

# Project management education: The human skills imperative

Ira Pant, Bassam Baroudi \*

*School of Natural and Built Environments, University of South Australia (City East), North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia*

Received 23 March 2006; received in revised form 24 November 2006; accepted 22 May 2007

## Abstract

This paper is intended to provide an insight into the importance of human skills in project management success and the apparent lack of emphasis placed on this within the context of university education. The discussion will call upon the viewpoints of many notable authors in respect to the human or ‘soft’ skills that are necessary in the management of projects. Against this background a review will be conducted into how well project management literature and university education equips potential project managers in the area of human skills. As the PMBOK® Guide is one of the major recommended texts in Australian universities offering project management education, the paper will identify that it predominantly emphasises the required ‘hard (technical) skills’ at the expense of the ‘soft (human) skills’. Subsequent discussion will highlight the need for a balance between hard and soft skills within project management education in universities. It will conclude that educators within this discipline should recognise the importance of incorporating greater human skills aspects into their educational programs.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd and IPMA. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Soft skills; PMBOK; Project management; University education

## 1. Introduction

The skill sets required for success in the work place have changed dramatically in the past few years. Employers insist on a better prepared workforce that is more adaptable, responsible and teachable to help meet the competitive realities of a global economy [1]. Most employers today expect workers to demonstrate and excel in many ‘softer’ skills such as teamwork and group development [2]. They are keen to tap into these vital soft skills obtained during study and periods of work experience, rather than just degree-specific knowledge [3].

There is a growing demand for project management skills as a consequence of the projectisation of organisations. Project management is being viewed as the ‘new’ form of general management which enables organisations to integrate, plan, and control schedule-intensive and one-of-a-kind endeavours in order to improve overall

organisational performance [4,5]. To cater to this demand and to make education more relevant to the reality of the workplace many university degrees are offering project management courses either as core programs or as electives. The paper presents arguments on the need for universities to broaden their emphasis of project management education to include both human and technical skills.

## 2. Human skills and project management

The job of the project manager is demanding, complex and varied requiring the juggling of several issues concurrently. Though traditional project management competencies are critical for project success, communication between team members and the entire network is vital to support a shared understanding of the project and its goals [6]. Managing projects successfully therefore requires a mixture of skills including interpersonal ability, technical competencies, and cognitive aptitude, along with the capability to understand the situation and people and then dynamically integrate appropriate leadership behaviours [7]. Mantel

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 08 8302 2234; fax: +61 08 8302 2252.  
E-mail address: [bassam.baroudi@unisa.edu.au](mailto:bassam.baroudi@unisa.edu.au) (B. Baroudi).

et al. [8] categorised skills into six areas: communication, organisational, team building, leadership, coping, and technological skills. Katz [9] suggested that effective administration rests on human skills, conceptual skills and technical skills which can be developed independently. El-Sabaa [10] adds that the human skills of project managers have the greatest influence on project management practices and technical skills the least.

In his research on Canadian project-driven organisations Loo [11] found an almost even split in top-rated internal best practices between technical and people practices. The people skills set that emerged included high-calibre project teams, stakeholder participation, effective team and external communication, customer satisfaction, conflict management, and staff management and motivation [12]. Other studies have also highlighted the significance of people skills for project success [13,14].

Realising the importance of people management skills, Turner [15] has reframed his definition of “project” to recognise its human aspects. He defines a project as an:

...endeavour in which human, financial and material resources are organised in a novel way to undertake a unique scope of work, of given specification, within constraints of cost and time, so as to achieve beneficial change defined by quantitative and qualitative objectives. (p. 3)

Kloppenborg and Petrick [16] suggest that project leadership requires more than just technical competence and encompasses the ability to manage a team. Skills in managing relationships are critical to achieve stakeholder satisfaction through all stages of the project. Relationship skills complement the effectiveness of hard (technical) skills because project outcomes are achieved through people, using their knowledge and creativity not through the mere use of techniques or hardware [17]. Creating the right relationships with team members and other stakeholders is one of the biggest challenges that face project managers. This requires them to cultivate both hard and soft skills [18,19].

Belzer [20] identifies soft skills in managing projects as ‘the missing link’, critical to project success. Some of the skills in this category include communication, organisational effectiveness, leadership, problem solving and decision-making, team building, flexibility, creativity and trustworthiness. Halstead [21] contends that

Whilst a project manager must focus on the task, real success comes from knowing how to get things done through others. Whilst some may see managing the human issues within a project, as a soft option it is neither soft, nor an option, if a project manager wants the project to succeed. (p. 5)

Against this background the question then arises as to how well current university training in project management equips potential project managers in the area of human skills? The next section will focus on evaluating the coverage of these skills in the PMI PMBOK® due to its wide-

spread use as project management text in Australian universities. This will provide insights into assumptions in respect to the education and skills required to practice as a project manager in Australia.

### 3. Human skills and PMBOK®

Since 1969, the Project Management Institute in the United States has been the predominant professional association for project managers in North America, and perhaps, the world. It has taken a stewardship role in promoting the establishment of project management standards, training, education, and research. A central aspect of its mandate is the certification program resulting in the designation Project Management Professional (PMP). In 2002 there were some 55,000 credentialed PMPs worldwide which had increased to 108,000 by April 2005 [22].

A training blueprint for this certification is the *Guide to The Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®)* [23] which has also been adopted for accreditation purposes by bodies such as the Australian Institute of Project Management. This manual identifies the generally accepted best practice body of project management knowledge, providing a common language for project managers and uniform standards of project management quality, excellence, and professionalism. As a documented standard of how project managers ought to construct and define their success, PMBOK® provides authenticity to project management education [24]. Though there are other bodies of knowledge such as the APM Project Management Body of Knowledge (APM BoK) published by the Association for Project Management (APM) in England or the P2M Project Management Body of Knowledge issued by the Engineering Advancement Association (ENAA) in Japan [25], the PMI PMBOK® is a major recommended text in Australian project management education.

PMBOK® has been in existence since 1987 and its third edition was released in 2004. The focus of this project management literature has always been on the hard skills deemed necessary for managing projects, relegating soft skills to the background. Such an approach has not shifted significantly even in the current edition and its emphasis is still, in the main, on the delivery of hard concepts such as technical knowledge, scientific management principles, the usage of tools and tangible outputs. In contrast the coverage of soft skills appears to be both piecemeal and inadequate. Some might even suggest it is tokenistic.

Bourne and Walker [17] appear to agree that PMBOK® is more concerned with the hard skills required in project management than the soft skills. Further to this, the two knowledge areas concerned with human aspects, such as *Project Human Resources Management* and *Project Communications Management*, are typically seen as secondary to the more technically based areas. Even within these knowledge areas the emphasis would appear to be more about process and tools than human relations and thought [26].

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات