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FIVE ESSENTIAL PEOPLE SKILLS FOR PROJECT MANAGERS  
AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

Degree Programme in International Business and Marketing Lo-  
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# FIVE ESSENTIAL PEOPLE SKILLS FOR PROJECT MANAGERS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

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The purpose of this thesis was to enlighten project managers on the importance of their rather neglected competence, such as people skills. It was achieved by creating a product of this thesis - an easy-to-use and easy-to-understand brochure for project managers, which demonstrates five most essential people skills for their job.

The brochure was implemented for the client company – Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. The rights to print and distribute the product of the thesis were given to this company.

Since there is no unified list of five most essential people skills, they had to be identified through a two-step process. So the first stage was to conduct a literature research. After finding appropriate books and investigating them, the initial five people skills were recognized: trust building skill, ideological conflict management skill, commitment building skill, accountability building skill and focus on results building skill.

The next step was to question and challenge these five skills by conducting the interviews with the former project managers of the client company. In addition, the original opinions of the leaders on the topic were noted. The data gathered during the interviews was thoroughly analyzed and, as a result, the new more valid five skills were established, such as: trust building skill, ideological conflict management skill, communication skill, motivation skill and listening skill.

These five skills were taken as a base for creating the simple and colorful brochure. The importance of each skill in project management is concisely explained in it. The brochure aims to educate current and future project managers of the client company on which people skills are the most essential for them. This brochure serves as a first step in their learning process, inspiring them to study more on this topic independently.

## CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	4
1.1	Purpose of the thesis .....	4
1.2	Conceptual framework.....	5
1.3	Scope and limitations.....	5
2	CLIENT COMPANY .....	6
3	PROJECT MANAGEMENT .....	7
4	COMPETENCIES OF A PROJECT MANAGER.....	8
5	WHAT ARE SOFT SKILLS AND PEOPLE SKILLS.....	9
6	IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE SKILLS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT.....	10
7	ESSENTIAL PEOPLE SKILLS ACCORDING TO LITERATURE RESEARCH..	11
7.1	First people skill.....	12
7.2	Second people skill .....	13
7.3	Third people skill .....	14
7.4	Fourth people skill .....	14
7.5	Fifth people skill .....	15
8	IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT .....	16
8.1	Methodology .....	16
8.2	Data analysis .....	17
9	ESSENTIAL PEOPLE SKILLS ACCORDING TO INTERVIEWS .....	20
9.1	First people skill.....	21
9.2	Second people skill .....	22
9.3	Third people skill .....	23
9.4	Fourth people skill .....	24
9.5	Fifth people skill .....	25
10	COMPARISON OF RESULTS .....	26
11	THE BROCHURE .....	27
12	DISCUSSION .....	30
13	CONCLUSION .....	31
	REFERENCES.....	33
	APPENDICES	

## 1 INTRODUCTION

All humans already have people skills, which we gathered from being social creatures. The question is how developed are these skills in each of us? (Bolton 2011)

Communication is considered to be the greatest accomplishment of people. This communication, translated through language, distinguishes human-beings from other creatures. Nevertheless, majority of men simply do not know how to communicate well. People do not wish to share subjects that truly matter to them, nor are they able to listen attentively and fully comprehend what others say to them. This ineffective communication appears in all aspects of our lives and it causes a lot of troubles. (Bolton 2011)

Thereby, in order to make a change in this pattern, people or, how they are also called, interpersonal skills should be brought to light.

### 1.1 Purpose of the thesis

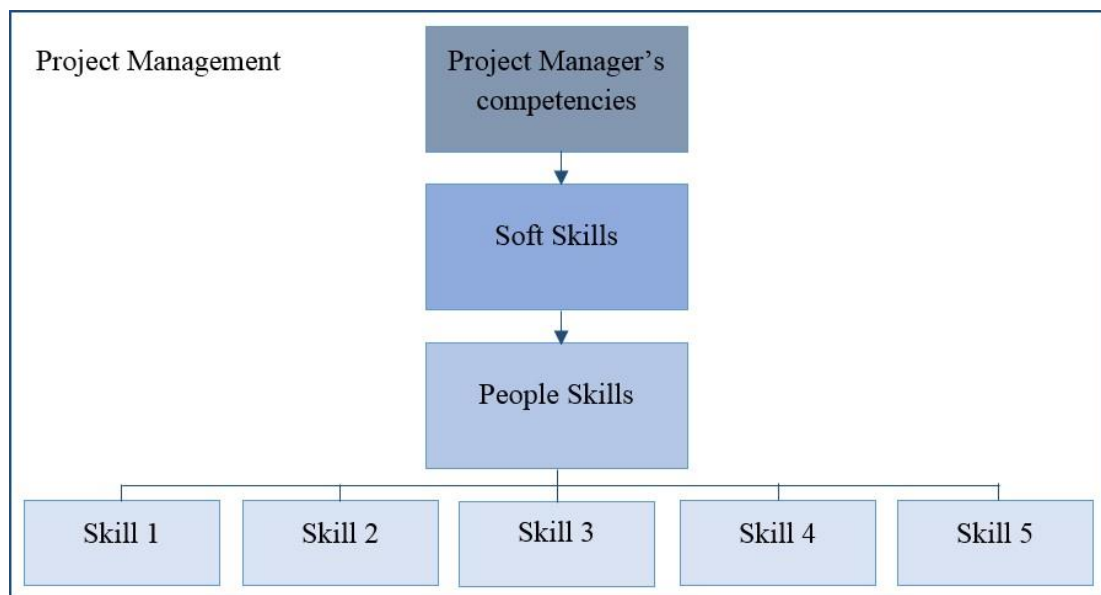
This thesis strives to address the neglected competence of project managers, which is people skill. Nowadays everyone is very focused on hard skills and competencies. Employees aim at increasing their technical or business knowledge and experience. And the soft skills are usually granted minor importance. However, project managers spend majority of their day communicating. It is their main job. Thereby understanding the importance of people skills and enhancing it can increase overall performance of the project team.

