Core Competency of Soft Skill Towards Project Team Member

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Abstract— The scope of this research is to demonstrate the soft skills are the heart of building a capable team and working effectively. Therefore, the goal of this research to address the soft skills of project team members through questionnaire. All range of construction activities within Klang Valley and Selangor are invited to participate in this research due to time constrain. The objectives of this research are: i. to determine the core soft skill competencies towards the project success, ii. to evaluate the current performance on soft skills in project team members, iii. to identify an effective way to improve soft skills for future preparation.

Keywords— soft skill, project team member, klang valley, selangor.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are multiple stakeholders to every project and the stakeholders play an important role to increase the project success rate (PMI, 2017). Today, the competitive market increases the complexity of the project. Therefore, project management is an important skill for success. Hence, comprehensive makes the expectation of the effective team is higher. An effective team can be established with the partnering of soft and hard skills. Performance of the team would be affected by the absence of soft skills. This is because soft skills are considered a complement to hard skills (Kenton, 2020).

Strong soft skills can build understanding, motivation, and create a harmonious environment to run the operation effectively (Hills, 2018). Therefore, Hills (2018) stated that neglecting of soft skills development can impact the operation and directly affect the performance of the project.

To survive and sustain a business in a competitive market, it is beneficial to have both soft and hard skills. Building a project team with technical ability and interpersonal skills is a great competitive advantage (Omidvar et al., 2011).

Development and improvement of soft skills are crucial in this highly competitive industry. This research is focused on the assessment and familiar the weakness in soft skill to the project team member. Despite awareness of soft skills, this research comprising also the appropriate strategies on the improvement of soft skills to achieve a project goal. Which this is an important step in improving team performance to achieve project success.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Soft skill refers to a wide range of skills, abilities, attitude, and behaviour which enable team members navigate, work, and excel in the workplace (Lippman et al., 2015). The term "soft skills" was presented by Dr. Whitemore in the year 1972. The report presented the performance of a group of soldiers in training depends on how the group has been led. Although soft skill is not acquired knowledge which been teach in studies, it is job-related skills. It is involving the actions which affecting the team achievement and relationship. Therefore, both hard skills and soft skills are essential to the workplace. Strong soft skills are able to communicate well, building trust with other stakeholders and achievement in career.

2.1 Competence of soft skill

Core competencies are described as the base of the framework, which the basic competence required by the team member. Whereas functional competencies refer to the additional necessity competencies that are identified by the level of responsibility or seniority of the role.

Soft skills are identified as the most critical skills to nail a job in a fast-moved era of technology as in today and this also applies to project management. As stated by Gulati et al., (2020), the success criteria for project management has been changed where a project manager nowadays also should manage a business and strategic component of projects instead of just pure completion of the project.

With the development of project management principles, the need for soft skills in project management has become the key to project success. In addition, project management can be social behaviour and person-to-person interaction to achieve goals. Therefore, to effectively manage a project, a combination of hard skills, the use of tools and techniques, and soft skills are necessary. A study by Awan, Ahmed and Zulqarnain, (2015) highlights the important contribution of soft

skills to project success. Which soft skills positively influence the outcome of the project.

Numerous studies highlight the importance and enhancement of soft skills to the workplace and the studied competencies summaries and presented in Table 1. Therefore, it is concluded from numerous studies that there are 16 soft skills that this study focuses on, namely communication, teamwork/ engagement, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, adaptability/ flexibility, emotional intelligence, understanding/ empathy, negotiation, motivation, persuasion, leadership, enthusiasm/ positive attitude, critical thinking, and coordination.

