COMMUNICATION STYLES AND TEAM MOTIVATION IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT – DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. Communication is crucial. Several authors emphasize the role of the project managers' communication with teams, and the importance of the project management teams' on the success of projects. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of the communication styles of the project managers' on the teams' motivation and consequently on the success of projects. Therefore, the literature was reviewed and exploratory research was developed using a qualitative methodology (content analysis of eight semi-structured interviews). A conceptual framework was developed. The results suggest that communication style and leadership are related and impact teams` motivation and consequently on projects' success.

Keywords: communication styles, project management, project success, organizational motivation.

JEL Classification: M10, M14, O15.

Introduction

Technology tends to evolve and consequently, the organizational world has to follow these changes without diverting the focus from the strategic objectives. To meet the level of consumer demand, organizations develop projects, which to be successful must be well understood (Jordão et al., 2015).

For the determination of the success or failure of a project to be feasible, there must be good communication in the team. When the members communicate frequently, trust and consequently the relationship between them are strengthened, which means an increase in their performance (Júnior & Chaves, 2014; Sarhadi, 2016).

But motivation does not come from communication alone, a project manager must exercise a leadership role in parallel to his role as a communicator to be able to motivate people (Anantatmula, 2010; Zulch, 2014). Although communication is one of the problems in project management, it must be taken more carefully into account, both by companies and by project managers, since the importance of its role is notorious.

Therefore, it is pertinent to know the communication styles used by project managers and to understand how they influence the motivation of teams.

The purpose of the paper is to obtain an answer to the research question: "How do the communication style and leadership style of the project manager relate to team motivation and what is the impact on project success?".

And for this purpose, it is necessary to fulfil the following general objectives:

1. To understand if there is a relationship between the communication style and the leadership style of the project manager with the motivation of the teams.

2. To understand if there is a relationship between team motivation and project success.

To find cues to accomplish these objectives the authors developed a literature review to find relationships between the constructs and develop a conceptual framework that could be re-designed after being explored by interviews selected taking into account their expertise leading project management teams in Portugal.

This paper is developed in the following way, firstly the literature is reviewed, then the methodology is explained, followed by the discussion of the results and finally, a conclusion is outlined.

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1. Literature review

1.1. Projects

One big challenge for organizations is to know how to keep focused on strategic objectives, but at the same time to adapt to external changes and in this sense, projects are key factors. According to (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2010, 2017), a project is a temporary effort undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result, and according to Jordão et al. (2015), it can achieve its strategic objectives and increase competitiveness.

Understanding a project is one of the key points that can determine its success or failure, and a good base for understanding is communication. It becomes an essential characteristic in human relationships in the search for better results for the organization (Júnior & Chaves, 2014).

1.2. Communication

The concept of communication is commonly accepted by the authors, yet, it was the definition of Blidaru et al. (2019), that was used in this study due to the recognition of the authors and to the fact that they developed a very recent study regarding it. These authors state that communication is any behaviour, gesture, word and/or symbol that occurs between two or more individuals.

Studies such as Benchmarking concerning the years 2010 and 2012 point to communication as one of the problems that occur most frequently in project management.

Orpen developed a study conducted in 1997 that concluded that motivation at work arises from the quality of communication within companies. Perhaps this is why it is among one of the most valued skills in project managers (Ramadanty & Martinus, 2016).

After an extensive review regarding communication, the authors decide to study passive, aggressive, and assertive communication styles (Sherman, 1999). Communication style is a set of characteristics of a person's speech in the act of communication, and while there is no uniquely effective style, as people gain more experience in communication, they develop a style that defines them (Pânişoară et al., 2015).

Among the mentioned styles, the passive is characterized by individuals who avoid speaking and do not confront people. These individuals have an excessive fear of being judged, so they do not express their opinions or feelings thus ceding the right to decide (Filho & Blikstein, 2013; Urea, 2014).

In contrast, in the aggressive style, the individual always has the last word, imposing themselves without problems even if they cause harm to others. This style stimulates fear and hatred in listeners (Pânişoară et al., 2015; Urea, 2014). It is used when the person who wants to communicate wants to control the communication channel, not tolerating another person to speak up, thus violating the rights of others. The aggressive style fails by

being used at times that do not match its need (Filho & Blikstein, 2013).

