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The influence of cultural diversity on project management competence development – the Mediterranean experience

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Abstract

In the last few decades project management gained popularity in all types of organizations across many industries and increasing number of projects, programs and portfolios are professionally managed. Therefore, competent project managers and associates who can cope with problems that are occurring became the ultimate need of the business entity. However, project management competencies as a set of knowledge, personal behavior, skills and experience are very complex and therefore require acquiring a variety of elements within three different areas: contextual, behavioral and technical. Further, in order to assess and develop or improve relevant project management competencies, a system for assessment was developed and levels of competences defined within certification process. Also, considering that certification can contribute to project success by ensuring that project managers and associates have adequate competencies for managing projects, programs and portfolios, as well to integrate, plan and control the schedule-intense and unique efforts to improve overall organizational performance, authors of this paper examine the interest for project management certification in the Mediterranean countries – Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The focus of the research is on the influence of a particular culture on the attitude regarding the project management competence, so as competence-based certification. This paper therefore describes initial results on relations and influences among competence, certification, culture and business practices. The findings are based on the data provided by the national project management associations, the obtained results about the relationship among cultural characteristics, competences in project management and project success are discussed and will be used as the foundation for further research in this field.

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1. Introduction to project management certification

The use of project management practices in today's fast changing working environment has dramatically increased. A large number of companies adopted project management methodologies and processes in order to deliver work packages in a more cost-conscious and controlled way, as well as to make the best use of their limited human resources to create competitive advantage and meet customer requirements (Fisher, 2011). Project management has been viewed as the new form of general management which enables organizations to integrate, plan and control schedule-intensive and unique endeavors in order to improve the overall organizational performance. Project-based workplaces are characterized by a short-term interaction and involvement and are particularly challenging for the individuals charged with managing performance within them. And since more organizations accept project management as their *modus operandi* to deliver work packages, the need for competent project managers who can face the challenges of implementing their projects despite uncertainty, diversity and great amount of potentially relevant information, grows as well (Cheng, Dainty, Moore, 2005). The job of the project manager is demanding, complex and requires dealing with several issues concurrently (Pant, Baroudi, 2008), so the competence of project manager is a factor in successful delivery of projects, but also the prerequisite in those areas that have the most impact on successful outcomes (Crawford, 2000). Project managers should be able to get things done through a large and diverse set of people, despite having little direct control over most of them. Therefore, knowing what they do and what kind of skills they demonstrate would constitute a very important step for the selection and development of an effective project manager to cope with every problem and accomplish unique outcomes with limited resources and within limited time constraints (El-Sabaa, 2001). Also, as project management is a complex process that targets multiple outcomes, competency in project management is also complex and requires the acquisition of a variety of knowledge and skill sets in different areas of expertise such as instructional technology, management, IT, engineering and manufacturing (Brill, Bishop, Walker, 2006) in combination with personal characteristics and relevant experience (Boyatzis, 1982). To allow measuring and development of such competence, it has been broken down into competence ranges that represent dimensions which together describe the function and are more or less independent. Each range contains competence elements that cover the most important competence aspects in the particular range and every competence element in each range is described in terms of the knowledge and experience required (Chaupin et al., 2006). Further, although traditional project management competencies are critical for project success, communication between team members and all stakeholders is vital to support the shared understanding of the project and its goals. Consequently, managing projects successfully requires a mixture of skills including interpersonal ability, technical competencies, cognitive aptitude and capability to understand the situation and people in order to dynamically integrate appropriate leadership behaviors (Pant, Baroudi, 2008). The concern of project managers' competence resulted in the interest for the development of standards and certification processes that can be used for assessment, recognition or as a guide for development of project management competence. However, not enough attention has been given to the role of project manager and the issues he/she have to face since project organizations tend to revolve around the fluid interaction of highly skilled personnel at various organizational levels (Wilemon, Cicero, 1970). Interest in the role of project manager and the aspects of competence in that role can be traced back to Gaddis (1959) and Lawrence and Lorsch (1967). The primary research on the subject began in the 1970's based on the investigation done by Thamhain, Gemmill and Wilemon (1974) into the skills and performance of the project manager and contributions to the understanding of the project management competence made by Posner (1987), Pettersen (1991), Ford and McLaughlin (1992), Zimmerer and Yasin (1998). Today's standards include primarily what project managers are expected to know or are able to do and the process of developing such standards involved extensive consultation with the industry, as well as participation of experienced project management staff in identifying key competencies (Crawford, 2000). A standard of competence for project management has been mentioned for the first time in the 1980s, the first International Competence Baseline was introduced in the 1990s (Nahod, Vukomanić, Radujković, 2013) and to date, many institutions and authors offer educational and certification programs in project management, with different project management competencies (e.g. Mantel et al., Katz, Sabaa, Loo, Turner, Belzer, Wysocki etc.). However, all certification programs for project managers have the task to identify the best qualified individuals and organizations in the area of project management at the national and international market and certificate should prove qualifications and empower holder to perform tasks in the field (Radujković, 2000). As the result, the organizations should make the commitment to improve their

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