Table 1: (Frequency) List of Competencies

No	Competencies	Kurse, (2020)	Foster, Wiczer and Eberhardt, (2019)	Lavender, (2019)	Apodaca, (2019)	Low, Gao and Ng, (2019)	Zuo et al., (2018)	Gray, (2016)	IAEA, (2016)	IPMA, (2015)	Jha, (2015)	Awan, Ahmed and Zulqamain, (2015)	(Zakaria et al., 2015)	Mishra, (2014)	Seetha, (2014)	Sumner and Powell, (2013)	Zhang, Zuo and Zillante, (2013)	Robles, (2012)	Babic and Slavkovic (2011)
1	Creativity	✓						✓											✓
2	Persuasion	✓			✓			✓											
3	Collaboration	✓															✓		
4	Adaptability / flexibility	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓										✓	✓
5	Coordination							✓				✓							✓
6	Emotional intelligence	✓				✓													
7	Communication		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
8	Teamwork / engagement		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
9	Problem solving / conflict management		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓		✓		✓			
10	Critical thinking/ analysis		✓					✓	✓					✓					✓
11	Understanding / empathy			✓	✓	✓													
12	Leadership		✓				✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓
13	Enthusiasm/ positive attitude		✓	✓												✓		✓	✓
14	Negotiation				✓			✓		✓		✓							✓
15	Motivation						✓												
16	Decision making							✓	✓			✓							

2.2 Important of soft skill towards workplace

In this technology era, soft skills needed are not only for personal growth but also for organization growth. Several benefits would bring to an organization with the development of soft skills. As conclude from numerous article, the important soft skills towards workplace as summarise as strength project team, create a positive workplace culture, building relationship and preparation for tomorrow.

A strength and competence project team is essential in the journal of project success. Strengthen the team members is crucial to team effectiveness. Atmosphere would affect the attitude of team members.

Strong and unique culture builds a collaborative team. Whereas, dry and meaningless create a group of robots, and may directly affect the sustainability of the organisation (Kluwgant, 2018).

Relationship is an art of connecting with people and benefit from it. There is no one person able to complete everything by himself specially to construction projects. Cross-sharing and cross-learning are huge gains and benefit from a good relationship.

Evolution of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) is advancing rapidly. However, soft skills are irreplaceable (World Economic Forum, 2016). Technology is impossible to rely solely especially on decision making. Therefore, cultivation and improvement soft skills is also important for the growth of the organization.

2.3 Challenge of soft skill

Soft skills bring a competitive advantage in this technology era. However, nothing is perfect. As highlight, everyone has their personality. Therefore, it will be the challenge of developing soft skills.

Generally, the challenge comes from a different generation, here called a generation gap, educational background, and work experience.

Most companies have several generations work in the same workplace. Different generation has different personalities, values, and priorities. In fact, it is a great opportunity for cross-learning.

Intangible knowledge such as experience and technology knowledge to be cross-sharing in an appropriate platform, a perfect team able to establish.

A group of team members that consists of various designation roles. Therefore, the level of literature is different. There is no statement that the educational background will affect the development of soft skills. However, a way of communication shall be concerned. It is because a certain group of team members prefers mother-tongue as unfamiliar with other languages.

Experience is intangible knowledge which not educated in school. Therefore, contribution of experienced team member to project success is strongly influenced. Total work experience (age reference) and specific job experience is another challenge for problem analysis and solution. From here, people skills play an important role to overcome the challenge.

2.4 Soft skill improvement strategy

It is never too late and no limitation to develop soft skills. Understand the necessity and weakness, develop and improve it to enhance both career and personal lifestyle. From the numerous article, improvement of soft skills can be achieved in the way of training, mentorship programme, buddy programme, appraisal, and reward.

It can be developed via educational training or self-learning or self-developing. Awareness of investment in training to improve the team member's performance has increased as team member is a bloodstream to an organization (Imran, 2013).

This is because the performance of team members drives the growth and success of the organization.

A mentorship programme studied to the audience of nurse by Zhang et al., (2019) highlight that one-to-one mentorship able to promote confidence and self-efficacy. This is because role of mentor plays an important to both guidance on professional knowledge and mentor support.

Buddy system refers to a parallel relationship and cross-learning is practised. Therefore, the improvement could be more effective. Compared with the mentoring programme, pressure from buddy programme is minimal.

Appraisal is a measurement to evaluate the performance of the individual. Soft skill competence is intangible, so they are hard to measure. However, it is impossible to know about improvement without measuring techniques.

Therefore, evaluation is essential. It is because reviewing the performance is significant step for improvement.

Reward is a token of appreciation. Appropriate rewards can maintain team spirit. It can be in monetary or recognition. Rewards system can be derived from the performance evaluation. A reward system study from Khan, Waqas and Muneer, (2016) mainly studied two main types of rewards, namely intrinsic reward and extrinsic reward. From the results, there is a strong relationship between team performance and reward.

3. Research methodology

Quantitative approach adopted in the form of structured questionnaire for data collection. Accordance to the literature review, structured questionnaire was developed comprising of five section. Section A is to collect demographic details of respondents. Section B focused to identify the soft skill that leads to project success.

Section C and D focused on evaluation to both individual and team performances to the soft skills. There is a similar list of question in section C & D, and this is because a similar question is able to determine the required competencies directly.

Section E focused on the improvement methodology. 5 points Likert-scale with different anchors are adopted for data analysis which is comprising of level of agreement (Section A), level of quality (Section C & D) and level of appropriateness (Section E).

Questionnaire was prepared by Google Forms. Pandemic restricts the questionnaire distribution. Therefore, online and digital device is the only platform for distribution.

With the consideration of the accuracy of data collected, non-probability with convenience and snowball sampling method were adopted.

Convenience sampling method is questionnaire distributed among the familiar environment, which it is expected questionnaire being circulated within organisation. Whereas, snowball is the way that respondent is recruiting other respondents. This helps to gather crowd across the different nature of business background.

3.1 Sample size

The larger the data received, the lesser the possibility of deviation. However, oversize the sampling size, the return of accuracy would be diminished. Therefore, balancing is required (Taherdoost, 2017).

Therefore, estimated construction company in Klang Valley for determination of sampling size as tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2: Estimated population construction company in Klang Valley

Nature of business	Estimated Population	Source
Client (Developer)	198	(REHDA Malaysia, 2020)
Consultant (Architect)	480	(Lembaga Arkitek Malaysia, 2020)
Consultant (Engineer)	750	(BEM, 2020)
Consultant (Quantity Surveyor)	243	(BQSM, 2020)
Contractor	>10,000	(CIDB, 2020)

Data analysis approach

There was total of 156 respondent's feedback to the questionnaire. Accordance to online calculator Raosoft, (2004), the sample size meets 8% margin of error, 95% confidence level. Majority of respondents are from the group of contractor (52.6%), followed by consultant (25%) and developer (22.4%). Table 3 tabulated the demographic of the respondents, position of quantity survey, generation Y and undergraduate are the majority groups in this research.

Table 3: Respondnet demographic

		A.01	A.02	A.03	A.04	A.05	A.06	A.07	Total
Nature of Business	Developer	-	-	-	12	9	10	4	35
	Consultant	4	7	19	9	-	-	-	39
	Contractor	1	1	-	28	21	31	-	82
Generation	Generation Y	2	3	14	39	6	23	4	91
	Generation X	1	5	3	10	23	17	-	59
	Baby Boomers	2	-	2	-	1	1	-	6
Educational background	Secondary	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	3
	Certificate / Diploma	-	1	-	8	6	11	-	26
	Undergraduate	2	-	12	37	20	26	3	100
	Postgraduate	2	7	7	4	4	2	1	27
Note									
A.01	Director								
A.02	Architect								
A.03	Engineer (Civil or Mechanical & Electrical)								
A.04	Quantity Surveyor								
A.05	Project/ Construction Manager (including assistant manager)								
A.06	Implementation Team (Project engineer, clerk of work, supervisor)								
A.07	Project Planning Department								

Core soft skills to project success

Table 4 tabulated the result of Cronbach's Alpha test from data collected. The closer the value received near to 1, the greater the internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Therefore, the results obtained in this research has a high internal consistency, which all the value ≥ 0.90.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document.: Result of Cronbach's Alpha Test

	Cronbach's Alpha Test
Section B Core soft skills	0.944
Section C Self evaluation	0.974
Section D Current team performance	0.982

Table 4 tabulated the result of core soft skills, team member and team performance. Section B indicated the core soft skills that significant to the project success. Apart from creativity, soft skills were generally performing consistently with the mean value above 4.000. communication and teamwork/engagement are the top rank with the scoring of I.I 0.909, followed by, coordination with I.I 0.905. However, creativity was the only which below mean value of 4.00. It is the least with the mean value 3.968.

