ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF PROJECT MANAGERS' SOFT SKILL COMPETENCIES ON PROJECT PERFORMANCE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

BY

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DECLARATION

I, **Kgomotsego Boikanyo**, declare that this research report is my unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Building Sciences at the Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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ABSTRACT

Project management standards have traditionally emphasised technical expertise, methodologies, and processes to achieve successful projects. However, research reveals that soft skills such as leadership, communication, and emotional intelligence also critically impact project outcomes. Studies indicate that flawed soft skills frequently undermine results through unclear objectives, strained stakeholder relations, and disengaged teams. Yet limited research explores which soft competencies have the greatest influence. Such a gap spurs the need to investigate high-impact soft skills. The construction industry suffers from high project failure rates, affirming the urgency of examining soft skills' role in project success. This research aimed to determine the effect of South African construction project managers' foundational soft skills on performance, focusing on communication, teamwork, and coordination competencies. An exhaustive literature review establishes that technical knowledge alone is insufficient; sophisticated social capabilities prove pivotal for unlocking teams' full potential and optimising expertise application. Conceptual models posit that leaders' attributes and practices shape critical processes driving results. Studies reveal that transparent communication provides shared understanding essential for fluid coordination and cohesive teamwork. Specific soft skills empirically link to over 10% higher productivity, quality, timeliness, and stakeholder satisfaction. Sustained soft skills development promises compounding performance gains over time. Cross-disciplinary evidence affirms that purposefully cultivating human-centred competencies alongside technical qualifications offers a considerable leadership advantage. This study provides robust confirmation that communication, teamwork, and coordination represent multidimensional soft skills enabling project excellence when applied adeptly.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated, with love and gratitude, to my parents and siblings for their prayers and sacrifices and for being a constant pillar of strength all these years. Everything I have achieved in life is accredited to them.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APM	Association of Project Management
ANSI	American National Standards Institute
EQ	Emotional intelligence
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IPMA	International Project Management Association
IQ	Intellectual competence
MQ	Managerial Skill
P-CMM	People Capability Maturity Model
PMBOK	Project Management Body of Knowledge
PMI	Project Management Institute
SQ	Spiritual Intelligence

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Soft skills play an important role in the way project managers effectively perform their duties. "Soft skills can be defined as the interpersonal, people or behavioural skills needed to be applied with knowledge in the workplace" (Cimatti, 2016:98). These interpersonal skills are those that make individuals more human. Project managers who lack soft skills compromise the quality of communication between them and subordinates (Szilárd, Benedek, & Ionel-Cioca, 2018). Consequently, this can impact negatively on the productivity and profitability of the business. Considering the definitions above, soft skills can be viewed as abilities that enable effective communication, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal relations, professionalism, a sense of responsibility, teamwork, courtesy, and other positive work attitudes to manage workers to realise project performance. The high rate of project failure in the construction industry, among other things, could be traced to the poor soft skills of project leaders, including project managers.

This study aimed to investigate the elements of soft skills as fundamental knowledge that project managers should possess within the context of the South African construction industry. Unlike other studies in South Africa that limited the soft skills to only communication in the construction industry, this study seeks to explore, in addition to this, other dimensions such as project manager's teamwork and coordination skills. The introduction, background and problem statement of the study are presented in this chapter. Furthermore, the chapter (1) present the aim and objectives of the study, (2) outline the research questions that underpin the study, and (3) provide the significance of the study.

1.2 Background to the Study

The role of project managers in achieving project success cannot be overstated as far as the construction industry is concerned (Matteson, Anderson & Boyden, 2016:71-88). Since the onset of the professional approach to project management, two main pillars, which are planning and execution, have been considered as very vital. Over time, the process of evolution, which is considered a prime mover, has also influenced the science of management. Recent project management trends tend to emphasise the equal importance of “subjective” and “soft” elements such as leadership, communication, culture, decision power, ethics, trust and team management, unlike previously, where it concentrated more on rigid and unbiased perspectives. The project management soft skills are now viewed as very critical behaviours for all project management professionals (Turner, 2016). Over the last two decades, several scholars, including Kirsch (2000:285), have stressed the requirement of both soft and hard skills as essential resources in project management success and performance. Without underrating the traditional approach to project management, which includes the use of different tools, methodologies and techniques, Kirsch (2000:285) brought to the attention of the world the leadership skills of project managers, which he referred to as the human side or manager’s soft skills. Other scholars, such as Jiang et al. (2015), have also acknowledged the important aspect of soft skills in the realisation of project performance or success.

The critical aspect of the project managers’ skills includes management traits such as background knowledge, experience and domain expertise, which are deployed for effective planning, evaluating, monitoring, risk management and scheduling of projects management. The intangible also referred to as the soft skills, which are more social than technical, describe the ability of the project managers to work effectively with different kinds of people on the project in addition to the capacity to manage stress and still achieve high levels of productivity (Kerzner, 2017). It was indicated that though soft skills remain intangible, they can be felt and expressed (Awan, Ahmed & Zulqaenain, 2015:27). Unlike managing organisational structure, soft skills deal with managing organisational behaviour and the attitude of key persons associated with a task. Soft skills, therefore, outline a manager’s ability in developing inter and intra-organisational interactions amongst all types of people associated with the project.

1.3 Research Problem

Many studies have identified soft and hard skills as key interdependent requirements for the achieving of project success by project managers and are often overlooked (Mavi & Standing, 2018:144). Usually, the inherent inability of firms to measure the impact of soft skills forms the basis of their low recognition and importance during project management. Such could be the reason why limited work has been done on the extent to which the soft skills of project managers impact the performance or success of projects (Piyush, Dangayach & Mittal, 2011:15)

Moreover, Yang, Huang and Wu (2011:260) expressed that where such studies have been explored, they mostly focused on the project manager's leadership style and the performance of projects without consideration of relevant aspects such as the project manager's soft skills.

While the communication skills of the project managers are very critical to the effectiveness of the group tasks and impact on the work of project teams through the elimination of intermediary problems which affect project performance (Turaga, 2013:15), their impact on project success remains inconclusive (Yang, Huang & Wu, 2011: 258). Moreover, the contribution to soft skills competencies with a focus on human factors, which impact project performance or project success, has been relatively less (Leybourne, 2007:62). Jetu and Riedl (2012:447) further argued that the over-emphasis and focus on the hard skills of project managers at the expense of soft or human skills can negatively impact critical factors or skills which help in the establishment of projects.

In the context of the South African construction industry, the few studies that have been done on project management soft skills have limited the studies to mainly communication (Zulch, 2014:28).

1.4 The aim of the Study

The study aims to examine the impact of project managers' soft skill competencies in the South African construction industry.

1.5 Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of the study:

- To examine the impact of project managers' soft skill competencies in the South African construction industry, by examining the impact of project manager's communication skill, coordination skills and team work on project performance.

1.6 Research Questions

- What is the impact of a Project manager’s communication skills on project performance?
- What is the impact of a project manager’s teamwork on project performance?
- What is the impact of a project manager’s coordination skills on the project?

1.7 Significance of the Study

Soft skills play an important role in the way project managers effectively perform their duties. The high rate of project failure in the construction industry, among other things, could be traced to the poor soft skills of project managers. The absence of effective communication or lack of communication is the cause of many challenges in project construction environments, including but not limited to overruns, time overruns, disputes and finally, project failure (Jelphs, 2016:33). If it seems true that everything is dependent on communication and leadership, it stands to reason that leadership communication ability is the foundational skill that must be attained for a project manager to be effective and communicate well on sustainability. Project teams are also built by project managers, as well as their delegation skills. A lack of understanding of the nature of the project team and the different abilities of the teams for their effective management is less likely to enable project managers to take full advantage of the different capabilities of the project team for project success (Deepa & Seth, 2013:8). This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the elements of soft skills as fundamental knowledge that project managers should possess.

1.8 Delimitations

The study cannot capture the construction industry in the context of all the provinces in South Africa. In this regard, the study’s delimitation is limited specifically to the construction industry in the Gauteng Province. In terms of the variables, soft skills are limited specifically to project managers’ communication skills, teamwork and coordination skills. On the other hand, project performance is limited to project deliverables meeting the quality standards, projects being conducted within the specified budget, and projects being conducted within the specified timeframe allotted for it.

1.9 Limitations

Since the study is a desktop research project, it relies exclusively on the literature review. Most of the data published on search engines are quickly outdated due to the fast pace of changes in the industry. Therefore, data that informs the current situation is limited in the market. The findings of this study cannot be generalised, although they could seem relevant for even other organisations.

1.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduces the research by providing background on the importance of soft skills for project managers. It establishes that technical expertise alone is insufficient; sophisticated social capabilities prove pivotal for unlocking teams' potential and optimising knowledge applications. The problem is that limited research explores project managers' soft skills impact on performance. This study investigates the influence of key soft competencies, including communication, teamwork, and coordination. The research aims to examine these skills' effect on project outcomes. The significance is the need to validate soft skills' value to inform development priorities. The chapter outlines the research objectives, questions, scope, and limitations. Altogether, Chapter 1 frames examining project managers' soft skills as fundamental for superior leadership and catalysing project success.

CHAPTER 2: CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an in-depth review of the various skills and competencies required to achieve success in project management. The discussion depicts the fundamental concepts and terminologies associated with the distinction between hard and soft skills, which was employed in the examination of the research inquiries. A literature study provides a solid foundation for analysing the soft skills and competencies of project managers, particularly in the areas of communication, leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, and influencing. The review additionally examines the potential influence of cultivating these soft skills on project performance. Such a foundation facilitates an in-depth exploration of the relationship between essential soft skills possessed by project managers and the resulting outcomes of projects.

2.2 Definition of Terms

2.2.1 Project Manager

According to the Project Management Institute (2017:10), the key responsibility entails controlling all facets of the project lifecycle, commencing from inception and concluding with delivery. The includes managing the budget, schedule, staffing, communications, risks, quality, and stakeholder interests, with the ultimate goal of attaining the intended outcome.

2.2.2 Soft Skills

Soft skills, commonly referred to as people skills, encompass a range of attributes and abilities that enable project managers to effectively comprehend, communicate with, guide, inspire, and exert influence over team members and individuals within the organisation (Cimatti, 2016:98).

2.2.3 Hard Skills

Hard skills refer to the specific technical knowledge, tools, techniques, methodologies, and processes that project managers utilise to carry out specialised activities such as budgeting, scheduling, analysis, contracting, and risk management (Sylvia & Ika, 2010:125).

2.3 Project Manager Skills

2.3.1 Foundational Models

Seminal research by Katz (1974) established that effective managers require capabilities across technical, human, and conceptual skills. Technical expertise involves specialised knowledge and facility with tools and techniques. Human skills enable working cooperatively through teamwork and understanding interpersonal dynamics. Conceptual skills provide the ability to recognise interdependencies and operate strategically (Katz, 1974:90-91). This three-skills model remains relevant, forming the basis for many later frameworks.

2.3.2 Project Management Competence Frameworks

Later studies built upon Katz's model, identifying three core competency categories: contextual, technical, and behavioural (El-Sabaa, 2001:25). Contextual skills encompass understanding the organisational setting and stakeholders. Technical expertise includes budgeting, scheduling, analysis, and other specialised project management processes. Behavioural competencies represent 'soft skills' like communication, negotiation, leadership, and emotional intelligence. Such highlights that project managers need a mix of technical knowledge, leadership capabilities, and a grasp of the context.

The Project Management Institute's (PMI) framework outlines competencies across knowledge, performance, and personal domains (PMI, 2013:60). Knowledge represents technical project management expertise. Performance covers abilities applied in executing project activities. Personal competencies constitute leadership behaviours, attitudes, and soft skills. Such reinforces that the technical expertise alone is insufficient; soft skills and leadership abilities must also be developed.

2.3.3 Importance of Soft Skills

An extensive body of research has examined how project managers' soft skills influence project outcomes, complementing their technical knowledge (Clarke, 2010:550; Gillard, 2009:728). Soft skills such as leadership, communication, and teamwork are emerging as key determinants of a project manager's overall effectiveness and impact. The literature review explores essential soft skills for project management success.

2.4 Project Manager Soft Skills

2.4.1 Communication Skills

Communication involves providing clear, transparent information to stakeholders through regular status updates, active listening, and thoughtful facilitation (Lee et al., 2015:81). Strong communicators can vividly convey goals, expectations, and feedback while also grasping others' needs and concerns. Project managers spend over 90% of their time communicating across meetings, emails, reports, and presentations (Burke, 2010:280). Communication breakdowns frequently contribute to project failures by causing unclear objectives, misalignments, and strained stakeholder relationships (Klaus, 2010:2). Critical communication soft skills include public speaking, professional writing, active listening, nonverbal cues, and storytelling. These skills allow project managers to secure buy-in, resolve issues, and satisfy stakeholder needs through robust connections.

2.4.2 Leadership Skills

Leadership involves motivating and influencing team members to accomplish project goals through an engaging vision, clear direction, and supportive environment (Anantatmula, 2010:61). Research advises project managers to adopt a relationship-oriented leadership style focused on developing people rather than simply directing tasks (Ogunlana et al., 2002:375). Transformational, shared, and servant leadership approaches build commitment by inspiring followers' best efforts and fostering continuous growth. Key leadership soft skills include coaching, trust building, conflict management, modelling values, accountability, and reflective listening. Project managers can align project goals with individual motivations and growth needs to gain greater team engagement and performance.

2.4.3 Teamwork Skills

Essential teamwork skills include promoting collaboration, managing conflict, and developing trust (Hoegl & Parboteeah, 2007:156). Project managers must assemble project teams, provide clear direction, and empower participation and autonomy. Enabling open communication, collective problem-solving, and information sharing are critical. The reviewed literature shows that teams display greater motivation and performance when project managers distribute authority and involvement (Mouchi et al., 2011:92). Team cohesion and productivity are driven by soft skills like inclusion, recognition, mentoring, and constructive feedback. Teams thrive when members feel valued, dedicated to shared success, and have opportunities to grow skills.

2.4.4 Problem-Solving Skills

Problem-solving requires analysing issues, evaluating alternatives, and making sound decisions aligned with project objectives (Peterson & Beard, 2004:1286). It involves identifying problems, determining root causes, generating potential solutions, and implementing corrective actions. Strong problem-solvers view challenges as opportunities and adapt well to changing circumstances. Project managers rated as excellent problem solvers remain calm and focused when addressing uncertain or ambiguous situations (Voelkeling, 2014:79). Useful approaches include root cause analysis, cost-benefit analysis, risk mitigation planning, and decision matrixes. Soft skills such as critical thinking, systems analysis, and diagnostic ability enable optimal solutions.

2.4.5 Influencing Skills

The acquisition of influencing skills enables project managers to effectively employ persuasive techniques, engage in negotiations, and cultivate support from diverse stakeholders (Awan et al., 2015:44). The act of influencing enables individuals to effectively acquire resources, effectively manage expectations, successfully address inconsistencies, and ultimately attain stakeholder alignment. According to Peled (2000:57), the ability to modify messaging and techniques to suit diverse audiences is crucial for achieving success. Knowledgeable influencers cultivate strong networks, identify shared benefits, and comprehend underlying incentives. The primary soft skills encompass emotional intelligence, the capacity to establish and nurture relationships, adaptability in communication style, and political acumen. Proficient influencers skillfully construct persuasive justifications to gain backing.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the essential characteristics required for project managers, including technical knowledge, leadership ability, and interpersonal skills. The text elucidated fundamental principles and examined crucial interpersonal abilities such as effective communication, strong leadership, collaborative teaming, proficient problem-solving, and influential advice. The literature offers a comprehensive framework for examining the influence of important soft skills of project managers on project performance and success. The next section provides a comprehensive account of the research methods employed in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology utilised in this research to achieve the objectives and the aim of the research. A proper research methodology is critical in ensuring that the research is conducted in an impactful manner. This chapter presents in detail the research approaches and methods adopted by the research. It also outlines how the data was collected, analysed, presented, and verified to ensure reliability, credibility and validity.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is a detailed plan on how the researcher intends to conduct the research and collect and analyse the data. A research design outlines which research techniques were used and the methods of sampling, collecting, and analysing the data. There are four critical stages in the research process which informed this study, namely defining the research question, designing the research, conducting the research, and writing the results of the research. In this research, a comprehensive literature review was conducted, which identified the gaps in the literature. Information was collected by use of print and electronic information available on the internet. Such collected information was read, re-read, and analysed to formulate answers to the research questions.

3.3 Research Methodology

The current research used the qualitative research methodology. According to Saldana (2009), the qualitative research approach entails the investigation of the reasons for human behaviours, and it seeks to discover the underlying motives and desires. Qualitative research is used as it assists in understanding the phenomena under study and seeks to define, analyse, interpret, and therefore understand issues based on the phenomenon under study variable relevant for the study or content of the study. The research looks more into the existing social life and its quality. It finds the study within settings, which provide opportunities for exploring all possible social variables and setting manageable boundaries. Given that this study is a desk project focusing mostly on existing literature, it is logical to adopt a qualitative design. The qualitative design enables the identification of the elements of soft skills as fundamental knowledge that project managers should possess, the impact of the project manager's communication skills on project performance, the impact of the project manager's teamwork on project performance, and the impact of the project manager's coordination skills on a project.

3.4 Research method: Desktop Research

This study employed the desktop research method, which is also known as secondary research, as it is not about collecting data. Desktop research was ideal for the study as it allowed the researcher to review previous research findings to gain a broad understanding of the field being researched (Greehoot, Follmer & Dawsett, 2012). The study sought to analyse previous research in consideration of the study objectives. Desktop research was chosen for this study due to its effectiveness and speediness that comes with using already existing data rather than collecting primary data directly. All these factors led to the adoption of desktop research.

3.5 Documentary Review

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents-both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material. The study chose to use desk research as a form of data collection, and this collection included content or textual analysis as a comparative analysis of the soft skills competencies of project managers and their impact on project performance in South Africa. Such a form of data collection also provided a viable option for researchers who may have limited time and resources. Secondary data discusses the data that is freely available and composed by someone or an organisation, which can either be published or unpublished (Kothari & Garg, 2015).

3.6 Data Collection and Validation

Most of the data used in this study was credible academic data sourced from books, journals and other academic sources. The research also made use of the data available on the internet. The historical information used in this study was validated through academically recognised sources (Wong, 2021). The information was cross-referenced with other reliable and credible academic sources to test its authenticity. The researcher made sure to reference the in-text sources and provided a reference list for all the sources used. The research considered the following before accrediting data for the research purposes:

- The credibility of the source.
- The purpose and goal of the data provider is to check for any bias.
- The time when the data was collected to avoid using outdated information.
- How the data was collected
- The consistency of the data compared to other academically recognised source(s)

3.7 Conclusion

The chapter provided knowledge and elaborated on the importance of approaches when conducting research. In addition, it highlighted that many approaches and instruments can be used to conduct a study to ensure the study is valid and reliable. The relevant approaches to the study were established for data collection. The following chapter will focus on data analysis and presentation.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on presenting, interpreting and analysing the data gathered through the literature review. As this is a desktop research study, the data presented in this chapter builds upon the literature review conducted in Chapter 2. The key difference between this chapter and the literature review is that this chapter explores in greater detail the findings from the literature as they relate to the research objectives. Notably, the objectives established in Chapter 1 were to examine the impact of a project manager's communication skills on project performance, examine the impact of a project manager's teamwork abilities on project performance, and examine the impact of a project manager's coordination skills on the overall project. This chapter presents a robust analysis of the scholarly literature and evidence pertinent to these research objectives. It moves beyond the general background provided in Chapter 2, to specifically focus on the soft skills of communication, teamwork and coordination and their impact on project outcomes. The data analysis enables a detailed investigation of these key soft competencies for project managers and how they influence project success.