In a more direct style, assertive communicators act assertively to make their point, whether to make a request or express a feeling, achieving their interests without violating the needs of others (Men, 2015).

1.3. Leadership

After reviewing the definitions of leadership, the definition by Chiavenato (2014) stands out when he describes it as the interpersonal influence exerted in a situation and directed through the process of human communication towards the achievement of a certain goal. It can be inferred from the authors' definition that communication is a tool of leadership. According to Zulch (2014), project managers who resent communication can hardly get their team members to see them as leaders, making them unable to maintain a position of influence over them.

As occurs in communication, there is no single effective style, and leadership depends on the followers, i.e., for each individual the leader assumes a different leadership style (Gonçalves & Mota, 2011).

Regarding leadership, the authors decided to focus on transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, and situational leadership. Transformational leadership is the opposite of transactional leadership, in the sense that, the most important thing for leaders is relationships with employees (Bass, 1990; Müller & Turner, 2007), unlike transactional leadership which is based on work in exchange for rewards and vice versa (Anantatmula, 2010). On the other hand, Laissez-Faire leadership is, according to the PMBOK® Guide (PMI, 2017), a liberal leadership style, as it allows the team to make its own decisions. Although these three styles are the most common, one cannot remain indifferent to situational leadership when approaching this construct in the context of project management. For Hersey and Blanchard (1986) the leadership style to be chosen by the leader will depend on the maturity level of those that he intends to influence. Therefore, it is visible that there is no unique specific style to lead any situation (Andrade et al., 2010).

1.4. Motivation

The opinion towards employees changed with the Hawthorne studies conducted by George Elton Mayo. Initially, those who were just an element that produced the goods and services of the organization today are the focus of the organization, since their contributions are important to understand whether the organization will be a success or not (Gupta & Tayal, 2013). Therefore, it is easy to see that it is important for the team to be motivated for the results to be as expected (Osabiya, 2015).

Within the various definitions of motivation, it is common to all that motivation is a force, within individuals, that drives them to try to achieve personal and organizational goals, intending to satisfy some need or expectation (Osabiya, 2015).

According to Bates (2009) and Gupta and Tayal (2013), motivation has a direct and undeniable impact on results. It can be stated that success is linked to motivation, given that the success of any organization depends on the ability of managers to provide a motivating environment for employees (Osabiya, 2015). Motivation can be divided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Robinson et al., 2014). The former refers to when a person acts without any intention of receiving rewards, as opposed to extrinsic motivation, which occurs when the individual does something already thinking about the results that may ensue.

1.5. Success

One of the most challenges in project management is to determine whether or not a project is successful. But measuring the success of a project is a complex task since it is an intangible construct. Therefore, it is a concept that remains unclear due to different perceptions of it (Chan et al., 2002).

Traditionally and regardless of the scope and objectives of the project, project managers tend to consider it successful if it meets the constraints of the iron triangle: cost, time, and quality. But for Wit (1988) meeting only these objectives is not enough to obtain a successful project. There are many examples of cases that did not fulfil the triad and yet they were successful, like the Thames Barrier and the Sydney Opera House project.

According to Morris and Hough (1987), the Thames Barrier project took twice as long to build and cost four times the original budget. But it still provided a profit for most of the contractors. The Sydney Opera House, on the other hand, cost 14 times the original budget but became the symbol of the city (Lim & Mohamed, 1999).

Of course, there are projects where meeting the deadline is extremely important. Yet, according to Wateridge (1995) project managers by generalizing and putting the deadline and the budget as the main criteria are leading the project to failure.

2. Methodology

Inspired by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the authors selected qualitative methodology in a more prescriptive way than the initial grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The authors intend to explore relations between constructs that, although have already been studied in other contexts (namely in human resources management), as far as the authors' concerns they were never explored in a project management context.