Self-evaluation of team members' performance is generally consistent. Similar to the results for identifying core soft skills, creativity was still the least important in terms of importance and performance. The top 5 performance rated by individual team member are collaboration, teamwork/ engagement, coordination, adaptability/ flexibility and critical thinking/ analysis.

Team performance is the spirit of the project, which is crucial to the success of the project. Among 156 respondents, the top 5 performance soft skills rated by individual team member are collaboration, teamwork/ engagement, leadership, adaptability/ flexibility and coordination.

Table 5: Result of core soft skills

Soft skill	Core soft skill		Self evaluation		Current team performance	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Creativity	3.968	16	3.179	16	3.276	16
Persuasion	4.205	13	3.314	15	3.333	14
Collaboration	4.340	8	3.769	1	3.615	1
Adaptability / Flexibility	4.321	10	3.615	4	3.532	3
Coordination	4.526	3	3.667	3	3.506	5
Emotional intelligence	4.135	15	3.391	14	3.314	15
Communication	4.545	1	3.519	6	3.423	9
Teamwork / Engagement	4.545	1	3.744	2	3.590	2
Problem-solving / Conflict management	4.462	5	3.519	6	3.397	11
Critical thinking / Analysis	4.404	7	3.590	5	3.462	7
Understanding / Empathy	4.186	14	3.468	10	3.417	10
Leadership	4.462	5	3.455	11	3.532	3
Enthusiasm / Positive attitude	4.333	9	3.442	12	3.449	8
Negotiation	4.231	12	3.429	13	3.487	6
Motivation	4.301	11	3.481	9	3.391	13
Decision making	4.481	4	3.519	6	3.397	11

Relationship between individual and project team performance

Spearman test was conducted to examine the relationship between individual and a team. From the result, all the result are positive. It tells the positive influence of each other. Among the soft skills, influence of enthusiasm/ positive attitude has the greatest correlation, it shows the importance of enthusiasm/ positive attitude toward project success.

From the result obtained, individual performance of critical thinking/ analysis possesses highest numbers of strong relationship, which are 16nos. This can be explained that competence of critical thinking/ analysis has strong positive influence on the identified soft skills in the team.

Enthusiasm/ positive attitude is another vital soft skill contribute to team effectiveness. It has 12nos strong positive correlation. Positive thinking and mindset team member will focus on the bright side. This helps identify key problems effectively and prevents them from getting worse. Cameron et al., (2011) introduce the heliotropic effect of the positive attitude, which positive practice in an organization able to foster, influence and cultivate a positive energy team member, resulting in higher performance. Besides, it cushions the negative effects of distress or depression through enhancing resilient, solidarity and tenacity.

Problem-solving/ conflict management is the 3rd soft skills has strong positive correlation value, it has 11nos. It effectively minimises the challenge of problem-solving by practice collaboration and knowledge-based approaches Cavaleri, Firestone and Reed, (2012).

Both negotiation and motivation have 10 numbers of strong positive correlation value. Negotiation is the process by which two or more parties create a potential or joint agreement and provide guidance or rules in the future (Martin-Raugh et al., 2020). Negotiation is not limited to commerce, it includes employer-to-employer negotiation (Doyle, 2020). The employer-to-employer negotiation is extended to the delegation of task, work schedule, empowerment or entitlement. Ways of motivation are wide, it can be monetary, empowerment or job promotion. Whereas, all these approaches are accompanied by both positive and negative impact Peterson and M, (2007).

Relationship between core soft skills and team performance

Spearman test was conducted to examine the relationship between core soft skills and team performance. From the result tabulated, all the result are positive. It tells the positive influence of each other.

From the result obtained, the project team collaboration played an important role in contributing to the core soft skills. It is including collaboration, coordination, communication, teamwork/ engagement, problem-solving/ conflict management, leadership. Besides collaboration, communication within project team are essential too.

