or professional to add value to organizations. In this sense, knowledge bases are threshold talents (Boyatzis, 1982; Kotter, 1982; Luthans et al., 1988; Spencer and Spencer, 1993; Goleman, 1998). But to be an effective leader, manager or professional, he/she needs the ability to use his/her knowledge and to make things happen. These abilities can be called competences. (Boyatzis & Saatcioglu, 2008)

Each competence affects a person's performance, but competences form synergic groups, which in turn affect the individual's performance. (Boyatzis, 1982; Wood et al., 2000; Lock, 1998). Boyatzis (1982) defi nes a competence as "A capacity that exists in a person that leads to behavior that meets the job demands within parameters of organizational environment, and that, in turn brings about desired results". Spencer et al. (1993) defi ne a competence as 'an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation.' According to Boyatzis (1982) 'Underlying characteristic' means that the competence is a fairly deep and permanent part of a person's personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and job tasks. Competences indicate 'ways of behaving, thinking and generalizing across situations, and enduring for reasonably long periods of time.'

Competences always include intent, which is the motive or trait force that causes action toward an outcome. Behavior without intent does not defi ne competence. Behavioral and individual competences represent the capability that a person brings to the job situation (e.g. Boyatzis, 1982; Wood et al., 2000; Lock, 1998). As shown in fi gure 1 motives, traits, and self-concept competences predict skill behavior actions, which in turn predict job performance outcome (e.g. Kets de Vries, 2001; Spencer et al., 1993; Zwell, 2000).

Competences can be seen as part of a layering process that has at its core needs, emotions, defenses, motives and traits. These are followed by values, attitudes, and self-image, which in turn are followed by competences and knowledge (fi gure 2). (Kets de Vries 2001, 221)
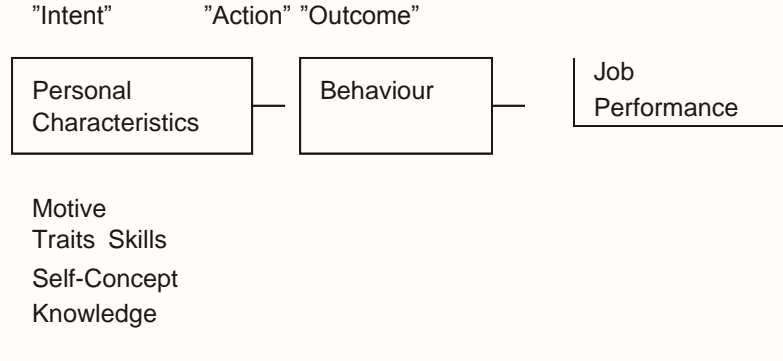
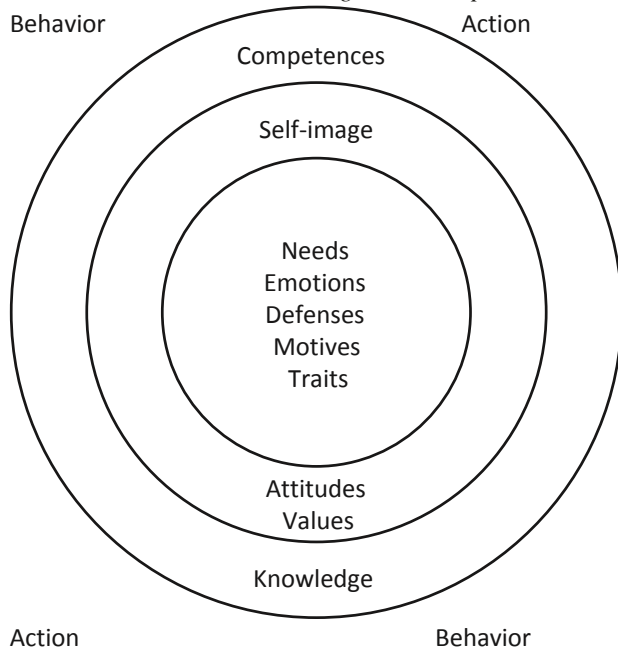*Figure 1. Competence Causal Flow Model (Spencer et al., 1993)*

Figure 2. The circle of Competences (Kets de Vries 2001, 222)

Personal competences are intrinsic to the individual, and refl ect the traits and characteristics that are related to what individuals believe, how they think, how and what they feel, and how they learn and develop. These competences affect people's ability to complete tasks and people's relationships with others, because they are related to their sense of self-identity (Zwell, 2000). The competences associated with relationships are critical to individual and organizational success. The individual's competences component reveals what a person is capable of doing and why he/she acts in a certain way. (Boyatzis, 1982)