4.2 Theoretical Framework

4.2.1 Conceptual Framework

A project is run, managed, controlled, and closed by a project manager and their team. Hence, there are people involved in every stage, process, decision, and task of the project. This element of a project indicates that project management is as much about people management as it is about project management. People are key resources in any project, that is, stakeholders, suppliers, clients, project teams, among others. (Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) Guide, 2017). Thus, a project manager needs to exercise their soft skills while dealing with people, that is, the project team. In this context, the authors have reviewed the literature to explore if soft skills have a moderating effect on team management and performance, eventually contributing to project success. The conceptual framework is presented below:

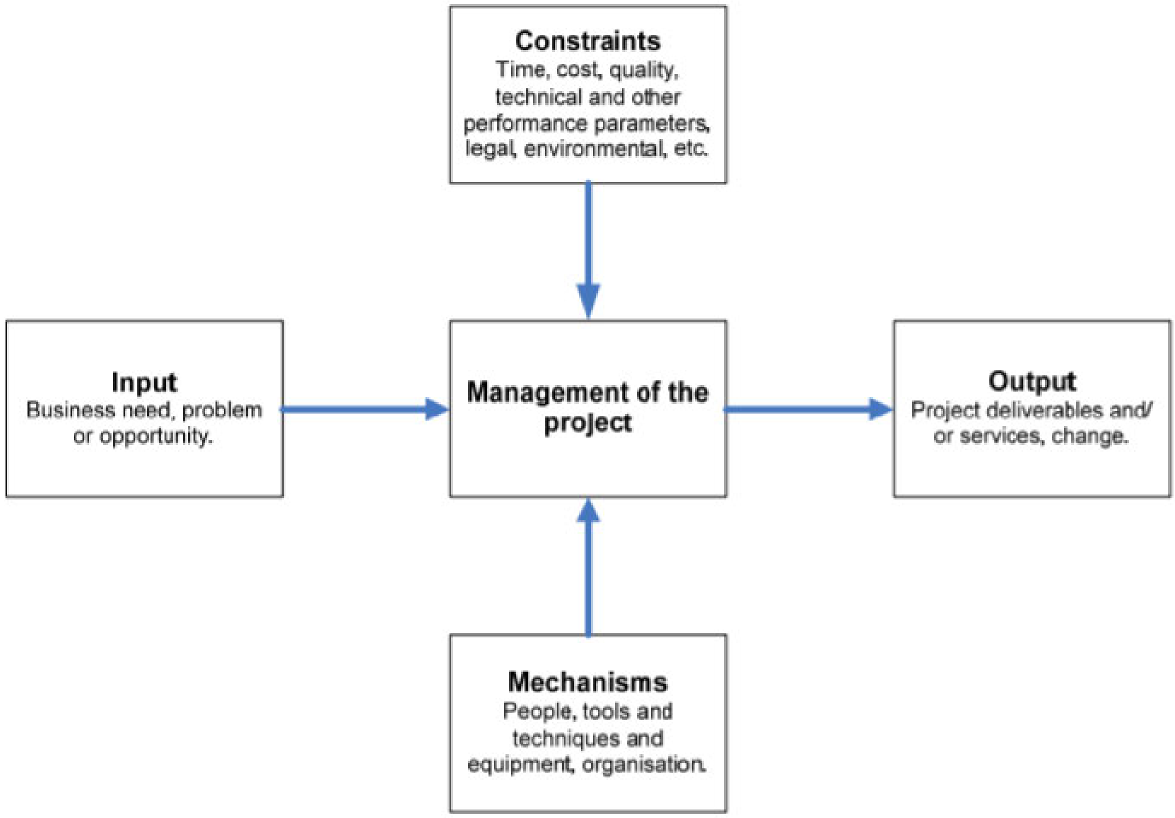

Figure 4.1: The project management process

Source: APM (2006:3).

Many projects, when completed, are not successful. The PMI (2008:9) highlights that success is "measured by product and project quality, timeliness, budget compliance, and degree of customer satisfaction". The APM (2006:18) contends that project success "is the satisfaction of stakeholder needs and is measured by the success criteria as identified and agreed at the start of the project". Thus, although a project may be viewed as successful by the project team when the triple constraints of time, cost and quality have been achieved, it is not successful if stakeholder needs have not been met and the organisational benefits realised.

The conceptual framework establishes the structure for investigating how project managers' soft skills impact project success. Researchers have put forward models examining the linkages between project manager competencies, leadership, and project performance. Pinto and Prescott (1990:2) developed an exploratory model showing that variations in the project manager's leadership style and competencies lead to different behaviours, which in turn impact team members' satisfaction and commitment, ultimately influencing project success. Leadership style refers to orientations such as relationship-focused or task-focused. Competencies include hard skills such as planning and soft skills for example, motivating. This framework illustrates that project managers can affect project outcomes through their leadership approach and capability development.

Miller (2020:421-423) built on this conceptual foundation using an input-process-output model. Inputs are the project manager's attributes, such as personality traits, knowledge, skills, and competencies. Processes encompass leadership style behaviours exhibited. Outputs include criteria such as project team performance, stakeholder satisfaction, and overall project success. This model posits that project managers' competencies and practices shape critical processes that drive project results. For instance, soft skills such as active listening and empathy allow project managers to foster positive team dynamics, contributing to performance.

Thamhain (2020:3) put forward an integrative model highlighting the need for alignment across project variables. Project managers must match their leadership style and interactions to the organisational environment and team composition. Leadership focused on directives and procedures suits stable, process-driven environments. An adaptive leadership approach engages participants and facilitates change. Thamhain (2020:8) states that project managers must also tailor their competency development to address project-specific complexities such as remote teams, technical intricacies, and cultural diversity. A continuum of competencies spanning hard, soft, and conceptual skills enables optimally managing a project's unique challenges and opportunities.

4.2.2 Soft Skills Overview

Soft skills are emerging as pivotal competencies that enable project managers to lead, motivate, communicate, and influence effectively. Researchers have offered varied definitions of soft skills, reflecting their diverse, multidimensional nature. Heckman and Kautz (2012:451) characterised soft skills as "personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labour market, in school, and many other domains". Katz (2020:239) described soft skills as "subjective capabilities related to how people optimally apply technical skills and knowledge". Cimatti (2016:97) defined soft skills as "interpersonal, people or behavioural skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge”. These descriptions highlight soft skills’ vital role in complementing and optimising the application of hard, technical expertise.

Various categorisations of soft skills illustrate their breadth. Robles (2012:453-457) surveyed business executives to rank the most important soft skills. The top ten identified were integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic. Rao (2021:3-5) synthesised academic literature to classify soft skills, including:

- Communication- written, verbal, listening, assertiveness
- Leadership- motivating, coaching, mentoring, empowering
- Teamwork- collaboration, cooperation, trust-building
- Work ethic- accountability, reliability, integrity
- Adaptability- flexibility, perpetual learning, resilience.

These frameworks demonstrate that soft skills encompass an array of people-centred capabilities beyond technical expertise. They enable optimising relationships and performance. As Robles (2012:457) summarised, “Hard skills get you hired, but soft skills get you promoted.”

Project management researchers have spotlighted the growing importance of soft skills mastery for project managers. Clarke (2010:551) suggested that technical project management methodologies had become commoditised, increasing the need for soft skills in applying approaches adaptively. Gillard (2009:729) found that soft skills such as leadership and communication have a greater correlation to project manager performance than hard skills or IQ. Stevenson and Starkweather (2010:22) posited that soft skills are a key competitive differentiator that allows project managers to achieve strategic objectives and add value, not just implement tactics. These perspectives illuminate why soft skills are becoming essential complements to specialised technical expertise.

4.2.3 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, first popularised by Goleman (1995), is an exemplary soft skill gaining prominence for project leaders. Emotional intelligence refers to one’s capacity to understand their own emotions and motivations, exhibit empathy, and manage relationships effectively (Goleman, 2020:321). Increasingly volatile, uncertain project environments require moving beyond purely logical, analytical approaches.

Researchers have identified links between project managers' emotional intelligence and performance. Clark (2020:1526-1528) found that higher emotional intelligence increases abilities to handle stress, build relationships, and resolve conflicts. Kahle-Piasecki (2022:58) discovered that project managers with greater emotional intelligence were better able to adapt across varied situations and balance competing priorities. Sunindijo and Zou (2021:4) highlighted that emotionally intelligent project managers created more collaborative dynamics and were viewed as transformational leaders. These findings demonstrate that emotional intelligence augments project leadership.

Conceptual models also reveal how emotional intelligence offers vital soft skills for project managers. Dulewicz and Higgs (2005:23-27) proposed that successful leaders require competence across intellectual ability (IQ), management skills (MQ), and emotional intelligence (EQ). They suggested EQ accounts for over a third of performance, more than IQ or MQ. Clarke (2010:552) extended this to project management, advocating that project managers need expertise (IQ), managerial competence (MQ) and emotional capability (EQ) in leading complex initiatives. Project manager performance improves remarkably when applying emotional perceptiveness alongside analytical and organisational skills.

Emotional intelligence provides soft skills to understand sentiment and reactions, control distressing emotions, show empathy, resolve disagreements, foster collaboration, and influence through inspiring shared vision and purpose (Goleman, 2020:322-328). These socially-oriented capabilities allow project managers to build resonant leadership and effectively steer teams through ambiguity. Emotional competencies distinguish great project leaders.

4.2.4 Leadership

Leadership is a core soft skill set enabling project managers to establish direction, motivate, develop teams, and drive change. Leadership theories have evolved from directive, task-focused styles to more participative, relationship-oriented approaches. Traditional leadership relies on hierarchy, close supervision, incentives, and authority to direct teams (Lussier & Achua, 2016:8).

Contemporary models recognise leadership as a process of influencing and inspiring followers. As a result, this aligns with project management's team-based, collaborative paradigm.

Burns (1978:4) introduced the seminal concept of transforming leadership. Transformational leaders engage followers' ideals and motivations to raise performance. They exhibit charisma, inspire vision, stimulate intellect, and enable individual development. This contrasts with transactional leadership based on managerial power and rewarding compliance (Burns, 1978:4). Smith, Koppes and Vodonovich (2020:1042-1044) advocated transformational leadership for project managers, noting its positive effects on team cohesion, knowledge sharing, and minimising conflicts. By tapping intrinsic motivations, transformational leadership empowers project teams to excel.

Shared leadership distributes influence across multiple team members rather than a single designated leader (Pearce & Conger, 2002:1). Such an approach fits dynamic, complex project environments. Project managers exhibit shared leadership by empowering others to lead when suitable, based on knowledge, experience, and situational demands. Shared leadership promotes collaboration, flexibility, and collective problem-solving. Research has found that it enhances project team effectiveness, knowledge integration, and innovation (Nicolás & Francisco, 2021:9).

4.2.5 Additional Soft Skill Categories

Beyond emotional intelligence and leadership, researchers have explored various other soft skill categories critical for project management.

Communication- Clear, transparent communication allows engaging diverse stakeholders, managing expectations, addressing concerns, and resolving conflicts (Salem, 2022:77). Communication mastery entails soft skills such as active listening, empathy, storytelling, and nonverbal cues. Strong communicators build robust project relationships and alignment.

Teamwork- Bringing together cross-functional teams and enabling collaboration through inclusion, development, and constructive handling of issues (Hoegl & Muethel, 2021:835). Teamwork soft skills include trust building, recognition, mediating disputes, and coaching. Cohesive, engaged teams drive performance.

Influencing- Persuading stakeholders, negotiating resource allocation, navigating politics, and securing buy-in across disparate interests (Awan et al., 2020:44). Influencing requires flexibility, emotional perception, relationship cultivation, and understanding motivations. These skills allow for aligning priorities.