The strong correlation between communication are emotional intelligence, critical thinking/ analysis, understanding/ empathy, enthusiasm/ positive attitude, decision making.

Furthermore, project team's enthusiasm/positive attitude is another important team spirit that contributes to core soft skills. The strong correlation between enthusiasm/ positive attitude are persuasion, adaptability/ flexibility, and negotiation. In a nutshell, performance of collaboration, communication and enthusiasm/ positive attitude are essential in the contributing of the core soft skills towards the project success.

Comparing with the current team performance, collaboration is the top performance. Therefore, continuous improvement is necessary.

Whereas current team performance of communication and enthusiasm/ positive attitude rank no 9 and 8 respectively. There is room for improvement in increasing the success rate of projects. Therefore, examination of the improvement strategy is necessary.

Effective way for improvement

Cronbach's Alpha test showed the results obtained in this section had a high internal consistency, achieving a good result of 0.858.

Table 6: Effective way of improvement

Strategy	Mean	SV	I.I	Rank
Training	3.455	0.904	0.691	6
Mentorship programme	3.590	0.963	0.718	4
Buddy programme	3.494	0.891	0.699	5
Appraisal	3.865	0.701	0.773	3
Reward: extrinsic	4.141	0.749	0.828	2
Reward: intrinsic	4.173	0.755	0.835	1

Spearman test was conducted to determine the relationship between strategy approaches and individual performance. From the result of Spearman test, it is found that there have both position and negative correlation between variable.

Training is positively correlated with all 16 identified soft skills, which means that soft skills can be trained. Eventhough it is least preferable improvement method in this research.

The result tells that proper training is a suitable way to develop and improve soft skills. In the construction industry, appropriate training is the prevailing practice in which competitive advantage is gained as knowledge, skills and talent are enhanced (Imran, 2013).

Mentorship programme has most negative correlation which are totally 5 negative value, which comprising of creativity -0.021; persuasion [C.02] -0.081; leadership -0.038; enthusiasm/ positive attitude, -0.042; motivation -0.001. This indicates that implement of mentorship programme might have a negative impact on the above mentioned soft skills.

Implementation of buddy programme hurts the performance of 3 soft skills. The 3 soft skills are persuasion -0.057, leadership -0.013 and enthusiasm/ positive attitude -0.007.

Similar to training, appraisal is another effective approach suitable to all 16 identified soft skills. Extrinsic reward has negative impact on the motivation, which has value of -0.018.

The last approach introduces in this research is intrinsic reward, the most preferable approaches which rank no. 1 has 3 negative influence on soft skills. Which it is comprising of persuasion -0.014, enthusiasm/ positive attitude -0.045 and motivation -0.026.

As conclude from above, the positive correlation above 0.1 to show the positive influence between individual performance and improvement strategies.

The table tabulated that the appropriate improvement strategy to the 16 identified soft skills feedbacks from the 156 respondents.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to identify and enhance core soft skills that are critical to the success of a construction project. Whereas, improvement requires appropriate strategies. Therefore, identification of individual and team performance is necessary in advance.

From the identified 16 soft skills in this research, the characteristic of soft skills able to build a positive attitude and environment which important to the project success. The characteristic comprising of tenacity, commitment, solidarity and inclusion are the core value to the project success.

Lucas and Spencer, (2018) mentioned that tenacious people are confident, controlled and committed. Which it is critical to develop, and able to build a high performance team. A tenacious people are resilient and adaptability, able to drive and stay focused under pressure environment. Commitment able to establish through systematic communication, coordination to overcome the obstacles in project completion.

Bachoe and Koster, (2016) present that solidarity refers to the willingness of cooperation, is mutual support within a group. Appropriate motivation, conflict management and collaboration are important to increase the spirit of teamwork. Sokolova, (2016) emphasizes that inclusion has positive influence on the team member's commitment and essential towards project success. Therefore, positive attitude, understanding and empathy are necessary soft skills to achieve the project goal.

In a nutshell, the ability of soft skills to support each other to improve team performance and effectiveness is a necessary condition to achieve project success.

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