

The Project Manager's Personality

Ramses Augusto Martínez Hernández
Dinamo Value Partners SC

The literature reviewed suggests that personality traits associated with extroversion and empathy are predictors of success in project management.

There is no evidence in the literature reviewed that suggests any relationship between Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) or some of its features with the effectiveness of project management, although it is possible that some of these behaviors are beneficial, the essential factor is that the individual has these behaviors in an egosyntonic way, which means that he / she is aware of these trends and the benefit he / she gets from them, that these are in accordance with the image he / she has of himself / herself and can effectively regulate them by avoiding any kind of cognitive dissonance.

Keywords: project manager, personality traits, success project managers, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), personality characteristics, VUCA, egosyntonic behaviors, personality-job fit theory, MBTI, ER89, Big five model

PURPOSE

To find out about the personality characteristics that are associated with successful Project Managers (PM) and to research whether there is a relationship between trends in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and effectiveness in project management.

Introduction

Are certain personality traits decisive for success in project management? Given the increasingly complex environments in which projects are executed and which result in the need for increasingly disciplined control and monitoring, do OCD trends lead to more efficient management?

It is very important to identify what personality characteristics are associated with proper project management. The human component is an important variable that must be considered when defining and establishing the entire structure to implement a project. In practice it is necessary to apply the analysis of personality in order to designate a PM as part of the routine to build a team and thus ensure that as far as possible you have the right person in the right role.

DEVELOPMENT

Are There Negative Personality Traits That Support the Performance of a PM?

Angela Kipp identifies two types of successful Project Managers (PM), the obsessive-compulsive one, who needs to have all under control in a detailed way and able to identify risks and implement solutions in advance, and the creative PM, who can foresee potential catastrophes and knows how to improve by executing solutions when the emergency happens.

Obviously there is a difference between having obsessive-compulsive traits and having a diagnosed obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), however, the point of interest is to be clear about whether some personality traits that may be related to OCD contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives of certain jobs, especially when results must be delivered in increasingly VUCA environments.

Based on the above, it is interesting to know to what extent certain features of OCD represent some advantage to successfully fulfill the role of PM, whose objective in the words of Anastasia Prok is ".....getting things done with someone else's hands".

Among the elements of OCD associated with control and detail are: concern for order, perfectionism, constant concern for detail, compliance with rules and task lists. These traits acquire negative characteristics when they interfere with efficiency, for example, excessive perfectionism that prevents the execution of activities, exclusive dedication to work, eliminating leisure activities and even damaging personal relationships or the impossibility of delegating for fear of losing control, or the inability to give in or negotiate with one's peers, etc.

A very illustrative example is that of Kerry Wills, a project management professional with a vast experience, who says that the secret of his success is his OCD and ADHD tendencies: "So, yes, I am neurotic about dates, commitments and expectations but I think this is the only way to deliver a project". This is a case where these types of traits are accepted by the individual since they are in accordance with the image that the person has of him or herself (egosyntonic behaviors).

It is not new, the subject about the relationship between certain features of different mental disorders and the performance of roles within the organization. Previously CEOs have been studied and figures have been generated indicating that about 12% of this type of managers have psychopathic traits as described by Martinez I. N. (2010), only comparable to the 15% identified in U.S. prisons according to McCullough J. (2019) However, it is important to avoid at all costs falling into the temptation of stating that a good CEO must have antisocial and/or psychopathic traits. There is no evidence at this time to support this thesis.

Do we have to identify these types of behaviors in order to ensure good performance in the role? The answer is controversial because if these traits are associated with good performance then our HR colleagues would have to face the dilemma of defining these traits as "skills" which would lead us into quite dark territory within recruitment and identify to what extent a personality characteristic is a skill or a negative trait.

What Is the Personality of a Successful PM?

The more the personality is adapted to the role, the greater the productivity and the integration in the organization, this is what the personality-job fit theory postulates, that is why it is interesting to identify which is the ideal personality type for the PM work.

Twenty years ago, NASA was involved in a project carried out by Mulenburg G. (2013), which sought to describe the personal traits of their PMs in charge of managing complex projects. They evaluated personality using the famous MBTI indicator and the ER89 indicator to measure the response to ambiguity and uncertainty (emotional maturity). The results showed that their PMs in general were extroverted people, guided by intuition and with a preference for organizing and structuring information in order to make decisions in a logical and objective way. In addition, they showed a high level of adaptation to change and a quick recovery from difficult situations, none of the previous descriptions showed TOC-type behaviors.

Another study carried out by Hassan, Muhammad & Bashir, Sajid & Abbas, Syed. (2017) analyzed the relationship between personality traits (using the Big Five model) and success in the execution of projects, the results revealed that intellectual curiosity, creativity and inclination for the new (Openness), empathy

with the team (Agreeableness) and extroversion are predictors of the success of projects while the aspect of neuroticism did not show any predictive relationship. The above results are consistent with the study conducted by John D. Bedingfield of the U.S. Air Force Institute of Technology using the same tool to evaluate personality traits.

It is possible that a successful PM has certain personality traits associated with disorders such as OCD but is able to redirect these behaviors to their advantage (egosyntonic behaviors) or be aware of the advantage that these behaviors provide. However, and according to the literature reviewed, balanced personality traits are a factor of more weight when adapting the personality with the role, within these traits extroversion plays a key role in managing teams so it is important to integrate this knowledge in the selection of PM.

Finally, not only the personality of the PM defines the success of a project, it is clear that other variables such as the organizational environment, the incentive system, the clarity of roles and responsibilities, the maturity of the project management process and the complexity of the project have an influence, but the human leadership component should not be disregarded.

REFERENCES

- Hassan, M., Bashir, S., & Abbas, S. (2017). The Impact of Project Managers' Personality on Project Success in NGOs: The Mediating Role of Transformational Leadership. *Project Management Journal*, 48, 74-87. Doi: 10.1177/875697281704800206.
- Martínez, I.N. (2010, January-April) Psicopatía: ¿Cuál es el origen del mal? *Revista el Residente*, 5(1), 14-18.
- McCullough, J. (2019). The Psychopathic CEO. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackmccullough/2019/12/09/the-psychopathic-ceo/#66f93210791e>
- Mulenburg, G. (2013). *The Characteristics of Project Managers: An Exploration of Complex Projects in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration*. NASA Ames Research Center Moffett Field, CA, United States.