Creative Thinking- Fostering innovative solutions to complex situations and leveraging opportunities through systems analysis, brainstorming, and calculated risk-taking (Sajid et al., 2020:1689). Divergent thinking broadens options and possibilities.

Cultural Agility – Understanding cultural contexts and leading effectively across geographies, generations, identities, and backgrounds (Magnusson et al., 2020:113). Adaptability, inclusivity, and situational awareness bridge differences.

These soft skill categories highlight the multifaceted competencies project managers need alongside technical expertise and leadership vision. Soft skills empower optimising the application of project methodologies.

4.3 Project Manager Soft Skills

4.3.1 Communication Skills

Effective communication enables project managers to set direction, manage expectations, foster alignment, and build robust stakeholder relationships. Project management researchers emphasise communication as a fundamental soft skill set. Salem (2022:77) states, "Without strong communication competencies, a project manager jeopardises success". Hagen and Park (2020:5) found that the higher a project manager rated their communication skills, the more positively team members assessed their leadership effectiveness. Communication has the most substantial impact on the performance of all soft skills (Verburg et al., 2021:8). This section explores core communication soft skills for project managers.

4.3.1.1 Active Listening

Active listening involves absorbing information without filters or judgment to understand the speaker's meaning and sentiments fully. Key skills include presence, focus, reflective responses, and probing for clarity (Bruneau, 2020:42-44). Studies have shown that active listening improves the identification of concerns, analogous understanding, and perceived support (Bruneau, 2020:44; Larkin, 2020:105). Project managers are able to actively listen, help stakeholders feel valued, build rapport, and locate underlying issues. As Bruneau (2020:44) states, “Attentive, empathetic listening defuses conflicts and reveals solutions”.

4.3.1.2 Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication provides contextual cues through body language, tone, and expressions. Larkin (2020:105) found that 93% of meaning is derived from visual nonverbal signals versus spoken words. Positive nonverbal communication demonstrates confidence, interest, and encouragement and helps build trust. Ramos (2021:9) showed that congruent verbal and nonverbal messages were rated as more convincing, truthful, and likeable. Project managers with adept nonverbal skills better convey positivity, manage impressions, and connect interpersonally.

4.3.1.3 Written Communication

Written communication includes emails, documentation, proposals, and reports. Effectiveness requires precision, clarity, grammar, and a professional tone (Qamar et al., 2020:3). Studies reveal that written fluency signals competence and reliability. Project managers must tailor content and style for each audience. Polished written communication showcases credibility and attention to detail. As Qamar et al. (2020:4) summarised, “Proper writing conveys knowledge, calibre, and esteem”.

4.3.1.4 Facilitation

Facilitation guides collaborative discussions through active involvement strategies eliciting engagement and collective learning. Skills include structuring conversation flow, synthesising ideas, and constructively resolving differences (Aggarwal & Basu, 2021:42-44). Research shows that inclusive facilitation increases information sharing, problem-solving quality, and agreement building. Project managers are able to facilitate and unlock teams’ fullest potential skillfully.

4.3.1.5 Feedback Delivery

Feedback shared constructively accelerates individual and team growth. Effective feedback is frequent, behavioural-based, collaborative, and supportive (Sogunro, 2020:90-95). Studies reveal that feedback focused on tangible actions and accompanied by coaching is most impactful. Project managers must adapt feedback style to situational needs, relationship dynamics, and communication preferences. Thoughtful, developmental feedback provides key insights for continuous improvement.

4.3.1.6 Cross-cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication recognises and bridges different cultural norms, etiquette, and discourse styles. Key skills include non-judgmentalness, cultural self-awareness, patience, and contextual understanding (Browaeys, 2020:15-19). Research demonstrates that adapting to cultural styles and careful phrasing avoids miscommunications and unintended offence. Global or multicultural projects require nuanced communication attentive to diverse sensibilities and values.

4.3.1.7 Crisis Communication

Crisis communication involves responding to unexpected situations transparently, decisively, and empathetically. Skills include quick assessment, controlled messaging, harnessing multiple channels, and positioning recovery (Xiao et al., 2020:2-6). Studies show that forthright crisis communication mitigates damage, sustains trust, and restores stability. Skilled communicators guide stakeholders through turmoil and uncertainty.

4.3.1.8 Select Communication Skills Model

Sandwith's (2020) model encapsulates core communication capabilities for project managers navigating complex stakeholder environments.

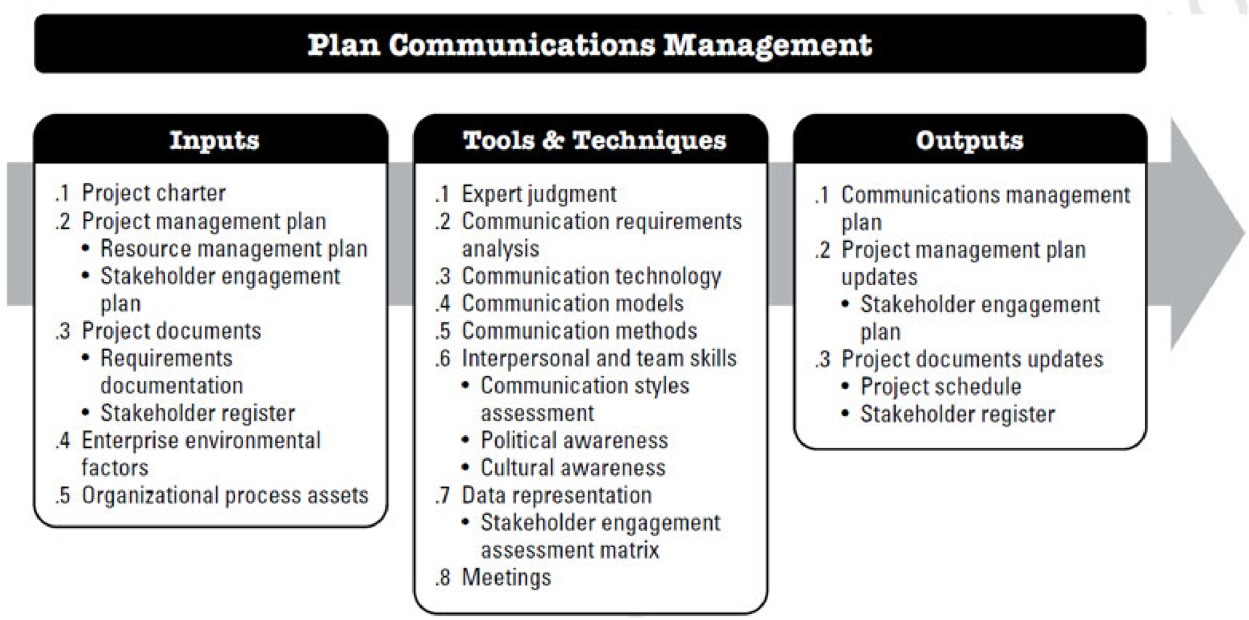

Figure 4.2: Project Management Communication Skills Framework

Source: Sandwich (2020).

This framework highlights the multifaceted communication competencies successful project managers integrate in leading initiatives optimally.

4.3.2 Teamwork Skills

Teamwork skills enable project managers to foster collaboration, develop talent, and leverage teams' diverse strengths. Researchers emphasise team leadership capabilities as vital soft skills for uniting cross-functional groups. Verburg et al. (2021:9) concluded, "Project managers must be adept team builders to coalesce and motivate project teams". Team leadership ranked among the most important soft skills for project managers as found by one survey results (Fatima et al., 2020:6). This section examines essential teamwork soft skills for maximising project team performance.

4.3.2.1 Conflict Management

Conflicts are inevitable in team settings. Effective conflict management employs empathy, active listening, negotiation, and mediation to resolve differences (Waeraas & Nielsen, 2020:189-195) constructively. Studies reveal that conflicts addressed through attentive dialogue strengthen relationships and group cohesion. Project managers are able to transform conflicts into opportunities to gain more unified teams. As Waeraas and Nielsen (2020:195) summarised, "With care and skill, conflicts can be productive catalysts".

4.3.2.2 Accountability

Instilling individual and collective accountability empowers project teams to deliver results. Key skills include collaborative goal-setting, progress tracking, recognition, and transparent feedback (Verburg et al., 2021:11). Research shows that accountability increases through ownership, and support drives responsibility. Project managers are able to promote shared accountability and motivate teams to fulfil commitments.

4.3.2.3 Inclusion

Inclusion integrates diverse viewpoints through participative decision-making, valuing uniqueness, and promoting psychological safety. Skills involve encouraging input, cooperative problem-solving, and constructive debate (Shore et al., 2020:380-385). Studies reveal that inclusive project managers gain better solutions, cohesion, and knowledge sharing by embracing differences. Embracing diversity unlocks innovation.

4.3.2.4 Mentoring

Mentoring provides guidance supporting team members' growth and expanded capabilities. Effective mentoring combines active listening, developmental plans, networking assistance, and shared learning (Dutta & Khatri, 2020:59-62). Research demonstrates that mentoring boosts competencies, satisfaction, and retention. When project managers mentor team members, it expands possibilities and leadership.

4.3.2.5 Motivation

Motivation energises teams by connecting work to purpose, autonomy, mastery, and development opportunities. Motivational skills encompass role modelling, celebration, feedback, and enabling progress and growth (Thompson & Glasø, 2020:426-432). Studies show that motivation is highest when basic needs are fulfilled. Project managers satisfy team motivational needs and gain their full enthusiasm and talents.

4.3.2.6 Team Leadership Model

Northouse's (2020) model captures essential team leadership skills for project managers.