Emotional competences

Emotional competences are learned and they are based on emotional intelligence that results in excellent performance at work. The emotional intelligence determines our potential for learning the practical skills that are based on self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy, and adeptness relationships. Our emotional competences show how much of that potential we have translated into on-the-job capabilities. (Goleman, 1998)

People have to get to know their own emotions, because a person who does not know him/herself fi nds him/herself in a deadlock situation. (Kets de Vries, 2001) To manage learning, emotions help people to understand how to acknowledge and deal with their feelings. Developing one's emotional intelligence is learning to understand how others feel. Emotional intelligence skills are synergistic with cognitive ones: top performers have both. The more complex the job is, the more emotional intelligence matters, if only because a defi ciency in these abilities can hinder the use of whatever intellect a person may have. People need emotional competences to reach the full potential of their talent. (Goleman, 1998)

The great divide in competences lies between cognition and emotions. All emotional competences involve some degree of skills in the realm of feelings. People can score well in IQ tests and other measures of cognitive ability, but in their jobs they can fail at emotional arts that make people like fl ight attendants so effi cient. (Goleman,1998; Zwell, 2000). The divide between those competences that are purely cognitive, and those that depend on emotional intelligence as well, refl ects the parallel division in the human brain.

PROJECT MANAGER'S COMPETENCES

Professional organizations (e.g. PMI, 2000) and different commercial organizations aspire to identify skills, knowledge and behavioral habits, which according to them, a qualifi ed project manager should possess. Several researchers (e.g. Thamhain et al., 1977; Posner, 1987) have endeavored to defi ne the competences of a project manager.

A project manager's 30 personal and social competences are presented in fi gure 3. The competences are result of the wider study of project managers' competences which had 50 engineers from forest industry, energy industry and offshore industry participating. The following work-role-based competences have been customized to fi t the requirements of a project

manager's job. (Liikamaa, 2006)

Competences			
1. Emotional awareness	Ability to recognize, realize and specify one's feelings (Goleman, 1998)	**Self-Awareness**	**P E R S O N A L C O M P E T E N C E S**
2. Self-confidence	A strong belief in one's capability, competence and self-esteem (Goleman, 1998); Boyatzis, 1982 Spencer et al., 1993)		
3. Self-assessment	Knowing one's limits and strengths (Goleman, 1998; Spencer et al., 1993)		
4. Trustworthiness	Behaving honestly and ethically (Goleman, 1998; Zwell, 2000)	**Self-Regulation**	
5. Maintaining order	Concern for order, quality and accuracy (Spencer et al., 1993)		
6. Flexibility	Ability to adapt to changes (Goleman, 1998; Zwell, 2000; Spencer et al., 1993)		
7. Innovation	Being comfortable and open with new ideas, approaches and data (Goleman, 1998; Zwell, 2000)		
8. Responsibility	Being conscientious and responsible for one's own personal performance		
9. Seeking information	Satisfying one's curiosity and desire for knowledge (Spencer et al., 1993)		
10. Production efficiency	Getting work performed quickly and with a high quality (Zwell, 2000)		
11. Decision quality	Making decisions based on high principles, purposes and values (Zwell, 2000)		
12. Stress management	The ability to handle adverse, tiring and stressful issues and situations (Zwell, 2000)		
13. Analytical thinking	Breaking down problems into sub-problems and their systematical diagnosing by rational principles (Zwell, 2000; Spencer et al., 1993)	**Cognitive Skills**	
14. Conceptual thinking	Identifying, applying and defining concepts (Zwell, 2000; Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer et al., 1993)		
15. Language proficiency	Ability and courage to use foreign languages		
16. Achievement drive	Willingness to aim at more effective performances (Goleman, 1998; Spencer et al., 1993)	**Motivation**	
17. Commitment	Adopting the goals of the group or organisation (Goleman, 1998; Spencer et al., 1993)		
18. Initiative	Recognizes and acts on opportunities and possesses an ability to create opportunities (Goleman, 1998; Zwell, 2000; Spencer et al., 1993)		
19. Optimism	Pursuit of goals in spite of obstacles and setbacks (Goleman, 1998)		

