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Did Covid 19 kill the creativity of project managers?

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Abstract

Creativity is a tool that can enhance the project manager's effectiveness in the application of skills thereby improving the chances of success on a project. Through the effective use of creativity techniques, a project manager can enhance the application of technical processes and lead the project team to the successful delivery of project objectives. This is a random case that appears in a normal situation. But since 2020 we are facing with Covid 19 pandemic, and we assume that also this situation has an impact on project managers, particularly in their creativity to enhance new projects and also to get better results in ongoing projects.

The important part of the application of creativity from Project Manager, is to improve the interpersonal skills and productivity of the team, and prepare them for different challenges.

Our research is focused to evaluate the behavior of Project Managers during this pandemic period. We intend to assessed through brainstorming with respondents what are the key factors that affected from Covid 19 to PM job including motivation, team building, communication, influence, decision making, and project results.

Keywords: Project Managers, creativity, performance, results.

Introduction

In business, project management offers a valuable and highly effective structure which helps to identify and focus on the priorities, track and measure performance, overcome challenges and issues, address unforeseen risks as they arise and achieve higher performance and probability of success in each business endeavor. The impact of project managers in business are higher if the business development trends are +20% each year, especially for dynamic business as retail industry is.

The importance of Project Manager engagement in retail business is not only to take care for project framework and budgeted but also to continue developing new projects in order to increase the efficiency of business process, procedures and increase the company Good Will.

Setting the priorities and defining the KPI for each department, sometimes need a different approach to handle it. The most important thing in project management job, is to have a balance between teams, consolidate the data and motivate others to joint and follow the project by knowing how to take the actions and to achieve the results.

Companies hire project managers so that targets set by the clients and stakeholders can be achieved within agreed timeframe. After all, companies do business, not the charity, so there has to be Return on Investment (ROI), project managers help to keep the project cost within limits in combination with on-time delivery so that the ROI can be secured.

The Covid 19 pandemic, based on our research had a huge impact in project managers job. The main pillars effected by pandemic were motivation, team building, communication, influence, decision making, and project results. All these pillars were part of our research and the results are absolutely expected.

This paper has the following structure divided by literature review, research methodology, data analyzing chapter, limitation of research and conclusions and recommendations.

Significance of the study

Research in the field of project management is with high relevance to business owners. The application of project management practices approaches in different sectors are gradually becoming an important issue in developing economies, where projects of different size and structures are undertaken, especially in periods that the business need to face with unpredicted situations.

Literature review

Project management is one of the key skills demanded by organizations around the world (Stellingwerf, R., & Zandhuis, A., 2013). As such, it has become one of the fastest growing professions in the world (Prabhakar, 2008). Increasingly, companies are clearly seeing the benefits to be gained from investing time, money and resources to build organizational project management expertise, such as lower costs, greater efficiencies, improved customer and stakeholder satisfaction, and greater competitive advantage. PMI research identifies the project management career as one of the fastest growing professions in the business world, noting that project managers are highly valued in virtually all sectors (Langley, 2015).

This chapter presents a critical examination of current project management theories. It includes the understanding of what constitutes a project, and provides evidence from literature on project management, including its characteristics, processes, knowledge areas, and activities. Attention is paid to the attributes, skills and competencies of an effective project manager. The benefits of effective project management are also outlined. The project statement should not be a gathering of technical information, but should define what is to be done, why it is to be done, and what business value it will provide to the state organization when the project is completed (Fuchs, D., and Fuchs, L. S., 2006).

Components of the project statement are shown in the following figure:



Figure 1- Components of the project statement

Project Management Knowledge Areas contain the following the topics:

- **Integration Management:** This area drives the project forward by developing plans for execution that help to integrate management roles. Integration management entails development by making alterations to ensure that aims are being met by offering various remunerations to the stakeholders of the project. It gives assurance by fulfilling the needs and prerequisites of the project by close synchronization during the initial design stages (Al-Turfi, 2017)
- **Scope Management:** This area contributes to success by promoting effective collaboration and incorporating the fundamentals of project management in order to achieve the intended results. It is done by taking various resources that allows project to extend scope of better construction and optimistic effects on project management. (Al-Turfi, 2017)
- **Time Management:** This is another key area that contributes towards project success for reaching key objectives. Time management is crucial in project management and plays an essential role in developing and structuring the actions of team members. (Al-Turfi, 2017)
- **Cost Management:** Effective project management must be efficient at managing costs and initial estimations by ensuring the inclusion of all key areas (Jack Gido, Jim Clements, 2014). This aspect can be achieved using techniques such as the Earned Value management practice that controls the budget of the project. (Al-Turfi, 2017)
- **Quality Management:** Quality management demands that criteria (i.e. specification of aims and needs) be determined in order to gauge the successful completion of the project. It contributes to the fulfilment of the project by ensuring the delivery of the expected outcomes. (Al-Turfi, 2017)
- **Human Resource Management:** The human resource management is an organizational aid in controlling cohesion regarding team work and leading effective management of project processes. They contribute to consistency by gathering all significant aspects for client satisfaction on completion of the project. (Al-Turfi, 2017)
- **Communication Management:** Communication among team members is a vital component that affects the appropriate progress of the project by connecting people in terms of their interaction. Through successful communication paths, management can gather new designs and concepts that may help to improve the efficient management of the project. Project completion is entirely based on processes like planning, delivery, recovery, construction and monitoring of key information. (Al-Turfi, 2017)
- **Risk Management:** Risk management plays an essential part in project completion; competence in this area helps to minimize issues and maximizes

chances of effective progress of construction. It extends the scope of success by planning of and control over fundamentals that guide the project manager to obtain successful outcomes. (Al-Turfi, 2017)

- **Procurement Management:** This area of management exerts control over suppliers and has command over appropriate legal information concerning the project; it further maintains the integrity of the project by provisioning for external factors in order to minimize risk. It may include outsourcing large-scale projects, and requires the acquisition of resources in order to provide effective results. (Al-Turfi, 2017)
- **Stakeholder Management:** A fundamental knowledge area of project management the effective management of stakeholders, which entails engagement of contributors and people working with the organization on a particular project. (Al-Turfi, 2017).

But, if we analyze deeply creative project management refers to the processes involved in ensuring the smooth delivery and management of creative projects within businesses and creative agencies. Creative project management is usually coordinated by a dedicated creative project manager who will organize, monitor, and coordinate the workload of copywriters, marketers, designers, and other creative stakeholders.

Creative project management provides a helpful framework to ensure work is done on time, on budget, and to a consistently high standard. Here are just a few reasons why creative project management is important:

- Ensures creative projects are briefed clearly and work is evenly distributed to appropriate team members
- By acting as the key coordinator between the creative team and those briefing projects, expectations can be managed and met appropriately regarding budgets, deadlines, and the creative direction of a project
- Prevents creative bottlenecks by monitoring the progress and objectives of projects to ensure everyone is on-track
- Coordinates feedback and approval processes to ensure everyone is satisfied prior to the sign-off of a project (DAM Leader, 2022).

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to present how digital can increase business performance in transition countries, with focus in Republic of Kosovo.

This research was focused on cross-sectional data rather than time-series data. The full research was conducted in the Republic of Kosovo. The study was conducted with 7 project managers that works in Retail Companies. We have chosen this sector because of the dynamics and also the contribution that the sector gave during the pandemic period.

Our research is focused to evaluate the behavior of Project Managers during this pandemic period. We intend to assessed through brainstorming with respondents what are the key factors that affected from Covid 19 to PM job including motivation, team building, communication, influence, decision making, and project results.

For brainstorming section, we have prepared some basic question to start the conversation, and to take in line the flow of section.

Research question and hypothesis

a. Research question

The following research question is formed:

Were the results of the project influenced by Covid 19?

Through this survey question presented above, we tried to obtain opinions of Project Managers, out of their daily practice, on the relevance of creativity during Covid 19 period, and the influence of such pandemic in performance on projects. Determination is not easy at all, since the nature of surveyed is rather complex, and they differ on the basis of project managers involvement. However, based on results gathered during brainstorming session held on October 2021, we have put our effort to understand the real situation and impact of Covid in creativity of Project Managers.

b. Hypothesis

Based on the results of this paper, we have developed the main hypothesis, in an effort to validate its importance.