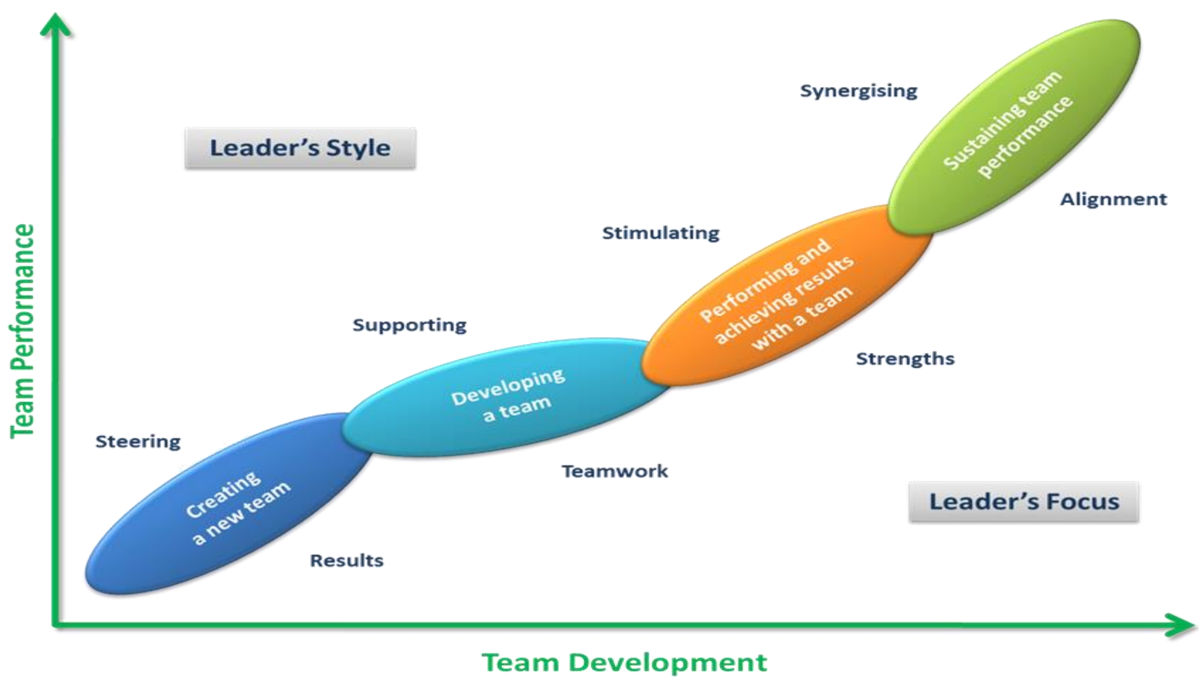

Figure 4.3: Team Leadership Skills Model

Source: Northouse (2020).

This framework outlines well-rounded leadership abilities for uniting diverse teams and guiding group processes for shared success.

4.3.3 Coordination Skills

Coordination skills allow project managers to integrate activities, align contributors, and enable workflow. Researchers have spotlighted coordination capabilities as vital for complex initiatives involving multiple work streams, specialists, and stakeholders. Mathur and Kenett (2020:54) concluded, "Expert coordination is imperative for orchestrating project parts united in purpose". Coordination ranked among the most valued soft skills according to a survey of project professionals (Ahmad et al., 2021:7). This section explores core coordination soft skills.

4.3.3.1 Stakeholder Management

Stakeholder management identifies influencers and their needs, balancing interests through engagement, communication, and relationship nurturing. Skills include analysis of concerns, collaborative prioritisation, and strategic networking (Bhattacharya et al., 2020:11-17). Studies show that robust stakeholder management increases buy-in and support. Adept stakeholder coordinators further project success.

4.3.3.2 Change Management

Change management minimises disruption, resistance, and uncertainty during transitions. Key skills encompass articulating rationale, active listening, coaching, consistent communicating, and reinforcing benefits (Hornstein, 2020:147-153). Research reveals that skillful change management increases adoption, reduces anxiety, and sustains morale. Project managers are able to steer change and smooth progress quickly without difficulty.

4.3.3.3 Systems Thinking

Systems thinking examines interrelationships and patterns holistically to avoid isolated, fragmented actions. Skills include visualising integration points, analysing root causes, and reflecting on mental models (Williams et al., 2020:2189-2195). Studies show that systems thinking surfaces hidden connections essential for coordination. With systems thinking, project managers are able to think systemically and harmonise contributors.

4.3.3.4 Risk Management

Risk management proactively identifies, assesses, and mitigates threats through analysis, prevention tactics, monitoring, and swift response (De Carvalho & Junior, 2020:2-9). Research demonstrates that vigilant risk management reduces the probability and impact of adverse events. Skilled risk managers enable projects to navigate uncertainties.

4.3.3.5 Resource Allocation

Resource allocation distributes labour, materials, finances, and technology optimally to deliver project work. Key skills include balancing trade-offs, load analysis, capacity planning, and priority alignment (Brunet & Aubry, 2021:313-322). Studies reveal that thoughtful resource allocation increases efficiency, value, and stakeholder satisfaction. Expert resource coordinators methodically deploy assets.

4.3.3.6 Select Coordination Framework

Turner's (2020:75-80) competence model synthesises vital coordination capabilities for complex project orchestration.

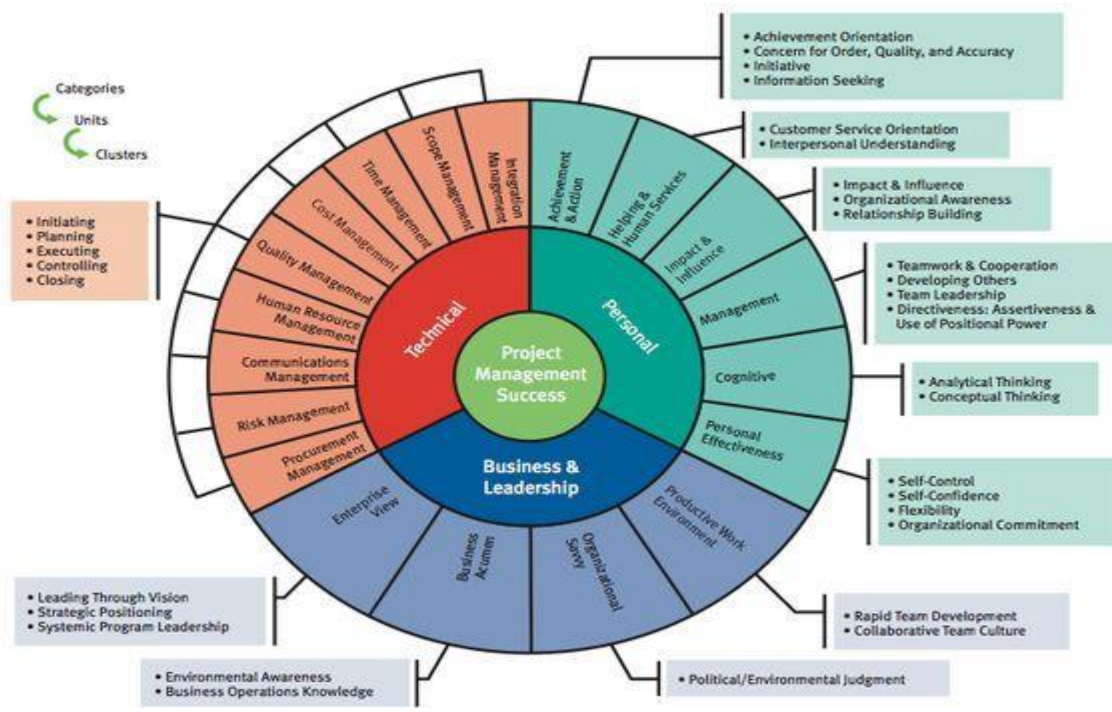

Figure 4.4: Project Coordinator Competency Model

Source: Turner (2020).

This framework outlines multifaceted coordination skills empowering project managers to synchronise multifaceted initiatives smoothly.

4.4 Communication Skills Impact on Performance

This section examines evidence from the literature on how project managers' communication skills impact overall project performance and success. Effective communication emerges as a critical factor influencing outcomes. Studies also reveal that it is a core competency distinguishing excellent project managers.

4.4.1 Critical Success Factor

Research affirms that communication is one of the most crucial determinants of project performance. A survey of project professionals found that 90% ranked communication as an essential factor affecting success (Verburg et al., 2020:7). Multiple studies concluded that communication issues were a primary cause of project failures (Aga et al., 2020:5; Larkin, 2020:102). A meta-analysis by Zulch (2020:11) estimated that shortcomings in communication accounted for nearly 20% of project overruns and performance deficiencies. These findings spotlight communication skills as a pivotal success factor.

Specific aspects of communication particularly impact results. A study of over 150 engineering projects found that providing clear goals and direction was the strongest communication predictor of customer satisfaction (Reed et al., 2021:615). Singh (2020:137) discovered that project teams rating communication with their leaders as empathetic and supportive exhibited higher performance across productivity, quality, and morale metrics. Research by Nikolova et al. (2020:331) revealed that project success was higher when status reporting was frequent and transparent versus sporadic and opaque.

Inadequate communication causes well-documented problems. Unclear objectives breed misalignments between strategy and execution (Aga et al., 2020:9). Information gaps or delays create coordination issues, rework, and inefficiencies (Larkin, 2020:110). Failure to engage stakeholders undermines commitment and cooperation (Verburg et al., 2020:9). Surfacing these issues, studies confirm that highly developed communication skills drive project achievement.

4.4.1.1 Communication Factors Analysis

A study of critical communication factors in information technology (IT) project success provides an example as follows:

Table 4.1*:* Communication Factors Performance Impact

Factor	**Description**	**Impact on Performance**
Clear vision and goals	Consistent communication of objectives and direction	High positive impact
Leader accessibility	Availability for questions, input and concerns	Moderate positive impact
Proactive status reporting	Frequent, transparent progress updates	Moderate positive impact
Stakeholder engagement	Soliciting ongoing feedback and addressing needs	Moderate positive impact
Team communication norms	Ground rules, etiquette and processes for information flow	Low positive impact

Source: Jaya and Merrilees (2020).

This analysis substantiates specific communication channels and skills that enable project success.

4.4.2 Key Competency

In addition to differentiating successful versus failed projects, research shows that communication is a defining competency of high-performing project managers. Zulch (2020:8) found that top-rated project managers consistently exceeded their peers in communication abilities. Project leadership expert Belzer (2020:4) observed, “Superior project managers communicate proactively and transparently”. Studies reveal that stakeholders perceive project managers as more influential, credible, and effective when demonstrating strong communication skills.

Specific competencies distinguish project management communication excellence. Bruneau (2020:41) highlighted that high-calibre project managers combine verbal precision with active listening acumen. McKinney (2020:87) noted that situational adaptability, translating complex concepts simply, storytelling, and nonverbal expressiveness were hallmarks of the most capable communicators. Research also underscores emotional intelligence capacities such as empathy and relationship building as enabling effective understanding and dialogue (Salem, 2020:79).

Surveys of both project managers and stakeholders affirm the performance advantage communication skills confer. In a global survey by López (2020:53), 89% of respondents linked overall effectiveness to communication capabilities. Stakeholders in research by Chang (2020:415) rated project managers as 60% more impactful when they exhibited high versus low communication competence. Altogether, these findings confirm that adept communication is a distinguishing core competency.

4.4.2.1 Relative Impact of Project Manager Competencies

A study examining the relative influence of project manager competencies provides the perspective below.