The main goal, and in the same time the product, of this project is to create an easy-to-understand brochure for project managers. This brochure will help them to comprehend the applications and importance of people skills. So, ideally, project managers in all fields will be able to benefit from this thesis.

In order to find out these five people skills, firstly, a literature research is done. It allows to collect and process existing information about people skills that are related to

project managers. And then this information is compared to the data that is obtained from interviews with project managers. This way, the differences between what literature suggests and what takes place in actual working life are observed.

## 1.2 Conceptual framework



Picture 1. Conceptual Framework.

As it can be seen in picture 1, the foundation of the conceptual framework is project management. From various aspects of it, the focus of this thesis is on project manager's competencies. These competencies include soft skills, which, in turn, consist of people skills. Thus it is the main topic of this thesis. In the context of the thesis, people skills consist of five skill, which are identified during research and project parts.

## 1.3 Scope and limitations

There are a lot of different people skills, however, this project focuses only on five. It is done with a purpose of being able to explain each skill in detail.

Moreover, the thesis will not discuss the ways of enhancing these five people skills for project managers.

## 2 CLIENT COMPANY

This thesis is done for the client company, which is Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK). It is a Finnish international higher education institute currently having four faculties, such as: health and welfare, logistics and maritime technology, service business and technology. SAMK has nearly 400 employees and 6 000 students. It operates in the west coast of Finland, more specifically in four towns: Pori, Rauma, Huittinen and Kankaanpää. (Website of Satakunta University of Applied Sciences 2018)

The client company has a program called TuotekehitysPaja, which offers an opportunity to all SAMK students to implement challenging projects. Usually the projects are done for a third-party or public organization. The themes are broad, starting from a creation of a service and ending at the development of a physical product, such as demo or prototype. For each project offered by TuotekehitysPaja, a team of SAMK students is established, which has one student acting as a project manager. Participants of a project gain 10 ECTS credits, while project manager gains 15 ECTS credits. (Website of Tuotekehityspaja 2018)

As it is mentioned in the introduction, interviews with project managers take place. The chosen project managers are the ones that were leading the TuotekehitysPaja projects in the client company during years 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The brochure, which is created as a result of this thesis, will be beneficial for the Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. It can be used by the future project managers of TuotekehitysPaja program, in order to have a better understanding of which people skills they should focus on. Information presented in the brochure is relatable to the future project managers, since the brochure is created with a help of the former participants who have had the same circumstances.

### 3 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project management was developed during Second World War and gained more importance in USA in 1950's and 1960's. Project itself can be explained as a set of actions directed at the achievement of a particular purpose. (Mishra 2005, 1-2) Thus project management is related to planning, arranging and controlling resources in order to reach this purpose. (Collins 2011, vii)

Managing a project is often very complicated and demanding. A leader is in charge of a great deal of operations and people. So naturally, a lot of consequences arise from it, and it is a project manager's job to battle it and seek the successful implementation of a project's goals. Project management is also challenging in the view of the fact that each project is unique, so a leader is never experiencing the same circumstances. (Mishra 2005, 1-2)

In order to classify practices in project management, a PMBOK Guide was created. This acronym stands for "A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge". Nowadays it already has six editions and serves as a global standard in project management. This guide was created by the Project Management Institute, which is the most successful association for project managers. (Wuttke & Zandhuis 2015, 9-13)

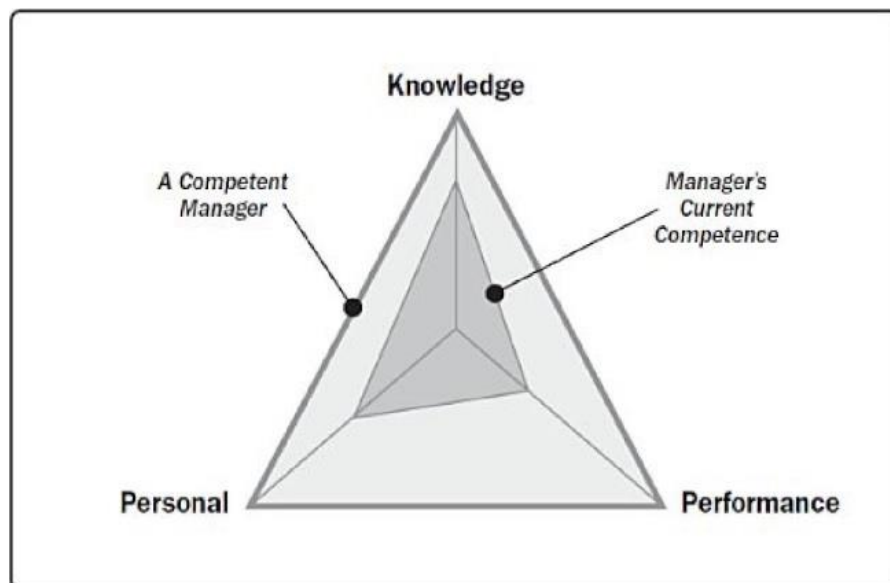
There are ten knowledge areas presented in the PMBOK Guide, such as: project integration management, project scope management, project time management, project cost management, project quality management, project human resource management, project communications management, project risk management, project procurement management, and finally project stakeholder management. These knowledge areas considered to be rather big and complicated. (Kay 2014, 14)

It was proved by a research that following the PMBOK Guide increases the outcomes of the projects, from lower costs to better customer satisfaction. (Wuttke & Zandhuis 2015, 13)

#### 4 COMPETENCIES OF A PROJECT MANAGER

The Project Management Institute (PMI) developed a special framework for assessing the competencies of project managers in 2002. It is called “The Project Manager Competency Development (PMCD) Framework”. As a name suggests, it determines the most significant competencies in relation to its effect on the work of a project manager. (Cartwright & Yinger 2007)

According to Cartwright and Yinger (2007), there are six elements of competencies, such as: abilities, attitudes, behavior, knowledge, personality and skills. In the context of project management, competence can be defined as a capability to execute project activities in alliance with set norms.



Picture 2. Dimensions of Competence. (Project Management Institute 2017)

There are three main dimensions of competencies (picture 2). The first one is knowledge. It refers to leader’s comprehension of project management. The second dimension is performance, which is about what a project manager can achieve when using the first dimension – his or her knowledge. And the last dimension is personal. It is related to the overall behavior of the project manager at work, including main personality characteristics. (Cartwright & Yinger 2007)

In order to be considered a fully competent project manager, he or she has to obtain a solid understanding of all three dimensions: knowledge, performance and personal. (Cartwright & Yinger 2007)

## 5 WHAT ARE SOFT SKILLS AND PEOPLE SKILLS

There are two types of skills: hard and soft. Hard skills refer to a specific knowledge or experience, while soft skills are a person's features, such as common sense, positive behavior and capability to socialize. (Bawge & Sapate 2017, ix) Overall there are around sixty different soft skills, which are considered to be the most important. Some of them are: honesty, personal energy, capability to follow rules, positive work ethic and readiness to learn. (Alex 2009, 8-9)

People skills are a part of soft skills (Alex 2009, 9) There are a great deal of various definition of people skills, for instance, Maciak (2012, 30) defines it as: "...good traits, habits and attitudes that allow someone to get along well with others". Meaning that a great number of good personal characteristics contribute to being an actual people person, who can communicate successfully. (Maciak 2012, 30-31)

Interpersonal skills can also be defined as skills that are needed to achieve the aspired effects on individuals in social situations. In the context of a project management, these effects can be: convincing a team member to operate better, motivate him or her or help in a troubled situation. (Hayes 2002, 3)

The repeating idea in all definitions is the behaving in certain ways that helps to reach desired results. Thus, people skills can be considered goal-focused behaviors. (Hayes 2002, 3)

## 6 IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE SKILLS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

One of the ways to understand the value of people skills is to look at different project phases. Flannes and Levin (2005, 1-3) define four project stages. At each stage project manager is required to have certain people skills in order to lead a team to success.

During the first stage team gathers. Each team member arrives with his or her own set of personal beliefs and values. The first task of project manager is to withstand from stereotypical way of thinking and making any guesses about people, their characters and hobbies. What is more, during this stage project manager should have outstanding communication skills in order to successfully explain the vision of the project to a team. (Flannes and Levin 2005, 3-4)

The next stage – the conflict - is almost inevitable and occurs in all teams. Project manager needs to resolve any disputes, as well as, build conflict resolution attitudes within a team. (Flannes and Levin 2005, 4-6)

During the third stage a team actually executes a job. Project manager should provide a team with all necessary resources and motivate it, in order to make sure that they are being productive and efficient. (Flannes and Levin 2005, 6-8)

And the last stage is a project closure stage. So a team finishes the job, evaluates it and disbands. A lot of various feelings arise during this stage. It can be a terror, rage, or lack of confidence. Many of these may be caused by individual stress or weariness. Project manager's main task is to make sure that a project will be successfully completed, without letting a team's stress to prevent it. (Flannes and Levin 2005, 8-9)

In order to guide a team across all of the four stages, project manager needs to recognize the importance of people skills. (Flannes and Levin 2005, 2-3)

## 7 ESSENTIAL PEOPLE SKILLS ACCORDING TO LITERATURE RESEARCH

There are a great deal of different essential people skills mentioned in an academic literature. And obviously there are no exactly the same five skills that all the authors have agreed on. Thus one book is chosen to serve as a base for the academic research, however, other literature sources are also referenced.

In the main book, Lencioni (2002, 187-190), defines five dysfunctions of a team, which are the difficulties that each team faces. As it can be seen in picture 3, the five dysfunctions are: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability and inattention to results.



Picture 3. Five Dysfunctions of a Team (Website of the Table Group 2018)

To each dysfunction one people skill is assigned. (Table 1) The idea is that each people skill should help project manager overcome correlating dysfunction.

Table 1. Dysfunctions and correlating people skills.

Dysfunction	People skill
<b>Absence of trust</b>	Trust building
<b>Fear of conflict</b>	Ideological conflict management
<b>Lack of commitment</b>	Commitment building
<b>Avoidance of accountability</b>	Accountability building
<b>Inattention to results</b>	Focus on results building

These five people skills are defined and explained in this chapter with a help of an academic research.

### 7.1 First people skill

According to Lencioni (2002, 195) the first dysfunction of a team is the absence of trust. Thereby the corresponding people skill that is needed to overcome this dysfunction is trust building. Lencioni (2002, 43-44) and Binder (2016, 51) consider the trust as a framework and the most essential piece in building a team.

In case of project management, the definition of trust is different from the typical one, which is the possibility to forecast individual's behavior according to past experience. The more appropriate definition in given context would be that the trust is "the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group". (Lencioni 2002, 195)

The crucial element in achieving trust is overcoming the necessity of being invulnerable. There can be a great deal of various vulnerabilities, for instance, people's weak points, lack of skills, mistakes, and reluctance to ask for help. In this way, project manager should force his or her team to not be afraid being vulnerable with each other and to create atmosphere, where their vulnerabilities will not be applied against them. In practice, it is quite difficult to reach, since majority of employees tend to be competitive with their co-workers and very concerned about what others think of them. So what project managers should do is to shift their habits for the sake of a team. What is more, project manager must become vulnerable himself or herself in pursuance of inspiring a team to act the same. (Lencioni 2002, 196-202)

One of the most significant benefits of trust within a team is that individuals do not waste time on protecting themselves, instead they can fully center their attention on the project. (Lencioni 2002, 196)

Consequently, teams that succeed in building a trust are able to ask for help, recognize their flaws, grant their feedback, give and welcome apologies, and concentrate on the actual project. (Lencioni 2002, 195-202)

## 7.2 Second people skill

The second dysfunction of a team, based on Lencioni (2002, 202), is a fear of conflict. So the suitable people skill for it is the ideological conflict management.