To find cues about how the constructs (communication, leadership, and motivation) relate to each other and their impact on another construct (project success) a literature review was developed. In line with this, the authors developed a conceptual framework (see Figure 1).

After reviewing literature and pre-designed a framework based on it, the authors developed qualitative
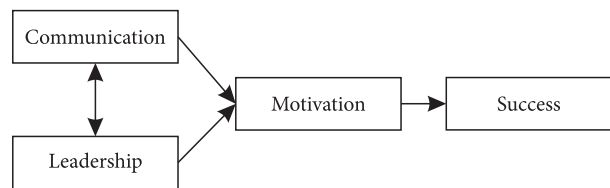

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework

research employing interviews pursued to eight project managers selected taking into account their expertise leading project management teams in Portugal and their proximity with the researchers. The objective of these interviews was to find cues of the relations found in the literature so that the conceptual framework designed could be, eventually, redesigned after being explored by the interviewees.

The interviews were analyzed through content analysis by Bardin (1977) as explained below before the results and discussion.

Most of the interviewees were male, aged between 40–50 years old and they developed their activities in areas like IT, management, diplomacy and higher education research activities. They also lead project management teams in more than one activity. So there was a mix between the private and public sectors. The interviews were conducted face to face using videoconference between May-July 2020 due to the pandemic situation.

According to the literature review, propositions were formulated to support the proposed conceptual framework.

Taking into account the proposed framework, evidence/clues were sought to corroborate the four proposed propositions, to provide information about the variables/constructs.

P1: Communication and leadership are closely linked.

For Zulch (2014), communication is an essential feature of leadership, since when project managers do not engage in communication, they can hardly convey an image of leadership to the team members.

Zulch is not the only author to believe that leadership and communication are intertwined, Chiavenato (2014) also establishes a link between the two variables by stating that communication is a tool of leadership, arguing that leadership is the interpersonal influence exerted in a situation and directed through the process of human communication towards the achievement of a certain goal. Molena (2009) goes further and finishes by claiming that leadership in the absence of communication is impractical.

P2: Communication influences motivation.

From Ramadanty and Martinus (2016), perspective, if communication is effective, it is a competence of project managers capable of motivating employees to perform their tasks, even though communication is the most frequently recorded problem in project management according to Benchmarking Studies in Project Management 2010 and 2012. Orpen (1997) uses the

results of his study to show the use of quality communication within companies. increases the motivation of employees at work. Almeida (2013) agrees with Orpen's conclusion, arguing that project managers consider that a good communication strategy affects the management of communication processes – essential contributions to the motivation of employees. Therefore, the author states that communication is an important factor for the organization concerning motivation.

P3: Leadership influences motivation.

Authors such as Anantatmula (2010) and Donato et al. (2011) argue that project managers have to know the needs of employees, but for this, they must exercise the role of leaders. Otherwise, they are hardly able to satisfy the employees, thus ending up with them not performing their functions according to the organization's objectives due to the lack of motivation provided by the leaders.

Ferrão et al. (2017) also added that it is up to the project manager, who plays the role of leader, to preserve a cohesive climate where employees feel motivated, regardless of the way he leads his team.

P4: Motivation influences success.

Although motivation has several similar definitions, authors Gupta and Tayal (2013) and Bates (2009) argue that motivation has a direct and undeniable impact on results, because more motivated employees are more productive. Thus, these help organizations overcome the obstacles that occur throughout projects, leading them to success.

For Osabiya (2015), the importance of the project manager in motivating his team is perceptible, so the results are as expected, since the success of any organization depends on the ability of managers to provide a motivating environment for employees. Also, Amorim and Silva (2016) highlight the link that exists between motivation and success.

After these justifications of the propositions, the authors develop the data collection. A qualitative method was used because, according to Malhotra (2011), it provides a better understanding of the context of the problem. Semi-structured interviews were developed. Because they do not contain particularized or entirely open questions, they allow very rich and diverse information to be obtained, since they enable the interviewer to ask others whose interest arises during the interview (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1998). This is the most appropriate instrument for this research, and it will be used in order to explore the items that make up the scales chosen for the study (Hersey & Blanchard, 1986; Robinson et al., 2014); to look for clues to support the propositions on which the proposed conceptual framework is based.

For the development of the interviews, an interview script was developed which went through several phases until it reached its definitive state. After collecting the necessary data, they were analysed using the content analysis technique. According to Bardin (1977), it is an investigation technique that aims to describe the content

of the communication between the sender and receiver. Initially, the original audios of the interviews were transcribed into text, then the transcribed data had to be organized to identify keywords and highlight the most relevant aspects for the study in question. Finally, interpretation was performed, which is related to the procedure of obtaining meanings and, consequently, concluding the data obtained.

3. Results and discussion

The interviews were conducted face to face using videoconference with 8 interviewees (E1…E8) working in project management. Most of the interviewees are male, aged between 40–50 years. When confronted with questions referring, implicitly, to the aforementioned propositions the respondents mentioned that:

(P1) Communication and leadership are closely linked.

When reading the introduction to one of the interview questions, a question was raised relating to the fact that it is often mentioned that one cannot talk about communication without talking about leadership. E2, along with nodding his head from top to bottom to show that he agreed with the statement, uttered at the beginning of his answer a "completely agree" to the expression. When confronted with the topic E1 stated that "the communication styles themselves change over the project life cycle, as do the leadership styles that go hand in hand with the former". From this statement, it can be inferred that communication and leadership are interconnected. E5's speech is also in line with the previous statement when he says that "the form of leadership along with the form of communication inevitably depends on the whole context and the whole ecosystem that surrounds the project". E6 also emphasizes the importance of communication within the leadership when he states that "any leader who has to manage a team has to have some communication training. I believe that it is determinant". This speech is in line with that advocated by Chiavenato (2014) and Molena (2009) when they state that the characteristics of communicators are directly associated with those of leaders, thus substantiating that communication and leadership are inseparable and that leadership in the absence of communication is impractical since this is a tool belonging to the former.

Interviewees 7 and 8 also share this vision, as we can see in their speeches. E7 states that "we can't always have the same leadership style or the same communication style. It will depend on the context, regardless of whether they go together". E8 adds that "communication and leadership are transversal. Leadership without communication could hardly be practised. How could one lead without being able to communicate?" From the analysis of the speeches, one can see that there are clues to accept proposition 1 and conclude that just as the literature suggests, communication and leadership are closely linked.

(P2) Communication influences motivation.

E2 stated that "if I want someone to be motivated and consequently perform their tasks properly, the issue of communication is fundamental". E4 states that "the motivation of the team itself has a lot to do with the type of leadership and the type of communication that is exercised" (Note that this statement also strengths proposition P3, to aid its analysis). E5 adds, reinforcing the idea, that "there is no chance of guaranteeing a team with a considerable degree of maturity and motivation if it is not clear to everyone what is the mission and what are the values that we need and want for this project or this company, and this can only be transmitted through communication. Communication is central to motivation." These statements are in line with the theory of the authors of Orpen (1997) and Ramadanty and Martinus (2016) who concluded that motivation at work comes from the quality of communication within companies.

The remaining interviewees share this point of view, as it is visible in their speeches. E1 mentions that it has to be measured whether project managers have the skills to hold the position or not and explains by stating that "if he does not have the skills to communicate, by being aggressive with a team member he is not winning the team, in the sense of motivating it, quite the opposite".

Once again, the speeches of the interviewees are in line with the literature, as Almeida (2013) claims communication is an important factor for the organization, assuming that managers consider that a good communication strategy affects the management of communication processes as essential contributions to the motivation of employees.

E6 was asked what his attitude would be when faced with a demotivated team, and thus with low performance in recent months, to which he replied "I try to understand where the failure is (most likely communication) and try to adjust the team according to the desired goals". E7 agrees with this interviewee when he states that "companies that have active internal communication departments are more successful. Communication is the fundamental piece". It is the fundamental foundation for a team to be motivated and consequently to function successfully. An organization without communication is like looking at a skeleton and missing a vital organ like lungs, for example. (It is also evident that this statement of the interviewee manages to secure two other propositions, P2 and P4). E8 adds to this idea that "the communication style of those who manage other people is very important. (...) The obligation of those who manage teams is to seek the most appropriate communication styles to get people more motivated, to get things done right".

It is perceptible, through the analysis of the speeches, that there are enough clues to accept proposition 2 and conclude that communication influences motivation, as pointed out in the literature.

(P3) Leadership influences motivation.

E1 when faced with the question "do you think the team will value the fact that by reaching the goals, the team expects the reward?", throughout his answer he felt the need to explain what the team members value, and in this explanation, he stated that "they value essentially having someone to lead them and as consequences of this leadership, someone to protect and motivate them". The same interviewee proved throughout his speech that he defends that leadership influences motivation. When faced with a situation about the reduction in employee performance and a possible decline in motivation, to which he had to react by stating what he would do, E1 reiterated "The leadership style ends up being determinant". E2 goes along with this interviewee's words by stating that "the leadership style, in my opinion, should be very much one of "I"m going to create the conditions for people to be self-managed, self-organized and motivated".

The interviewees used a speech that is in line with that given by the authors Anantatmula (2010) and Donato et al. (2011), who consider it important for the project manager to play the role of leader by knowing the needs of the employees to satisfy them, given that the opposite would make them not motivated to perform the functions under the organization's objectives. E4 and E9 are also of the opinion that leadership influences motivation when the former states that he tries with his leadership "to transmit the value of my action to the group, trying to encourage the various team members" and E8 reinforces by saying that "leadership is fundamental in motivating people. If I am managed by a person to whom I do not recognize merit whether, in technical or human skills, I will end up not respecting his indications, or else if I accept it will be for fear of being excluded from the project and this causes great demotivation. (...) The motivation comes a lot from whoever is leading the project."

Even if there is no explicit evidence in the speeches of the other interviewees about the influence of leadership on motivation, we cannot reject this proposition because none of them stated otherwise. By opposition, there are clues in the speeches we transcribed (E1, E2, E4 and E9) that meet the references of the authors, namely the authors Ferrão et al. (2017), who support that by maintaining a coherent climate the leader makes employees feel motivated to achieve certain goals.

Therefore, we can partially accept proposition P3 and conclude that this research partially accepts that leadership influences motivation in a project management environment.

(P4) Motivation influences success.

E2 when faced with the question of what factors influence the success of the project, in addition to mentioning more factors uttered that he could "(...) simplify this with communication creates in people the necessary motivation". E2 also adds that "the results are the way we expect to see a motivated person" and E1 corroborates by claiming that "by motivating them and making them feel good, they will also achieve better results". This speech is in line with the statements of Osabiya (2015) who states that it is of certain importance that the project manager

motivates his team so that the results are as expected. E5 states that "a good project manager must know and be able to adjust his or her communication style to the needs of the project to motivate the project team and consequently drastically influence the success of the project". This interviewee's statement can also be a support for proposition P2. E1 has the same opinion as E5, since he states that a "project manager has to spend more time communicating! In order to change behaviours, motivate the team members and consequently get their performance to change in order to meet the success of the tasks performed, I have to act differently, I have to go directly to the people, I have to communicate." It is visible that the speech of this interviewee can be used to analyse proposition P2 since it argues that communication influences motivation. "In order to change behaviours, motivate the team members (...) I have to communicate".

When asked about the characteristics that lead to project success, E3 answered that "we cannot say that there are certain characteristics that lead to project success. But common factors to all are: team motivation; control over the execution of the project and tasks; risk planning; employees' qualifications and skills matching the tasks; physical and material resources are available when needed; have a communication with the necessary frequency with stakeholders and sponsor". E8 also emphasizes the importance of motivation in the success of projects, stating that "motivation is an extremely important factor in achieving results! It leads us to be more committed and to give our best. A motivated person wants to reach a project conclusion and wants to come to fruition in the best way. Wants the result to be good and to be successful".

We can conclude from the interviewees' speeches and their analyses that there are enough clues to accept proposition 4 which states that motivation influences the success of projects.