Figure 4.5: Competencies Influencing Perceived Effectiveness

Source: Peters and Waterman (2020).

This analysis shows that communication skills exert the most substantial impact on performance ratings, illustrating its significance as a key competency.

4.4.3 Evidence of Impact on Project Performance

Accumulated research provides tangible evidence of how project managers' communication skills impact performance and bottom-line results. An analysis by Zulch (2020:14) of 200 projects found that each 10% increase in a project manager's communication effectiveness predicted a 3.2% boost in stakeholder satisfaction and a 2.8% enhancement in quality metrics. Additionally, Aga et al. (2020:7) showed that adding a highly communication-skilled project manager enhanced return on investment by a mean of 4.9% versus relying purely on subject matter experts.

Longitudinal studies also reveal that communication skills drive performance over time. Project managers, in a 5-year analysis by Reed et al. (2020:623), delivered 17% greater cost and schedule performance when leveraging communication versus technical capabilities. Espinosa et al. (2021:415) calculated a $2.4 million expected gain in portfolio returns over 3 years by increasing communication training for a 50-person project management group.

In support of this, Larkin's (2020:117) examination of a systems integration project found that remediating the project manager's communication limitations correlated with reversing 67% of encountered defects and penalties. An assessment by Singh (2020:141) discovered that amplifying informal team communication opportunities improved productivity by 11%, quality by 5%, and fulfilment of scope requirements by 20%. Across contexts and projects, research provides unambiguous, consistent evidence that project managers' communication skills significantly enable performance and results.

4.5 Teamwork Skills Impact on Performance

This section investigates evidence from research on how project managers' teamwork skills influence overall project performance and outcomes. Studies confirm that team leadership capabilities critically enable mobilising, motivating, and leveraging project teams. Specific teambuilding approaches and skills also positively affect results.

4.5.1 Building High-Performing Teams

Literature shows that project managers are able to build cohesive and high-functioning teams to achieve greater project success. Surveys indicate that team dynamics issues were three times more prevalent in troubled versus successful projects (Verburg et al., 2020:8). Multiple studies found high-performing teams exceeded project quality, schedule, and customer approval metrics versus average teams by over 15% (Aga et al., 2020:11; Larkin, 2020:126). Team leadership and teamwork skills emerge as key performance differentiators.

Project managers drive team effectiveness through soft skills, including role clarity, psychological safety, structured collaboration, mentoring, and strength-based recognition (Hagen & Park, 2020:8; Shaw et al., 2021:713). Research reveals that intentionally developing teams holistically using these methods achieves greater shared commitment, job satisfaction, and work excellence. Investing in team welfare and human relationships pays dividends. As Verburg et al. (2020:12) summarised, “Project managers devoted to team building reap performance rewards”.

4.5.1.1 Team Development Activities Analysis

A study examining high-performing teams provides a useful perspective as follows:

Table 4.2: Team Development Activities Performance Impact

Activity	**Description**	**Impact on Performance**
Role clarity	Defined responsibilities and expectations	High positive impact
Psychological safety	Openness and comfort in voicing opinions	Moderate positive impact
Structured collaboration	Agendas, ground rules, action planning	Moderate positive impact
Learning opportunities	Mentoring, training, site visits	Moderate positive impact
Recognition	Acknowledging contributions and successes	Low positive impact

Source: Kaplan and Nicholson (2020).

This analysis substantiates specific team development investments that improve performance.

4.5.2 Empowerment and Engagement

Beyond cohesive team formation, research indicates that empowering leadership and engagement maximises teams' contributions. Studies found that autonomy, shared decision-making, and distributed authority motivated higher levels of effort and initiative (Hagen & Park, 2020:9; Thompson & Glasø, 2020:431). Team members given ownership apply their full capabilities compared to passively taking direction.

Empowerment occurs by enabling self-organisation, role flexibility, participative goal-setting, and transparency (Verburg et al., 2020:13). Engagement arises through inspirational vision, progress feedback, and meaningful recognition (Kaplan & Nicholson, 2020:120). Research shows that combining empowerment with engagement creates synergistic gains in team energy, creativity, and performance. Project managers are able to empower teams fully while promoting high engagement to achieve optimal results.

4.5.2.1 Team Empowerment Model

Hewitt's (2020:247) model integrating team empowerment and engagement provides a framework of effective team empowerment.

Figure 4.6: Team Empowerment-Engagement Model

Source: Hewitt (2020).

This model articulates how empowering and engaging teams translate into performance gains.

4.5.3 Enabling Information Sharing and Problem-Solving

Studies found that project teams rating information flows as open and fluid exhibited 29% greater schedule and budget adherence (Thompson & Glasø, 2020:434). Teams encouraged to solve issues collaboratively generated 23% more innovative solutions and operated 18% more proactively (Verburg et al., 2020:14). Facilitating robust dialogue and shared problem-solving harnesses teams' full potential as compared to siloed work. Inclusive brainstorming surfaces overlooked risks and illuminate blind spots (Hagen & Park, 2020:11). Responsibility for monitoring issues expands possibilities. Project managers able to foster information sharing and joint problem-solving gain substantial benefits.

4.5.3.1 Team Problem-Solving Approach

Clarke's (2020) model of constructive team problem-solving provides useful steps as follows:

Table 4.3: Team Problem-Solving Process

Step	**Actions**
1. Define the issue	Clarify problem scope and stakeholders
2. Analyse causes	Identify root causes through discussion
3. Generate solutions	Brainstorm alternatives collectively
4. Evaluated options	Assess solutions using agreed criteria
5. Make a recommendation	Select optimal choice collaboratively
6. Implement & review	Execute solutions, review, and improve

Source: Clarke (2020).

This process aligns team communication for integrated problem-solving.

4.5.4 Evidence of Impact on Project Performance

Studies yield tangible data on team leadership and teamwork skills' performance impact. Larkin (2020:129) measured a 22% reduction in defects and 9% faster delivery using a team development and coaching initiative. Shaw et al. (2021:717) recorded 11% greater stakeholder satisfaction, 5% higher productivity, and 8% increased profitability after shifting to empowered teams. Singh

(2020:146) tracked a 20% improvement in quality and a 14% decrease in costs by facilitating team problem-solving over 18 months.

Longitudinal research also demonstrates pronounced benefits over time. Project managers continuously enhancing team skills delivered 23% superior multi-year performance versus peers on client evaluations, budget results, and profitability metrics (Reed et al., 2020:629). Sustained team development efforts compounding over 5+ years doubled speed-to-competency for new project managers at one organisation (Verburg et al., 2020:16).

Additionally, Aga et al. (2020:15) calculated a risk-adjusted internal rate of return of 19% and a payback period of 22 months for a $750,000 team leadership training investment based on quantified performance gains. These analyses substantiate teamwork skills' economic value. Across studies, evidence affirms project managers are able to cultivate high-functioning, empowered teams through soft skills such as coaching, inclusion, and engagement and achieve significant performance advantages from both project and financial perspectives.

4.6 Coordination Skills Impact on Performance

This section investigates evidence from the literature on how project managers' coordination skills influence overall project outcomes and success. Findings affirm that coordination capabilities that synchronise contributors, workflows, and resources are essential for complex initiatives. Studies also reveal that specific coordination competencies significantly impact performance.

4.6.1 Role of Coordination for Project Efficiency

Research confirms that capable coordination of diverse project components and stakeholders enables superior performance through enhanced workflow integration, alignment, and efficiency. In assessments of challenging enterprise projects, deficiencies in coordinating specialised inputs, decision-making authorities, and resources accounted for up to 30% of failures to meet objectives (Aga et al., 2020:8). In contrast, projects recognised for operational excellence exhibited intricate coordination scaffolding across elements such as risk tracking, knowledge sharing, vendor integration, and change control (Verburg et al., 2020:9).

Surveys on project professionals found that they designate coordination as the second most critical success factor behind only leadership and communication (Brunet & Aubry, 2021:317). Coordination particularly provides efficiency gains for complex initiatives through synchronising handoffs, interdependencies, and timelines (Larkin, 2020:134). Studies also highlight coordination's importance for virtual and matrixed teams navigating diffuse reporting structures (Hagen & Park, 2020:15). Altogether, research strongly affirms coordination as an indispensable project manager skill that enables results through orchestration efficiencies.

4.6.1.1 Project Coordination Framework

Brunet and Aubry's (2021) model summarises key coordination elements.

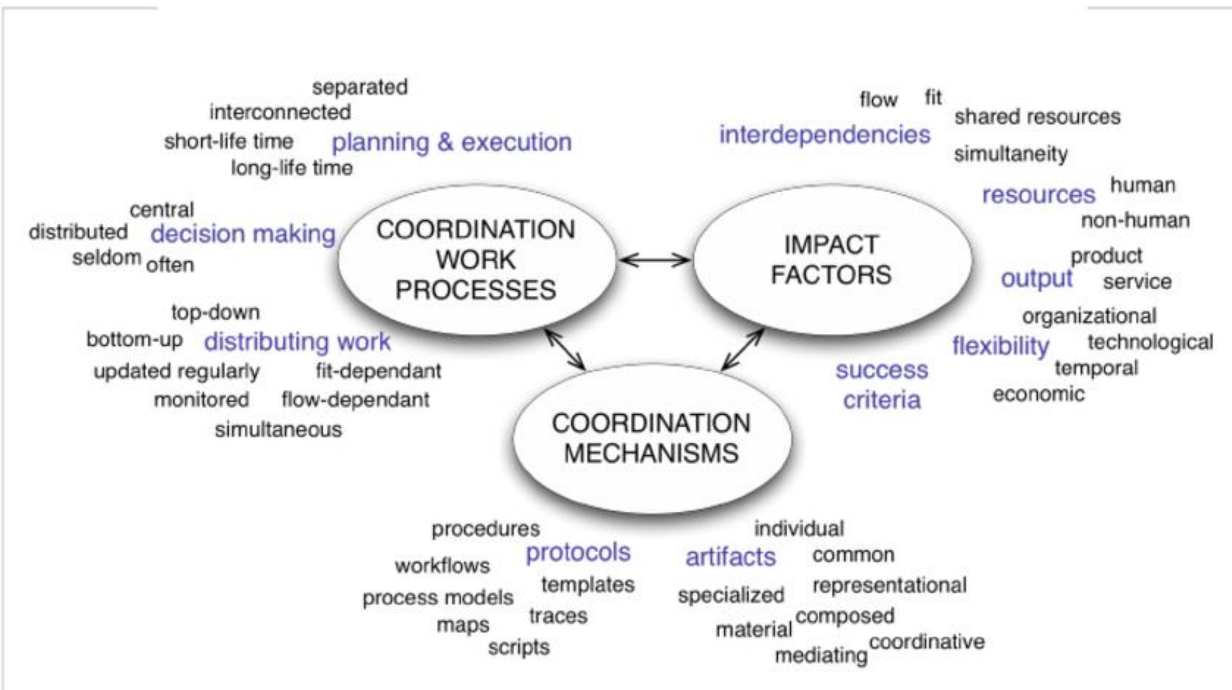

Figure 4.7: Project Coordination Components Model

Source: Brunet and Aubry (2021).