This skill should not be mistaken with regular conflict management. The more common conflict management is about solving existing problems. (Heldman, Baca, Jansen & Jansen 2007, 11) Whilst the people skill discussed in this chapter is about pushing teammates to have a conflict. It is vital to understand that ideological conflict should aim at being productive and resolving issues without any personal aspect. Project manager needs to focus on having a conflict restricted by topics and keep his or her team away from personality-centered and harmful assaults. As a result, ideological conflict should create the best solutions in the fastest time. (Lencioni 2002, 202-203)

A great deal of teams avoid and are even afraid of having a conflict. The most common reason for it is fear of hurting others' feelings. However, this behavior usually results in no solution about an issue, leading to having to revisit the same topic over and over again. (Lencioni 2002, 203)

When a project manager masters ideological conflict management skill, his or her team is able to debate about a topic and resolve it much faster. What is more, teammates actively engage into passionate discussions without any residual feelings and side harm. In addition, meetings become dynamic and interesting, which means that teammates are eager to have them. (Lencioni 2002, 202-206)

### 7.3 Third people skill

The third dysfunction of a team according to Lencioni (2002, 207) is a lack of commitment. It results in a third people skill called commitment building. It refers to teams creating clear decisions and fully committing to it. The key idea in commitment management is that every member of a team, even those who were against a solution, carries it out and is being confident about a decision without having any doubts.

There are two significant aspects of successful commitment management. First of all, project manager should make sure that a team is not wasting their time searching for a consensus, in a view of the fact that, it is almost impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, all opinions and ideas should be heard and taken into consideration. And eventually a team needs to agree and fully commit on the best possible decision. (Lencioni 2002, 207-208)

The second aspect is related to certainty. Project manager should realize that a solution is better than no solution. In many cases, there are no guarantees that a decision is right and will lead to success, therefore teammates are reluctant to committing to it. Yet they need to learn that it is better to make an incorrect decision and after that transform it. (Lencioni 2002, 208)

It is crucial to understand that commitment is an innate feature of teams, which may be cultivated. And commitment management skill allows project managers to grasp the drivers and hurdles to commitment and their origins. (Milosevic 2003, 347)

### 7.4 Fourth people skill

Avoidance of accountability is the fourth dysfunction of a team, leading to a people skill called accountability building. This skill refers to ability of project manager to make his or her team become liable for their performance as well as readiness of a team to hold each other accountable. Meaning that if someone executes task in a de-

teriorative for a team way, the other team members must comment on it. (Lencioni 2002, 212-213)

It might cause the interpersonal discomfort and reluctance, especially when team members have a close relationship, since they are afraid of endangering it. However, avoidance only impairs the connection, because of the dissatisfaction with person's work. Accountability helps to display that teammates respect and honor each other and that they have high standards for one another's results. (Lencioni 2002, 213)

Accountability building people skill, to some extent, refers to communication and performance feedback. Thus project manager should make sure that a team communicates enough in order to provide each other with a constructive feedback. (Knutson & Bitz 1991, 23-28)

## 7.5 Fifth people skill

The fifth dysfunction of a team according to Lencioni (2002, 216) is inattention to results. Thus the people skill appearing from it is focus on results building.

This skill should help a project manager to focus his or her team on certain goals and achieve planned outcomes. It is crucial to understand that these outcomes do not have to be measured only financially, for instance with revenue or profit. Focus on results building skill is more about having a wider definition of results, such as an outcome-based. So with a help of the fifth people skill, project manager is able to set collective team goals, which will drive the results. And in the long run, team goals always contribute to the achievement of company's financial goals. (Lencioni 2002, 216-217)

Project teams have a tendency of worrying about something not related to achieving shared goals. Some team members are satisfied just because they belong to a team, especially when it is a popular or a special one. They view achieving outcomes as something desirable, however not valuable of a considerable investment. What is more, some people in project teams tend to be concerned about their own success

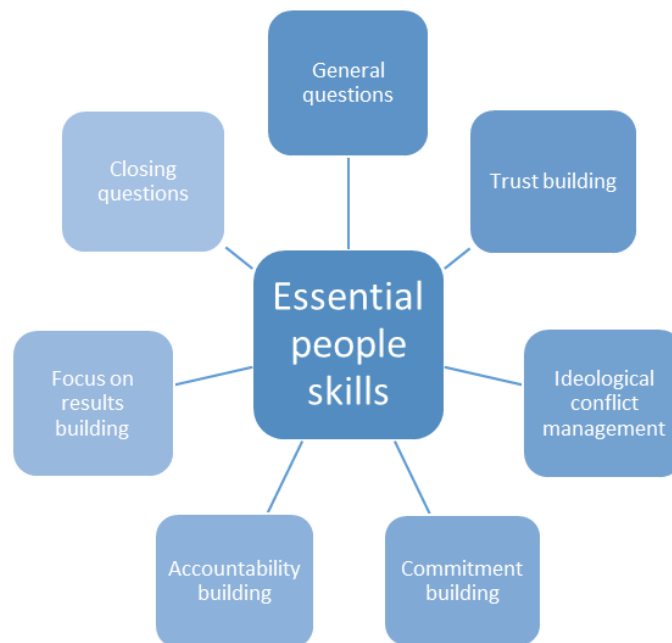
more than a team's success, often at the cost of it. To some extent, this is a common trend, since all individuals have an inborn instinct of self-preservation. But what a focus on results building skill helps to do is to convince a group that, for the sake of a success of a team, shared outcomes are more significant than individual's ego. (Lencioni 2002, 217-220)

## 8 IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT

### 8.1 Methodology

The research method used in this thesis is qualitative. Regarding the data collection method, the focused semi-structured interview is considered to be the most appropriate technique. Interviews are arranged as individual interviews with project managers, who have worked in projects for the client company. These project managers are current or former students in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. And they have implemented big and challenging projects as a part of the TuotekehitysPaja program in 2015, 2016 and 2017. All of the projects were completely different, some focusing on customer attraction, some on product development, and many more.

