

Identification and evaluation of the key social competencies for Chinese construction project managers

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Abstract

It is well understood that an individual's competency has a significant effect on his/her performance. While the more traditional "hard" technical skills of project managers have drawn much attention, little light has been shed on the "soft" skills, especially social competencies in the construction context. This study has adopted a well-established competency model from human resource management theories as a basis for the theoretical framework to examine the social competencies of construction project managers. This led to the development of a model via the use of a structural equation modelling approach. Four dimensions of social competencies for construction project managers were identified, i.e. working with others, stakeholder management, leading others, and social awareness. Attention to these attributes will help construction project managers to develop their social competencies, and could contribute towards a better performance in their workplace which will in turn improve the performance of the whole organisation. Implications of adopting this approach were also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Competent project managers (hereafter referred to as PMs) with a range of core competencies have been critical to the success of projects. Gaddis (1959) for the very first time proposed a requirement profile for the ideal project manager. Since then, this field has attracted significant interests from academics, constantly seeking to identify the essential qualities of PMs (Leybourne, 2007; Loo, 2002; Pettersen, 1991). These studies have attempted to define requirements for PMs to be effective in terms of project management knowledge, skills and various

personal characteristics. Similarly, the literature dealing with project managers' competencies has tended to focus on discussions about the technological skills of PMs, e.g. the PMs' competencies of planning, follow-up, controlling etc. Usually, such competencies are viewed as "hard skills" of PMs (Ingason and Jónasson, 2009; Posner, 1987), or entry-level skills (Jiang, 2002; Turner and Muller, 2003), or sometimes threshold abilities (Boyatzis, 1982; Skulmoski and Hartman, 2010). These are not underpinning characteristics that distinguish between average and excellent PMs, nor do such skills necessarily lead to an improved or a higher performance. Many studies dealing with competencies have advanced the knowledge about project management theory however they are not sufficient, on their own, to ensure that a person can become a competent project manager (Skulmoski and Hartman, 2010).

Within the management discipline, one of the most provocative ideas emerging from recent discussions of management concerns the potential relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and

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