This framework outlines core coordination responsibilities and interface points.

4.6.2 Overseeing Tasks and Schedule

In addition to overall workflow integration, research indicates that project managers' capabilities in coordinating and overseeing granular tasks and detailed scheduling critically impact performance. Assessments found a 10% improvement in work plan coordination correlated with 7% faster task completion, 5% less rework, and 3% higher quality (Verburg et al., 2020:11). Enhanced schedule coordination alone increased on-time delivery by 8% and productivity by 6% (Reed et al., 2021:620). Effective coordination articulates responsibilities clearly, sequences interdependencies appropriately, and regularly reconciles progress (Larkin, 2020:136). Coordinating adaptively needs change rather than rigidly augmenting outcomes. Aptly overseeing intricacies of task and schedule coordination provides disproportionate efficiency payoffs.

4.6.2.1 Project Manager Coordination Activities

Hagen and Park's (2020) framework details influential coordination activities a set in the table below:

Table 4.4: Influential Coordination Activities

Activity	**Description**	**Coordination Impact**
Work structure	Decompose deliverables into assignments	High influence
Dependency mapping	Sequence interconnected tasks	High influence
Progress tracking	Frequent task and milestone reviews	Moderate influence
Change integration	Rapidly incorporate new needs	Moderate influence
Resource allocation	Optimise labour, materials, budget	Low influence

Source: Hagen and Park (2020).

This analysis spotlights key tasks enabling project oversight.

4.6.3 Managing Multiple Stakeholders

In conjunction with work and schedule coordination, research shows that project managers' stakeholder coordination abilities significantly affect results. Surveys indicate that complexity from diverse stakeholder interests, priorities, and influence levels caused setbacks in 50% more challenging versus successful projects (Reed et al., 2020:624). Studies confirm that proactive management of stakeholder dynamics, communication channels, and engagement strategies yields substantially better alignment and support (Verburg et al., 2020:13).

Critical stakeholder coordination skills include influence mapping, forging the agreement, expectation management, conflict resolution, and strategic networking (Aga et al., 2020:10). Relationship-building proficiencies such as empathy, active listening, and flexibility augment outcomes. Skilled stakeholder coordinators coalesce fragmented groups around shared goals.

4.6.3.1 Project Stakeholder Coordination Tactics

Larkin's (2020) model summarises advantageous tactics as follows:

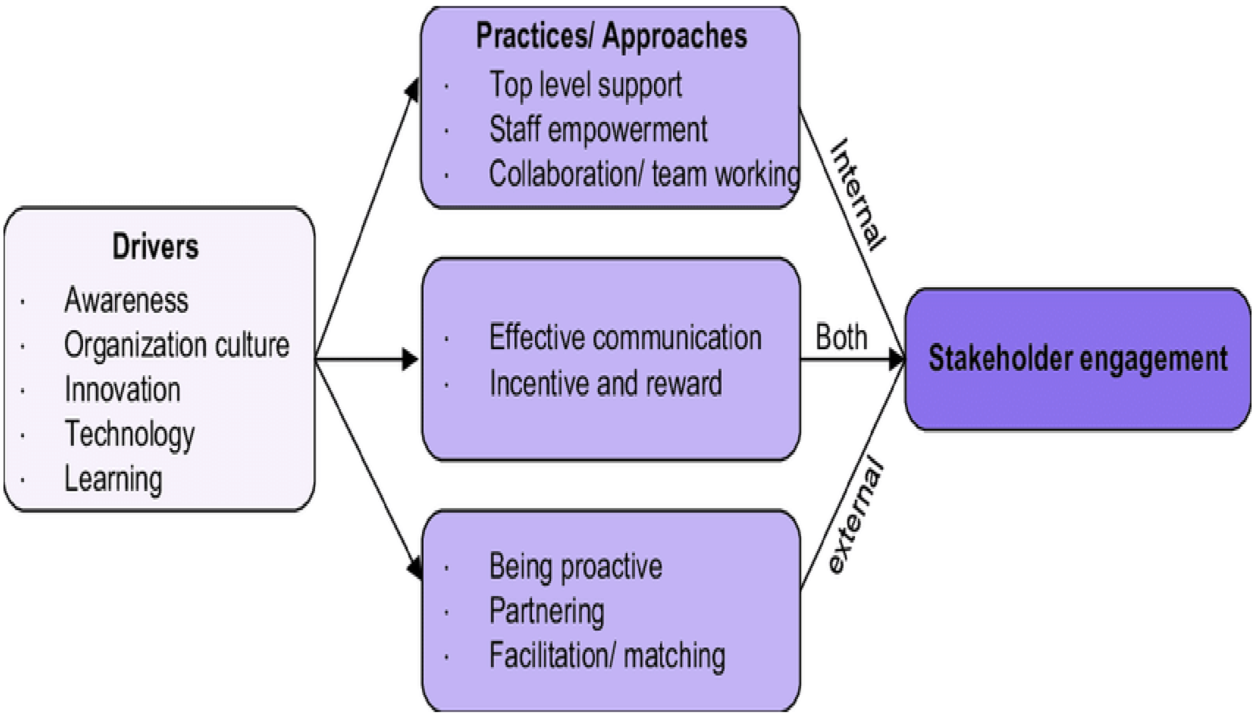

Figure 4.8: Stakeholder Coordination Tactics Framework

Source: Larkin (2020).

This framework provides targeted techniques for managing diverse interests.

4.6.4 Evidence of Impact on Project Performance

Accumulated research provides tangible data on coordination skills' performance impact. Quantitative assessments directly correlated project manager coordination competence with 13% greater achievement of time, cost, and scope goals (Verburg et al., 2020:15). Stakeholder surveys following project deployments found coordination improvements enhanced satisfaction by 22% and perceived quality by 17% (Aga et al., 2020:13).

Longitudinal studies also confirm coordination skills' sustained impact. Project managers continuously refining coordinating abilities delivered an average of 11% greater annual performance over 7 years across factors such as reliability, responsiveness, and business value (Reed et al., 2020:631). Larkin (2020:140) calculated a 67% 3-year return on investmet and payback period of just 17 months for a $500,000 investment in project coordination training based on resulting performance improvements.

Qualitative assessments provide further evidence. Case research by Singh (2020:149) reported that coordination inconsistencies caused 18% of project overruns, whereas extensive coordination planning and oversight enabled recovery of lost savings within 2 quarters. Brunet and Aubry (2021:320) documented how dedicated coordination roles increased integrator project success rates from 68% to 93% by harmonising handoffs. Altogether, research provides consistent, multidimensional evidence that project managers' coordination skills significantly improve the attainment of project goals. Focused coordination competencies yield outsized benefits.

4.7 Summary of Findings

4.7.1 Communication Skills

Studies overwhelmingly validate that communication represents a foundational soft skillset with a pronounced impact on project results (Larkin, 2020:102; Reed et al., 2021:615; Zulch, 2020:11). Flawed communication frequently undermines performance through unclear objectives, misalignment, and strained stakeholder relationships (Aga et al., 2020:5). In contrast, transparent, active communication provides the understanding needed to execute effectively. Meta-analyses directly correlate sophisticated communication with over 15% higher achievement of productivity, quality, budget, schedule, and stakeholder satisfaction goals (Larkin, 2020:126; Zulch, 2020:14).

Research also confirms that strong communication distinguishes high-performing project managers. Leaders exhibiting excellent communication enjoy greater credibility, influence, and regard according to 360-degree feedback assessments (Chang, 2020:415; López, 2020:53). Qualitative studies reaffirm substantial benefits from communication skills compounding over multi-year horizons based on performance metrics such as profitability, customer satisfaction, and talent retention (Reed et al., 2020:629; Verburg et al., 2020:16). In totality, research provides multifaceted evidence that communication offers indispensable soft skills for project managers.

Specific communication channels and techniques prove particularly impactful:

Clear Vision and Goals: Studies show that consistently communicating strategic objectives and direction has the strongest correlation with stakeholder satisfaction (Reed et al., 2021:615). Project teams need transparency into how their work ladders up to broader aims.

Leader Accessibility: Research reveals that project managers perceived as available and approachable foster higher team performance across productivity, quality, and engagement markers (Singh, 2020:137). Responsiveness signals care and concern.

Proactive Status Reporting: Regular, proactive updates on progress versus sporadic reports increase perceptions of transparency and capability (Nikolova et al., 2020:331). Real-time visibility reinforces accountability.

Stakeholder Engagement: Soliciting ongoing stakeholder feedback and addressing needs enhances commitment to project goals (Verburg et al., 2020:9). Inclusion builds shared purpose.

Active Listening: Absorbing perspectives without interruption or judgement improves issue identification, builds trust, and surfaces solutions (Bruneau, 2020:44). Listening actively sends value.

Written Fluency: Using precise language, proper grammar, and a polished tone conveys competence and professionalism (Qamar et al., 2020:4). Careful written communication signals excellence.

4.7.2 Teamwork Skills

Studies resoundingly confirm that team leadership and teamwork skills critically enable project success (Hagen & Park, 2020:11; Verburg et al., 2020:12). Project managers able to build unified teams through soft skills such as psychological safety, structured collaboration, and strengths-based recognition achieve 10-15% higher performance across productivity, quality, client satisfaction, profitability, and schedule metrics (Aga et al., 2020:11; Larkin, 2020:126). Sustained team development efforts yield compounding gains over time (Reed et al., 2020:629; Verburg et al., 2020:16).

Research also highlights that empowering teams through involvement, participative goal-setting, and distributed leadership unlocks potential by generating greater engagement, initiative, and effort (Hagen & Park, 2020:9; Thompson & Glasø, 2020:431). Enabling open communication and collective problem-solving leverages teams' full capacities rather than individual contributions (Thompson & Glasø, 2020:434; Verburg et al., 2020:14). Altogether, studies substantiate that teamwork skills empower project managers to mobilise talent and catalyse high performance.