The interview themes serve a great purpose of identifying and collecting similar data. (Mann 2016, 212) Thus, seven interview themes are created. As it can be seen in picture 4, they are: general questions, questions about each of five people skills identified in the literature research and closing questions. The purpose of the general questions is to identify initial opinions of project managers on the topic, as well as, to ask them to name five people skills that has helped them the most. However, it might be difficult to determine these skills immediately, that is why there are the next five themes. In these themes, opinions on already identified five skills are asked through non-leading questions. The last theme - closing questions – is the most significant part of the interview. After receiving the initial thoughts on the topic and having a discussion about people skills, project managers are asked to name the final five most essential people skills.



Picture 4. Interview themes.

There are some predetermined points, however, the additional unplanned questions are asked if necessary. The aim is to have a flexible interview in a conversation style. The interview questions can be seen in appendix 1.

Considering ethical issues, the research permission to conduct interviews is obtained. Interviews are recorded if participants give their verbal consent. Besides, interviewees are notified that the data gathered from discussions is not used in any other purpose and that it is destroyed after the thesis is completed.

## 8.2 Data analysis

According to the chosen research method, the outcome of investigation is qualitative. And this kind of data is hard to analyze or convert into any statistics. However, in order to notice certain trends, some form of statistics is needed and it is created with a help of quite creative and unusual methods.

So during the research part of the thesis, eight interviews are done with project managers, who worked for a client company. The recordings of each interview are analyzed, and as a result a heatmap is created. A heatmap is a tool, which visualizes data by utilizing various colors to show the level of activity. (Website of Business Dic-

tionary 2018) In this case, the map is done with a purpose to show how a project manager feels about each people skill identified in the literature research. Each color demonstrates the degree to which an interviewee sees the importance of people skill. Green color showcases the strong feeling, yellow color shows semi-strong feeling and red demonstrates a not strong feeling. In addition, as it can be seen in picture 5, in order to identify the most essential people skills, the scores are added. They are distributed in such way that green color gets 1 point, yellow 0.5 points and red 0 points.

People Skill	PM1	PM2	PM3	PM4	PM5	PM6	PM7	PM8	Score
Trust building	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	8
Ideological conflict management	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	8
Commitment building	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Green	5
Accountability building	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	4,5
Focus on results building	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	5,5

Picture 5. Heatmap.

All of eight project managers agree on the importance of trust building and ideological conflict management. Both of these skills have scored 8 points. The next skill according to the scores is focus on results building skill with 5.5 points. The following skill is commitment building with 5 points. However, one project manager considers these two skills not very important. And the last people skills, which gained only 4.5 points, is accountability building. Two project managers affirm that it is only a team leader's job to hold members accountable. To summarize, it can be claimed that the last three skills evoke versatile opinions, while the first two – trust building and ideological conflict management – proved to be essential. Thus, these two skills are included in the brochure.

Furthermore, other original ideas of project managers related to people skills are analyzed. In order to find out the repeating ideas the word cloud is created. Word cloud is a tool, which is used to illustrate the word frequency, as the size of the word depends on how often it is mentioned in a text (Website of Cambridge Dictionary 2018) The more frequently a word is referred, the bigger its' font is. And as it can be seen in picture 6, it clearly shows that the words motivation, communication, listening and truthful are mentioned multiple times. Motivation is referred six times, communication five times, listening four times and, finally, truthful three times.



Picture 6. Word Cloud.

Word cloud shows which words were stated the most amount of times, but attention should also be paid to the words that were mentioned only once. And in order to perform that, the word groups are created. The idea is that all people skills mentioned by project managers are gathered into groups. Each set contains words with a similar concept or meaning. In some cases, the same word is put to several suitable categories, as for instance, the word “respect” is situated in two groups. As a result, six groups are identified. With a purpose of recognizing the groups that have the most amount of words, number of times that the words are mentioned are stated in the brackets. As picture 7 demonstrates, after the words are combined together, the name to each group is given. The names are chosen by identifying the repeating ideas that the words carry. After that the overall scores are given in a brackets, which is a sum of all words. So the group that gained the most points is communication having 10 points, the next is motivation with 8 points, following trust building with 6 points, listening has 5 points, ideological conflict management 3 points and finally accountability building has 2 points.



Picture 7. Word groups.

Eventually, after analyzing the data with three different tools, the final five essential skills can be declared. The heatmap showed that trust building and ideological conflict management are important people skills. And it was also proved with word groups. The word cloud and word groups also identified that communication, motivation and listening are important. Thereby these five skills are the most essential according to interviews. Even though, accountability building was mentioned and gained 2 points in the word groups, it is not included in the list of five skills, since it caused conflicting opinions, as it can be seen in the heatmap.

