Compatibility Between Training Programs and Profile Requirements for Construction Project Managers

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Abstract

This paper explores the compatibility among the educational preparation of construction project managers and the actual background which is necessary to perform their professional tasks. The research is focused on the identification of the knowledge and competencies offered in several educational programs through different education processes and practices on the field of Construction Project Management. The critical points and current trends in the education of construction project managers are investigated through the review of related literature and specific curricula of academic programs and professional organizations seminars. The related data are evaluated and the produced results indicate specific directions adopted in the education of the construction project manager. Among the main conclusions is the emphasis on soft skills and the importance on the development of behavioral and personality-based competencies compared to the strong technical and business training background.

Keywords

Project Management, Construction Management, Education, Skills, Competencies

1   Introduction

Project Management (PM) constitutes a constantly rising career choice worldwide, thus leading to an increased interest and need for properly qualified professionals (Berggren, et al., 2008). This is evidenced by the continuous growth, in terms of number of members and impact on the field, of well-established project management organizations, such as the International Project Management Association (IPMA) and the Project Management Institute (PMI) and the creation of new ones, such as the International Association of Project and Program Management (IAPPM) and the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management (ASAPM). With an educational background, as well as a previous professional experience that may vary significantly, the average active project manager has an academic degree in engineering and at least 10 years of working experience (Edum-Fotwe & McCaffer, 2000) .

Successful incorporation and application of PM practices and processes by qualified project managers does not ensure projects' success (Munns & Bjeirmi, 1996; Dvir, et al., 2003). This is common especially in the construction industry where approximately 50% of the projects end up with budget overruns or schedule delays (Gardiner & Stuart, 2000). In an effort to impugn project failure and ameliorate their project results organizations focus on the improvement of projects delivery methodologies and PM training (Alam, et al., 2008). However, among the most critical issues seems to be the profile of the project manager.

Katz (2009) argues that there are three basic categories of skills, which an effective manager should possess: human, conceptual and technical. El-Sabaa (2001) examines through literature review, several categorizations of a project manager's skills and concludes that the human skills are the most and the technical ones the least prominent on the application of project management practices. Murch (2000) adds "coping skills" as a fourth category along with personal, technical and management skills. These skills are necessary to "cope with different situations, conflicts, uncertainty and doubt". A more elaborate description of "people skills" is given by Flannes (2004), as the skills related to communication, leadership, customizing contact with stakeholders, motivation, conflict management, self control and personal balance and competence in career management skills. Thomas and Mengel (2008) go even further, by emphasizing on shared leadership, social and emotional intelligence, communication, skills in organization policies and the importance of vision, values and beliefs as the competencies required in managing projects in the modern complex environments.