H0: Covid 19 didn't impacted on the creativity of Project Managers

H1: Covid 19 impacted on the creativity of Project Managers

This hypothesis was developed with an effort to validate impact of Covid 19 on creativity of Project manager. Our focus was for the paper to present data which would be then presented to businesses, to inform them further about the relevance of Project Managers job on their own development, not only within the region. Since recent trends in doing business do not relate anymore to state borders, we believe this is an advantage

to be used, for these businesses to penetrate with their products/services to the EU and wider, thereby using such advantages of digitalization.

Summary of Brainstorming session

The brainstorming session were held in Pristina (capital city of Kosovo), and part of the session were 7 Project Managers out of 10 invited. All of them represent the most influenced retail chain in Republic of Kosovo.

The main points of the discussion are presented below:

- The negative effect of pandemic in PM job is evident, otherwise the 85.7% of the participants confirm that financial performance of their business was positive compare to 2019. This mean that the sales were grow, but the gross margin is lower that 2019, but also to overall expenses were low, especially the salary line, that effect directly in business profit.
- Only 45% of ongoing projects, managed to be successfully completed.
- The businesses hesitated to invest in new projects, and impact of this this decision will take place during 2022
- Most of time the PM team worked form distance, and since the focus of Top Management, wasn't to develop the new projects, the concentration of the team shifts on Freelancers
- The projects implementations were hard to manage, and lack of cooperation from other departments were registered during the Covid 19 lockdown
- The Project Managers faced the problem of team motivation in high level. Since this kind of global pandemic isolate the whole world, the possibility of interaction between team and developing new ideas was very hard to developed, and this cost high demotivation/depression of dynamic team as the project management department have
- Lack of decision-making process were registered during this period
- All the meetings were virtual, but the engagement of people was to low. This situation reduces the cost-benefit to invest further from company owner/management.

In the end, based on the discussion during the meeting, the lack of motivation of PM team, impact directly to the project performance, and had negative impact on creativity. Based on the participants point of view, in near future, it will be very difficult to manage

huge projects in retail business, because during the pandemic, the behavior of the companies was in different direction, and push in limits PM staff.

Testing Hypothesis

The most important part of this paper, is to test the hypothesis, developed by begging of this research.

The Hypothesis are as follow:

H0: Covid 19 didn't impacted on the creativity of Project Managers

H1: Covid 19 impacted on the creativity of Project Managers

Table 1 – Testing Hypothesis

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min- imum	Max- imum	Mean	Std. De- viation
DID Covid 19 impact on your creativity?	7	1	5	2.71	1.496
Valid N (listwise)	7				

The center of distribution (mean) is 2.71 and the standard deviation is 1.496, from this result we can see a small standard deviation, which means that we do not have spread data, or data are very close to the mean. As we can see from the result, the significance level is 0.003, which is lower than 0.05, which means that we reject the null hypothesis.

Limitation of research

While our study is a significant contributor in terms of theory and practice, on the other hand it should be acknowledged that there are also several limitations that should be considered.

Firstly, within our study it was used cross-sectional data to empirically investigate the proposed hypothetic models. This requires us to posit that our conclusions are related and valid at one point in time. Indeed, cross-sectional data are criticized for their inability to accept analytical insights.

Secondly, another limitation in data analysis is found in the age of employees, since the engagement of youth in labor processes involving use of technology is rather simpler and more compact when compared to training of older employees in technological processes and equipment.

In this regard, future research that replicates this study and tests the same conceptual model is advised. Additionally, futures longitudinal studies could cross-validate the current findings and provide additional support regarding the causality of the above hypothesis proposed.

Regarding the sample size, our study had 7 project managers out of 10 invited. The sample is representative because we have succeeded to involved the largest retail chains in Republic of Kosovo (7/15).

Financial resources required to conduct this study were limited as well as shortage of the time to conduct the study. Time constraint and expense/ cost related to collection of data, getting appointments, traveling to the potential respondents were the main hurdles in this study.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Therefore, we can summarize that projects are unique in nature and much depends on the industry, size, location, nature, complexity, business environment etc. in which they operate. The truth appears to be that the concept of ‘one size does not fit all’ is a good point to start with in certain cases.

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