## 9 ESSENTIAL PEOPLE SKILLS ACCORDING TO INTERVIEWS

All of eight project managers, who are interviewed, agree that people skills are very important in project management. According to Project Manager 1 (PM1) (personal communication on 27.03.2018) people skills are needed to successfully guide a team to the achievement of a goal. Furthermore, PM1 states that all people are different, so

in order to cooperate with them, various people skills are needed. Project Manager 2 (PM2) (personal communication on 27.03.2018) shares an opinion that “...you cannot motivate people if you do not know them”. Project Manager 3 (PM3) (personal communication on 27.03.2018) and Project Manager 8 (PM8) (personal communication on 03.04.2018) articulate the same idea as well. Project Manager 4 (PM4) (personal communication on 28.03.2018) shares that people skills help to “get to know how people work and behave”. In addition, people skills contribute to simply getting to know teammates better, according to Project Manager 5 (PM5) (personal communication on 28.03.2018) and Project Manager 6 (PM6) (personal communication on 29.03.2018). They say the better a team leader knows people, the easier it is to work with them. Project Manager 7 (PM7) (personal communication on 02.04.2018) assures that “it’s impossible or at least extremely difficult to work at all without people skills”.

## 9.1 First people skill

According to the analysis of the interviews with project managers, the first people skill that they consider essential is trust building. As it was already defined during the literature research, this skill refers to an ability of team members to avoid feeling protective and defensive around a team. (Lencioni 2002, 195)

Achievement of vulnerability is the most significant part of trust building skill. (Lencioni 2002, 196) PM2 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) notices the importance of being vulnerable, especially when it is related to making mistakes. She says that, if someone stumbles “...it is better to come clean and admit a mistake”. PM2 points out that there is nothing wrong about making mistakes, so team members should feel comfortable confessing it. PM5 (personal communication on 28.03.2018) also adds to this point that if someone hides problems and does a job in a wrong way, it results simply in losing of a valuable time.

PM1 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) also raises another important aspect of being vulnerable. In her opinion, it is good to show the insecurities, because then a team can help to overcome them. That is exactly what she did during her project,

which resulted in an insecure member becoming more confident with a support of a whole team.

Additionally, PM2 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) and PM6 (personal communication on 29.03.2018) state that a trust building skill improves teamwork.

Overall, trust building skill allows to create confiding and open atmosphere within a team. And this atmosphere permits team members to admit their mistakes and insecurities, thus potentially not wasting a time on dealing with problems that can arise from the opposite scenario. What is more, trust building skill makes a teamwork better.

## 9.2 Second people skill

The outcome of interviews with project managers, shows that the second essential people skill is ideological conflict management. As it is already defined, this skill is related to encouraging team members to have disputes, which are limited by project-related topics. (Lencioni 2002, 202)

PM4 (personal communication on 28.03.2018) and PM5 (personal communication on 28.03.2018) specifically emphasize this idea that having conflicts is very good for a team, as long as they are not personality-centered. They say that only creative and project-based disputes are useful. PM7 (personal communication on 02.04.2018) shares the same opinion adding that: “I believe any team will profit from inner debate, as long as it’s factual”.

Another point, which is identified after analyzing the interviews, is that it can be refreshing for a team to sometimes have conflicts. This idea is presented by PM2 (personal communication on 27.03.2018). In addition, PM3 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) claims that having a debates is a “...great way to engage people and bring opinions”. PM8 (personal communication on 03.04.2018) also says that conflicts are good especially when people have different views. In his opinion, it can build a team stronger.

The problem of avoiding conflicts, in PM1's (personal communication on 27.03.2018) opinion, is that team members have negative feelings and thoughts, which stay unresolved. As a result, people are silently holding a grudge. PM6 (personal communication on 29.03.2018) adds to this point that: "if there are problems – say it, handle it".

Ideological conflict management skill helps project managers to encourage his or her team to have conflicts. It also helps to guide these disputes into a right direction, avoiding personality-centered and rude statements. This skill is important, because conflicts can be refreshing and engaging for a team. Inner debates allow different opinions to be heard, eventually making a team stronger.

### 9.3 Third people skill

The third most essential people skill that is identified during the research part is communication. Five out of eight project managers noted this skill.

Communication is a medium through which all the relationships commence. It is important to understand that communication consists not only with words. The most common theory suggests that communication is composed of three parts, such as verbal, non-verbal and emotional. Verbal element is related to the choice of words, the tone of them and the volume of a voice. Non-verbal component is the body language. And finally, the emotional element is related to all of the feelings that an individual is experiencing which are projected onto the communication. (Maciak 2012, 48-61)

The discussion with PM2 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) clearly shows that communication plays a main role in project management. Every conflict that PM2 faced within her team was solved through communication. She proves it by saying: "Communication solves all problems" and "Talking has helped every time". What is more, PM2 tried to cease unnecessary conflicts at the very beginning by discussing a problem.

PM3 (personal communication on 27.03.2018), PM4 (personal communication on 28.03.2018) and PM5 (personal communication on 28.03.2018) share the same opinion that good communication skill can be very helpful in project management, as it can solve a great deal of problems.

Furthermore, the research shows that constant communication is also important to make sure that team members know “...what and why they are doing”. (Personal communication on 03.04.2018)

Ultimately, communication skill is needed to successfully convey an idea, as well, as maintain friendly relationships with people. It is the one of the most common skills, which can be applied in many areas of project management, including preventing or resolving necessary and unnecessary conflicts.

#### 9.4 Fourth people skill

The fourth people skill – motivation – is mentioned by six out of eight project managers, thereby proving its importance. Motivation, in general, is a summation of inner needs, impulses and energy, which allow an individual to work for the sake of achieving personal aims. It is important to realize that a person cannot be motivated by some external factors. Self-motivation is the key trigger that pushes people to actually do the job. Therefore the project manager’s role is to understand and touch on these inner forces that motivate people. (Singh 2017, vi-xi)

PM5 (personal communication on 28.03.2018) is the only respondent who mentions this crucial part of motivation. He states: “It is hard to motivate people if they are not self-motivated”.

In PM4’s (personal communication on 28.03.2018) opinion, motivation “...is the most helpful skill”. He points out that as his project was a student work, team members were very unsure about it. So the project manager had to motivate people and show them that they are capable of doing the job. PM3 (personal communication on

27.03.2018) also mentions that her team sometimes was struggling with keeping the motivation up, so she had to use the motivation skill to mend the situation.