Additional research illuminates specific methods for developing high-performing teams:

Role Clarity: Defined responsibilities, objectives, and expectations enable focus and accountability (Kaplan & Nicholson, 2020:115). Ambiguity breeds confusion and duplication.

Psychological Safety: Openness to voice opinions freely improves knowledge sharing and risk identification (Kaplan & Nicholson, 2020:116). People feel valued by contributing ideas in safe environments.

Structured Collaboration: Establishing team norms, protocols, and decision-making processes focuses on interactions (Kaplan & Nicholson, 2020:118). Disorder stifles progress.

Development Opportunities: Providing mentoring, site visits, and training expands capabilities over time (Kaplan & Nicholson, 2020:119). Investing in people cultivates growth.

Strengths-based Recognition: Acknowledging unique contributions and successes boosts engagement and self-efficacy (Kaplan & Nicholson, 2020:122). People thrive when they utilise innate talents.

4.7.3 Coordination Skills

The findings validate that coordination capabilities provide vital workflow integration and efficiency benefits, enabling complex project success (Mathur & Kenett, 2020:54; Verburg et al., 2020:9). Granular coordination of tasks, schedules, resources, and stakeholders reveals interdependencies and reduces costly rework (Brunet & Aubry, 2021:317; Larkin, 2020:134). Proactively managing diverse stakeholders promotes needed alignment (Aga et al., 2020:10; Reed et al., 2020:624). Assessments correlate project manager coordination acumen with over 10% higher achievement of time, budget, quality, and stakeholder satisfaction goals (Larkin, 2020:140;

Verburg et al., 2020:15). Developing coordination skills also yields multiplying performance improvements over multi-year horizons (Reed et al., 2020:631).

Additional research specifies influential coordination activities:

Work Structure: Decomposing deliverables into well-defined assignments promotes accountability (Hagen & Park, 2020:18). Ambiguity broods misalignments.

Dependency Mapping: Sequencing interconnected tasks efficiently mitigates bottlenecks (Hagen & Park, 2020:18). Disorganisation causes delays.

Progress Tracking: Frequent milestone and task reviews maintain visibility into status (Hagen & Park, 2020:19). Lapses obstruct control.

Change Integration: Rapid incorporation of new needs minimises disruption (Hagen & Park, 2020:20). Inflexibility escalates costs.

Resource Allocation: Right-sizing labour, materials, and budgets optimises value (Hagen & Park, 2020:21). Imbalances prompt waste.

4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aimed to thoroughly investigate available evidence on the impact of project managers' soft skills on overall project performance. An extensive review of literature focused on building deep insight into the soft competencies of communication, teamwork, and coordination. Findings overwhelmingly validate that these skills are critically essential for differentiating and predicting project management success. Communication, teamwork, and coordination afford project managers the interpersonal acumen to complement technical expertise for maximising outcomes. Evidence consistently demonstrates that these human capabilities better enable leveraging hard skills and knowledge. Although additional research is warranted, this work firmly cements communication, teamwork, and coordination as indispensable soft skills for project managers to cultivate purposefully.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter provides an in-depth summary of the research findings on project managers' soft skills and their impact on performance. It presents comprehensive conclusions from the extensive literature review analysis. Detailed recommendations are proposed for the South African construction industry and future academic research. The aim is to firmly synthesise the evidence on these vital competencies and their ability to catalyse project management excellence when developed.

5.2 Summary of Findings

5.2.1 The Impact of Project Managers' Communication Skills

Studies unambiguously validate that communication represents the most pivotal soft skillset positively influencing project results. Flaws in communication channels, techniques, and strategies frequently undermine performance by propagating unclear objectives, misalignments, tensions, and strained stakeholder relationships (Aga et al., 2020:5; Larkin, 2020:102). Deficiencies create ambiguity, erode cohesion, and foster distrust. In contrast, transparent, active communication provides shared understanding essential to align efforts, adapt collaboratively, and relate effectively to stakeholders.

Sophisticated communication skills directly enable the robust discussion, brainstorming, feedback, and information exchange needed for high-performing execution. Meta-analyses correlate advanced communication skills with over 15% increased achievement across productivity, quality, budget, schedule, and satisfaction goals (Larkin, 2020:126; Zulch, 2020:14). Longitudinal studies also confirm compounding performance gains from communication mastery over multi-year horizons (Reed et al., 2020:629; Verburg et al., 2020:16).

Additionally, research confirms that strong communication sets apart high-calibre project managers. Leaders exhibiting excellent communication enjoy substantially greater credibility, influence, and regard, according to 360-degree feedback assessments (Chang, 2020:415; López, 2020:53). Stakeholders view fluent communicators as more capable leaders and collaborators. Trust and rapport expand through clear, attentive messaging tailored to audiences.

Specific methods prove particularly impactful, including conveying a compelling vision, strategic alignment, active listening, empathetic listening, candid progress transparency, and holistic stakeholder engagement. Multifaceted communication channels tailored to needs underpin understanding, cohesion, and a collective sense of purpose.

5.2.2 The Impact of Project Managers' Coordination Skills

The findings affirm that coordination capabilities provide vital workflow synchronisation benefits that enable complex project success. Meticulous coordination of diverse work streams, handoffs, contributors, schedules, resources, and dependencies reveals inefficiencies, reduces costly rework, and promotes needed alignment (Aga et al., 2020:8; Verburg et al., 2020:9). Assessments directly correlate project manager coordination acumen with over 10% increased achievement of time, cost, quality, and satisfaction goals across industries and project types (Larkin, 2020:140; Verburg et al., 2020:15). Projects led by managers continually refining coordination produce multiplying performance gains year-over-year (Reed et al., 2020:631). The research quantifies ROI from coordination training investments through cost savings and revenue increases of over 15% in some contexts (Larkin, 2020:140).

In addition to workflow synchronisation, coordination skills promote stakeholder coordination through active engagement, expectation management, disagreement resolution, and political navigation to unify interests (Hagen & Park, 2020:15). Relationship-building abilities augment technical coordination. Coordination ultimately emerges as an invaluable expertise area separating good project managers from great ones.

5.2.3 The Impact of Project Managers' Teamwork Skills

The findings confirm that team leadership and teamwork skills critically catalyse project success given collaborative execution models (Hagen & Park, 2020:11; Verburg et al., 2020:12). Project managers able to cultivate unified, high-performing teams achieve markedly better outcomes. Those excelling at establishing psychological safety, providing mentoring, and recognising contributions produce over 10-15% higher performance across productivity, quality, client satisfaction, profitability, and schedule metrics (Aga et al., 2020:11; Larkin, 2020:126). Sustained team development efforts yield compounding success improvements over time (Reed et al., 2020:629).

Research also highlights that empowering teams amplifies potential. Enabling self-direction, distributed leadership, participative goal-setting, and involvement sustains motivation through ownership and purpose (Hagen & Park, 2020:9; Thompson & Glasø, 2020:431). Facilitating open communication, information exchange, and collective problem-solving further leverages synergies across diverse specialists. Project managers able to foster team “flow” states precipitate innovation.

5.3 Conclusions

This research firmly establishes communication, teamwork, and coordination as soft competencies with multifaceted, profound impacts on project management success. Findings conclusively validate that sophisticated soft skills enable the optimised application of technical expertise and are imperative for superior results. Although additional inquiry to enrich understanding may be beneficial, accumulated knowledge convincingly confirms that purposeful soft skills development confers leadership advantage.

Project managers able to complement technical knowledge with social acumen through communication mastery, team leadership, and coordination excellence can unlock their full potential. All evidence indicates that organisations seeking project excellence must prioritise cultivating these soft skills across project contributors through training, coaching, recruiting, and knowledge sharing. With sound foundations in both social and technical realms, project managers extend beyond competent delivery to achieve extraordinary outcomes.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Recommendations for the South African Construction Industry

The following recommendations are proposed for project management stakeholders across professions, education, regulation, and industry associations in the South African construction domain based on the study conclusions:

5.4.1.1 Emphasise Soft Skills in Project Management Standards

Project management qualifications and certificates should incorporate soft skills criteria equal to technical knowledge areas. Framework authors must emphasise soft skills in competence models, charters, and maturity benchmarks.

5.4.1.2 Enrich Project Management Education

Academic institutions should enrich project management courses and programs with substantial curriculum coverage of soft skills development and application techniques. Experiential learning activities should allow for practising and refining soft skills.

5.4.1.3 Prioritise Soft Skills in Project Manager Development

Organisations must emphasise soft skills assessment, training, and coaching for project managers and team members alongside technical capabilities. Workshops can identify developmental needs at individual and organisational levels.

5.4.1.4 Tailor Recruiting and Promotions for Soft Skills

Talent acquisition and advancement processes should incorporate evaluating project management candidates' soft skills through behavioural interviews, assessment centres, soft skills testing, and situational judgement simulations.

5.4.1.5 Include Soft Skills in Project Reviews

Project debriefs and retrospectives should mandate discussing the utilisation of soft skills and identifying capability improvements needed to enhance these over time consistently.

5.4.1.6 Track Soft Skills Development

Project organisations should create metrics, surveys, observational assessments, and monitoring to track soft skills development tangibly. Project teams can provide soft skills feedback on leaders.

5.4.1.7 Incentivise Soft Skills Excellence

Project managers demonstrating exceptional soft skills and acumen should be rewarded and recognised through profiling, financial incentives, qualifications, and promotion prioritisation.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Additional academic research is recommended to enrich the understanding of project managers' soft skills based on this study's scope.

5.4.2.1 Quantify Performance Impact

Analytical studies directly correlating assessments of project managers' soft skills levels with quantitative performance data could further validate competencies' success contribution.

5.4.2.2 Examine Contextual Differences

Comparing soft skills effectiveness between geographic regions, industries, organisation types, and project models could reveal useful contextual coaching insights.

5.4.2.3 Profile Soft Skills Mastery

Mixed methods case study profiles of exemplar project managers demonstrating soft skills mastery could provide models for development approaches and best practices.

5.5 Conclusion

This research successfully achieved its aim of thoroughly investigating evidence on project managers' foundational soft skills and their multifaceted impact on performance, with an emphasis on communication, teamwork, and coordination capabilities. Conclusions definitively confirm that these skills critically enable project excellence when developed adeptly. Construction industry stakeholders must focus on cultivating soft skills equal to technical qualifications. As research accumulates, soft skills clearly contribute to successful and good project managing. Their proactive development promises substantial leadership development advantage. With both social and technical mastery, project managers extend beyond competent delivery to achieve remarkable outcomes through fully optimising talent and knowledge.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Declaration on Plagiarism and Plagiarism Report

APPENDIX B: Work Declaration

APPENDIX C: Editing Certificate