To make the conclusions of the analysis of the propositions easier to understand, Table 1 shows how many interviewees made the propositions, even if sometimes they were not expressed directly.

Table 1. Percentage of interviewees that accepted the propositions

Proposition	N. of the interviewees	%
P1: Communication and leadership are closely linked	6	75
P2: Communication influences motivation	7	86
P3: Leadership influences motivation	4	50
P4: Motivation influences success	6	75

Considering that this table only shows the number of individuals who expressed the propositions, not including the fact that they may be said more than once by the same individuals, we can see that propositions P1, P2, and P4 have the majority, which means that they were accepted.

We can conclude from the interviewees' speeches and their analysis that there are enough clues to accept proposition 4 which states that motivation influences the success of projects.

As for proposition P3, we cannot say with complete certainty that we cannot accept the proposition, since opinions were divided among the interviewees, with half of the individuals speaking in agreement with the proposition and the other half not expressing it. For this occurrence, we may pose several questions, such as whether there was a communication problem, or whether the individuals were in some way atypical, but the most legitimate thing to do would be to conduct more interviews, since the sample may be too small to make a correct judgment. Still, we consider that with 50% of the interviewees being in favour of the proposition, we cannot accept it either, so we have opted for partial acceptance (see Table 1).

The most common words used were first: communication, second: team and leadership, third: project, motivation and success, and fourth: people and tasks. This demonstrates the importance of the four constructs used in the proposed framework: communication, leadership, motivation and success.

Conclusions

The authors started by developing a literature review through scientific articles, technical-scientific books, and other supports that drew our attention to the importance of communication in the organizational context. The concept of communication is, in general, common for the authors present in the literature, but it was the definition of the authors Blidaru et al. (2019) that was used much in function of being recognized authors and due to the reference being recent. These authors state that communication is any behaviour, gesture, word and/or symbol that occurs between two or more people.

Several studies point to communication as one of the problems that occur most frequently in project management and, perhaps because of this, it is one of the most valued abilities in project managers. We found in the literature three communication styles: passive, aggressive, and assertive, and we concluded that there is not a uniquely effective style, since project managers have to use various communication styles according to the situation and context in which they are inserted, so it is sometimes necessary to use a combination of styles. Leadership was also studied because some authors argue that communication is a characteristic of this variable/construct. Although there are several definitions from different authors, leadership is considered the art of motivating a group of people to act in pursuit of a common goal. Within leadership, the authors focused on transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership.

The literature review led the authors to conclude that motivation is a consequence of good communication along with good leadership and consequently becomes a success factor for projects. In the past, employees were seen only as elements that produced goods and services within the organization, but over time, they began to have the importance they deserved, thus becoming the face of the organization (White et al., 2010). It is in this context that interest arises in the study of motivation associated with teams. It is commonly accepted that it is defined as a force within people that drives them to try to achieve personal and organizational goals to satisfy some need. In this study, we chose to focus on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, because they are the most frequently distinguished and verified types of motivation and because various research shows that the quality of people's performance can differ greatly when someone behaves for intrinsic and/or extrinsic reasons (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

To understand if there is a relationship between employee motivation and project success it was also necessary to define "success".

Based on the relationships between the constructs found in the literature, a conceptual framework was proposed, and four propositions were defined, with which a first validation was sought through semi-structured interviews with project managers. The analysis of the interviews allowed the authors to conclude that there are enough clues to accept 3 of the 4 propositions.

The analysis of the speeches allowed us to conclude that there are enough clues to accept that, communication and leadership are closely linked since the interviewees emphasize the importance of communication within leadership. The authors could also conclude that there are enough clues to accept that communication influences motivation. In the case of leadership influencing motivation there was not a full, but only partial acceptance in the speeches of the interviewees. Still, the authors will not rule out this relationship in future research, as this result may be related to the fact that we surveyed only eight project managers. In opposition, the speeches reveal a total acceptance for the fact that motivation influences success, as referred to in the literature.

As a future work, the authors also intend to validate this framework through a questionnaire passed by a large sample of team project managers. Structural Equation Modelling will be used.

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