PM1 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) and PM8 (personal communication on 03.04.2018), on the contrary, recall no problems with maintaining the motivation high within their teams. However, they both view motivation skill as an essential skill for project managers.

PM2 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) agrees with the previous point of view, but she also attaches an additional factor to the motivation skill. PM2 affirms that this skill should also challenge people, making them achieve more than they think they can.

Overall, when thinking about motivation it is crucial to remember that, first of all, an individual has to be self-motivated. When that is understood, a project manager should try to motivate people by finding out the origins of people's driving forces.

## 9.5 Fifth people skill

The fifth people skill identified during the interviews with project managers is listening. It was mentioned by four participants. Majority of people spend 70 percent of their awake time communicating with others. Listening takes 45 percent of this time. And as project manager's main job is interacting with team members, the importance of listening becomes even more relevant. (Dale Carnegie Training 2010, 171-185)

Simply hearing what others are saying has nothing to do with the listening skill. This skill refers to paying a close attention to what an interlocutor is telling. What is more, listening skill allows to deeply grasp the message and the senses of it. (Dale Carnegie Training 2010, 171-185)

Project managers, who mention the importance of listening skill, emphasize the same attributes of it, as a literature does. PM7 (personal communication on 02.04.2018) voices that listening and actually understand what is told is "...at the very core of

people skills”. He also stresses that it is hard to work as a project manager, when a person is not capable of carefully listening and understanding.

PM5 (personal communication on 28.03.2018) and PM3 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) both mention that listening skill is useful to find out what is on a team’s mind and to be on the same page with them. PM2 (personal communication on 27.03.2018) shares the same viewpoint, adding that without listening skill, a project manager “...does not get to work properly with a team”. And that, in turn, leads to not achieving the best outcome of a project.

In conclusion, listening skill plays an important role in project manager’s life, as he or she dedicates a lot of time to interact with a team. A well-developed listening skill helps to understand the whole message of the speech. And as a result, it allows to recognize what a team is truly thinking about, leading to a better teamwork and outputs.

## 10 COMPARISON OF RESULTS

According to the purpose of the thesis, literature research and interviews take place. Both of these tools are used in order to identify similarities and differences of the lists of five most essential people skills for project managers.

As a result of literature research, which was based mostly on Lencioni (2002, 187-190), the five most essential people skills are: trust building, ideological conflict management, commitment building, accountability building and focus on results building.

As a result of the analysis of the interviews, the five essential people skills for project managers are: trust building, ideological conflict management, communication, motivation and listening.

So as it can be noticed, the two people skills are present in both parts: trust building and ideological conflict management. What is for the other three, suggested by literature research, they caused versatile opinions during interviews. Project managers feel that communication, motivation and listening are more important.

## 11 THE BROCHURE

The five people skills that are presented in the brochure are chosen from the results of the interviews. And that is: trust building, ideological conflict management, communication, motivation and listening. These five skills are considered to be valid, since they were created, firstly, as a result of a literature research. And then they were challenged during the interview part, leading to the creation of this well-founded and justified list approved not only by literature research, but also by the actual project managers.

It is decided that the best way to present the information is through a triple fold brochure. The template is taken from a website called Canva (2018), which offers a great deal of various templates from brochures to CVs and many more. The chosen design is bright and colorful, attracting attention and making learning process more fun. In addition, it is rather minimalistic, to avoid destructing readers from the message of the brochure. This brochure can be easily printed on both sides of a paper and then folded three times.



Picture 8. First page of the brochure.

As picture 8 demonstrates, the front side of the brochure has a title in a big font. The back side contains contact information of the creator of this brochure. Also there is a definition of people skills, to make sure that everyone, who studies it, has a clear understanding of what the people skills actually are. This side is the first thing that a user spots when opening a brochure.



Picture 9. Second page of the brochure.

The second page of the brochure (picture 9) contains information about the five people skills for project managers. The first side describes trust building skill and ideological conflict management skill, the middle side explains communication skill, and the last side displays motivation skill and listening skill. The text is composed in a quite concise, but simple and easy-to-understand style.

The purpose of this brochure is to give a reader a basic idea of what are people skills and which ones are the most essential for their job. It is made to enlighten project managers about the importance of people skills and inspire them to study on this topic.

The rights to print and distribute this brochure are given to a client company – Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. Thus, their current and future project managers can freely use it for an educational purposes. The bigger printable version of a brochure can also be found in appendix 2 and appendix 3.

## 12 DISCUSSION

The discussion chapter is dedicated to the deliberation of the problems that arose during the creation of the thesis. The main challenges emerge during literature research and interview parts. The first problem appeared with finding an appropriate book. There are a great deal of books, which have lists of the most essential people skills for project managers. However, majority of these books contain more than five skills. Thereby such books cannot be chosen, since the scope of the thesis is exactly five skills. And randomly selecting only five skills out of these books is considered to be misleading and improper. Nevertheless, the fitting book and a creative decision for this problem is found. It is described in chapter 7. Another challenge arising in the literature research is that majority of the chosen five people skills are quite unique, leading to some hardships finding more resources about them. It is also worth mentioning that if the different book was chosen, the outcome of the brochure would, most probably, be slightly different. But that is simply due to the fact that there is no unified and agreed upon list of five most essential people skills.

