

Project proposal

Project name

Empowering project managers for sustainability: A framework for assessing and advancing competencies.

Supervisor

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Abstract

Amidst escalating demand for social and environmental sustainability, the imperative for project managers to possess sustainable project management skills is mounting. Despite well-established competencies in various project management areas, sustainability competencies of project managers are relatively undeveloped. This project addresses the need by enhancing project managers' sustainability competencies through professional development. Hence, the project aims to establish an assessment framework to validate the project manager's competencies and recommend professional development strategies. The project findings will empower organisations to boost their project managers' sustainability expertise through targeted professional development initiatives.

Business Systems PhD Research Topic

Empowering project managers for sustainability: A framework for assessing and advancing competencies.

Dr Masoud Aghajani

Aims

This project addresses a crucial gap in project management by identifying, validating, and enhancing sustainability competencies among project managers. The project unfolds through a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, providing organisations and educational institutions with the means to foster sustainability-driven project management practices.

Background

Sustainability, encompassing the principles of sustainable development and adopting the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach, has gained prominence in modern business, necessitating environmentally and socially responsible practices (Silvius & Marnewick, 2022). The TBL approach integrates economic, environmental and social dimensions to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2022). In recent years, Sustainable Project Management (SPM) has emerged to balance project goals with TBL dimensions (Aghajani et al., 2023). SPM aims to efficiently plan, monitor and control project delivery and support processes, while also taking into account the TBL aspects of the project's lifecycle. The goal is to realise benefits for stakeholders through transparent, fair, and ethical practices, including active stakeholder involvement. SPM encompasses both sustainable development through projects and sustainability of the project's resulting products and services (Silvius, 2021).

Project managers assume a crucial role in SPM, grappling with the task of harmonising contrasting sustainability objectives. This entails upholding the financial viability of projects, navigating environmental repercussions, and addressing social considerations like stakeholder involvement,

community engagement, and equitable societal impacts (Aghajani et al., 2023). Consequently, the call for project management professionals well-versed in sustainability is more pressing than ever (PMI, 2023). Additionally, proficiency in sustainability knowledge and skills has become a critical competitive imperative for project managers (Ika & Pinto, 2022). Thus, the identification of sustainability competencies and the implementation of professional development activities and training are crucial. These enable project managers to operate at the desired level, aligning with sustainability principles and desired outcomes (Silvius, 2016).

The increasing demand for sustainability-oriented project managers highlights a critical gap in existing competency frameworks. Prominent frameworks such as the Project Manager Competency Development (PMCD) by PMI (2017) lack comprehensive sustainability competencies. While many project management competency studies explore various facets, few delve into the knowledge and skills needed for successful SPM (Hassan, 2020). Some scholars, such as Silvius (2016), propose sustainability competencies based on education for sustainable development (ESD) literature but offer limited perspectives. Recent ESD studies, including Brundiens et al. (2021) propose several sustainability competencies for university graduates. These competencies are systems thinking, futures thinking, value thinking, strategic thinking, interpersonal skills, integrated problem-solving and implementation capabilities. These competencies should be complemented by discipline-specific skills (Brundiens et al., 2021), are expected to form a foundation for determining project manager's sustainability competencies.

Project Description

This project aims to enhance project managers' sustainability competencies by developing and validating an integrated assessment framework. This comprehensive framework will encompass various dimensions (knowledge, skills and attitudes), providing project managers and organisations with a reliable tool to assess their existing sustainability competencies and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, this project will deliver practical recommendations for project managers' professional development, focusing on bridging any identified gaps in their sustainability competencies. These recommendations may include targeted strategies to equip project managers with the necessary capabilities to excel in SPM. As a result, the framework, competency evaluation and professional development will empower project managers to make significant progress in their sustainability efforts. The following research questions can guide the project toward achieving its goals:

1. What key sustainability competencies do project managers require to achieve successful SPM?
2. How can an integrated assessment framework be developed and validated to measure project managers' sustainability competencies effectively?
3. What recommendations can be proposed for the professional development of project managers, aiming to enhance their sustainability competencies and promote successful SPM?

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