20. Understanding others	Perceiving, considering and understanding the feelings and viewpoints of others (Goleman, 1998; Spencer et al., 1993)	**Empathy**	**S O C I A L**
21. Developing other people	Perceiving the development needs of others and reinforcing their abilities (Goleman, 19980; Zwell, 2000; Spencer et al., 1993; Boyatzis, 1982)		
22. Leveraging diversity	Creating opportunities for cooperation with different kinds of people (Goleman, 1998)		
23. Organisational savvy	Understanding and utilizing organisational dynamics in order to achieve objectives (Zwell, 2000)		**C O M P E T E N C E S**
24. Communications	Listening openly and conveying (Goleman, 1998,; Zwell, 2000)	**Social Skills**	
25. Conflict management	Arbitrating and resolving differences (Goleman, 1998; Zwell, 2000)		
26. Management	Concentrating on things (Spencer et al., 1993)		
27. Leadership	Concentrating on people (Goleman, 1998; Spencer et al., 1993)		
28. Relationship building	Building, cultivating and developing useful relationships and informal networks (Goleman, 1998; Zwell, 2000)		
29. Collaboration	Working with others towards common goals (Goleman, 1998)		
30. Team capabilities	Creating group synergy in order to achieve collective goals (Goleman, 1998; Zwell, 2000; Spencer et al., 1993)		

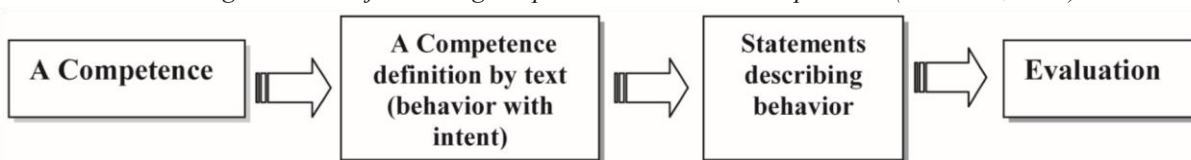*Figure 3. A Project manager's personal and social competences (Liikamaa, 2006)*

Figure 4. Defi nition of competences

Before competences can be evaluated each individual competence (1-30) has to be defi ned separately by words. Then according to the defi nitions every single competence is specifi ed by four statements described through texts or examples of behavior. When we evaluate competences we actually evaluate the statements of the competences, which easily describe understandable and evaluative everyday activities. (Figure 4)

The requirements of the job can be regarded as the job's demands on the person in the context of the organization, with its physical, fi nancial and technical resources, as well as its traditions and culture. There are many competences that are the same within several professional groups, but each of these groups also has very special characteristics that have to be determined based on the requirements of each task in an organization. (Liikamaa & Vanharanta, 2003b; Liikamaa, 2006)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The skill that distinguishes successful project managers from those who are not so successful do not include special know-how, but consist of competences which are not taught at all. Technical skills are acquired through education, training, or through related systems, methods and techniques. Enhancing performance skills are learned through life experiences. The success of a project depends not only on interaction and personnel commitment but also on project managers' personal and social competences. (Liikamaa et al., 2003)

In the future more and more project managers are needed, as tasks become more project based and organisations become more flexible. That is why identifi cation of project managers' personal and social competences is important. An organisation which recognizes that identifi cation and development of a project manager's competences has a huge impact on the success of the project, can reduce the business risks and improve the success of the project. (Liikamaa et al., 2003) The identifi cation of the individual's competences leads to increase the employees' transition of experience-based knowledge, skills, commitment, motivation and productivity, and thus the enterprise's competitive advantage. (Liikamaa & Vanharanta 2003a)

A competence is an integration of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, attitudes, and personal characteristics that allows an individual to perform successfully on the job. Creating of job competence profi les provides the organization and its employees

numerous benefi ts. Using competences in recruitment can be as simple as including a list and a brief description of the required competences in the job posting. It is important to ensure that those selected for a job meet both the minimum technical requirements, and have the essential "soft skills" (e.g. relationship building, teamwork, communication). A conceptualization of a competence is that it is observable, measurable, and can be learned to achieve desired performance levels. (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Hereby competences can be exploited in many human resources functions like recruitment, selection, placement, compensation, performance management, succession planning, and training and development. Training is focused on the competences that lead to superior performance. By comparing employees' competences with the competence requirements of the future job a successful plan can be made. (Zwell, 2000; Boyatzis, 1982; Liikamaa

&Vanharanta, 2003b)

Knowledge, competences, and motivational drivers help us to understand what a person can do (i.e. knowledge), how a person can do it (i.e. competences), and why a person feels the need to do it (i.e. values, motives, and unconscious dispositions) (Boyatzis & Saatcioglu, 2008). Emotional competences determine how people manage themselves whereas social competences determine how people handle relationships. (Goleman, 1998) Competences can be taught. The improvability of competences has important implications for organizations. Even core motive competences such as achievement orientation can be modifi ed. (Zwell, 2000)

In addition to competences subconscious factors are important because they affect a project manager's performance. Individual's subconscious factors such as motives, values and attitudes contribute to behavioral situations defi ned by competences, which affect the subconscious factors as a continuous interaction. (Liikamaa, 2006)