Concerning the interview part, a lot of difficulties are present here as well. First of all, interview participant's first language is Finnish. Yet the interviews are conducted in English. This factor may cause some misunderstandings and inability to properly explain ideas. Secondly, the fact that interviewees are not the professional project managers should not be forgotten. Their concepts and opinions are based on a quite limited experience. For instance, if a project manager have never had a problems with commitment of team members, then, most probably, a commitment building skill will not seem very significant for this person. The lack of experience and biases can make the results of the research to some extent inaccurate. Another bias that can influence the outcome and reliability of the thesis product is the author's leading questions. Although, the interview questions are written in a neutral manner, the tone of the voice or body language can also be leading. Speaking of that, another problem is that the author is not a professional interviewer and has a very limited experience in handling this role. As a consequence, the quality of the interview can suffer. Furthermore, it is noticed that the quality of the Skype interviews is poorer than the quality of the face-to-face interviews. Additionally, in order to obtain more specific information the interviews could have been deeper, taking more time. However, that

would make the interviews even harder to analyze. Speaking of the analysis, since the gathered data is qualitative and vast, it is challenging to properly examine it and make conclusions. Also the interview question “What would you say are the 5 people skills that has helped you the most?” proved to be very difficult to answer straight away. Not all project managers managed to name all five people skills. In such cases, only their relationship towards the people skills identified in the literature research is established. And lastly, if the bigger interview sample would have been taken, it would provide more accurate results.

In spite of the fact that the chosen data collection methods proved to be challenging causing some problems, author still believes that the product of the thesis can be considered valid. The ground for such opinion is the fact that the final five people skills arose from a multiple researches and they were challenged and questioned many times. Additionally, majority of discussion points are stated in order to demonstrate that the author knows that the processes could be more thorough. However, since a bachelor’s thesis is supposed to be quite short, the existing research is considered to be sufficient.

## 13 CONCLUSION

Conclusion of this thesis begins with the introduction of one impressive research, which was done by Harvard Business Review in 2017. This study aimed to collect data related to management from a significant number of manufacturing companies in the United States of America (USA). So it is not directly related to the project management, instead it shows the management in general. Nevertheless, the author considers it absolutely necessary to include in the thesis, since it clearly demonstrates the importance of good management practices. (Bloom, Reenen & Brynjolfsson 2017, 1-4)

First of all, this study is unique, because it is the only management research that is done on such a big scale. Overall, 35,000 factories took part in a survey. And the findings are astonishing: only one-fifth of companies utilize three-quarters or more of

the management methods that are performance-focused. But what is more, these factories have way better performance. The study shows that every 10% growth in management index brings 14% growth in productivity. In addition, it was also identified that good management adds more to a better performance, than R&D and IT. Even though this research concentrates only on manufacturing companies in the USA, the further study proves that the good managements is also significant in other areas, such as retail and education, as well as in other countries in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa. (Bloom, Reenen & Brynjolfsson 2017, 4-6)

So by taking into consideration this research, the importance of good management techniques is proven again. And one of the factors leading to becoming a good manager is obtaining a knowledge about people skills. And this paper conducts its own research with a purpose of identifying the most essential five people skills. And then explaining why are these skills so valuable for project managers. The result shows that these five skills are: trust building skill, ideological conflict management skill, communication skill, motivation skill, and listening skill.

The product of this thesis is the brochure, which contains these five people skills with a short but well-defined explanations. The author sincerely hopes that this brochure will help current and future project managers of a client company, in such way that they will have a better understanding of the importance of people skills in their field. The author hopes that because of her work, project managers will value soft skills more than or as much as they value traditional hard skills. And that they will strive at improving these five people skills. The author, in her turn, is not planning on stopping the investigation of this topic. She aims at becoming better in project management in general, and especially in people skills.

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## APPENDIX 1

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. General questions
  - Do you think that people skills are important in project management? Why?
  - What would you say are the 5 people skills that has helped you the most?
2. Trust building
  - Have you ever had a situations where your team members did not trust each other, meaning that they have felt the need to be protective or careful with a team? If yes, then what did you do about it?
  - Would you say that your team members were able to be vulnerable with each other, meaning that they were not afraid of showing their mistakes and insecurities?
  - Do you think it is important for a team to be vulnerable with each other?
3. Ideological conflict management
  - Have your team often had constructive conflicts? How often have these conflicts came to a solution and how?
  - How do you see the importance of conflicts and debates within a team?
4. Commitment building
  - Would you say that all of your team members always focused on what has been decided, meaning that they put all of their energy into it?
  - Would you say that there were members of a team, who were silently against the decision that was made? If yes, how did you handle the issue? Did you bring it up?
5. Accountability building
  - Surely there have been some situation, where a team member did his or her job wrong. Have any other members of your team pointed it out to that person (in a gentle way)? And how did you react?
  - How do you think team could hold each other accountable for actions?
6. Focus on results building
  - How did you get your team focused on project goals?
  - Do you think that sometimes some of your teammates were concerned more about achieving their own success instead of team's success? Do you consider this situation a problem? Why?
7. Closing questions
  - So after having this discussion, what would you say are the 5 people skills that helped you to run the project?



SECOND PAGE OF THE BROCHURE

## 5 ESSENTIAL PEOPLE SKILLS FOR PROJECT MANAGERS

### 1. TRUST BUILDING SKILL

This skill helps to create confiding and open atmosphere within a team. As a result, it allows team members to admit their mistakes and insecurities. So a time is not wasted on dealing with problems that can arise from the opposite scenario.

### 2. IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILL

This skill supports the encouragement of a team to have project-related conflicts, avoiding personality-centered disputes. Ideological conflicts can be refreshing and engaging for a team, allowing different opinions to be heard.

### 3. COMMUNICATION SKILL

It is one of the most common skills, which can be applied in many areas of project management. The main idea is that communication skill helps to successfully convey an idea and to maintain friendly relationships with a team.

### 4. MOTIVATION SKILL

This skill, first of all, helps to realize that an individual has to be self-motivated. When that is understood, this skill allows a project manager to motivate people by finding out the origins of their driving forces.

### 5. LISTENING SKILL

A well-developed listening skill helps to understand the whole message of the speech. And as a result, it allows to recognize what a team is truly thinking about, which leads to a better teamwork and results.