

Intersubjective Understanding in Educational Project Management

Between Advertised Requirements and Lived Collaboration

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Summary

This study examines how shared understandings of competence emerge between organizations and educational project managers in the context of job requirements. An online survey of 104 current and potential project managers in German-speaking countries explored professional, self, social, negotiation, team/leadership and methodological competencies, revealing how different stakeholders construct meaning around essential qualifications. Results show that organizational and planning skills, conflict resolution abilities and delegation competence are considered essential for enabling productive intersubjective exchange. Gender-specific differences emerged particularly in social and self-competence, rated higher by women, suggesting divergent perspectives on communicative capacities. The study highlights a fundamental disconnect: while organizations demand comprehensive profiles, 50 % alignment may suffice for interviews, indicating misaligned expectations. To foster genuine intersubjective understanding, organizations should engage in transparent communication by clearly differentiating between 'must-have' and 'nice-to-have' competencies, recognizing that successful collaboration depends on shared meaning-making rather than exhaustive credential matching.

Keywords: Education Project management, Job advertisements, Competency profiles, Personal recruitment

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1 Introduction

Traditional education and expertise are becoming less and less adequate in the workforce to meet the evolving and complex demands of the modern world. (Salvisberg, 2010). This shift is particularly noticeable in educational project management, where complex challenges of the modern workforce call for competences from a variety of disciplines, including knowledge management, organizational learning, and educational management. This interdisciplinary approach requires educational project managers to have the necessary skills to address the diverse and evolving challenges within the field. In educational project management, each project is guided by a precisely formulated educational mission. These specific requirements encourage potential candidates to critically reflect on their current competences and identify possible areas for development, which often leads to a degree of uncertainty (Salvisberg, 2010).

Although studies show that potential candidates are often reluctant to apply if they do not meet all the criteria listed in job advertisements, research by the recruitment agency Talent Works shows a different picture: the chances of getting an interview are almost the same, whether 50 % or 90 % of the requirements are met (Gaulhiac, 2018). The diversity of projects in the education sector requires a wide range of skills. While routine projects are characterised by clearly defined goals and resources, innovation projects are often characterised by unknown factors (Gessler, 2009). This distinction highlights the need for a flexible and adaptable approach to education project management.

Due to a scarcity of applicants who sufficiently cover the required disciplines, current job advertisements in the education sector regularly fail to attract applications. This suggests that there may be a need to rethink the design of job advertisements and the skills required. A survey of students currently working in project management and those who might do so in the future aims to clarify which competences are considered essential („must-have“) and which are desirable („nice-to-have“) in job advertisements.

2 Theoretical Background

The „Eye of Competences“ (Figure 1) of the International Project Management Association (IPMA) defines three central areas of competence in project management: People, Perspective and Practice.

People: This area includes personal and social competences such as self-reflection, self-management, personal communication, integrity, reliability, leadership, handling conflicts and crises, relationship management, commitment, teamwork, resourcefulness, results orientation and negotiation skills. According to Kuster et al. (2019), these skills are the key to success.

Perspective: This area relates to the project framework and includes strategies, structures, governance, compliance, processes, regulations, standards, interests and power relations, values and culture. These elements make up a project's environment, which project managers need to be aware of (Kuster et al., 2019).

Practice: The focus here is on the methods and craft of project management, including project design, scope, organisation, stakeholder management, planning, transformation, information management and documentation. The relationship within the project team is crucial to the success of the project (Kuster et al., 2019).

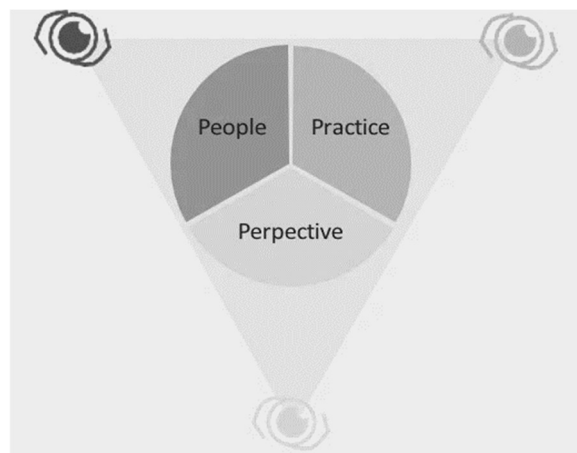


Figure 1: Eye of Competences (Source: based on IPMA, 2022)

The emphasis placed by Schiersmann, Petersen, and Weber (2017) on the importance of knowledge, skills, and attitudes as key resources highlights essential competences in project management, notably in navigating self-organisation and problem-solving, as depicted in their Figure 2. This adaptability, highlighted in the figure, is crucial for project managers to effectively respond to the ever-changing conditions and challenges within project environments.

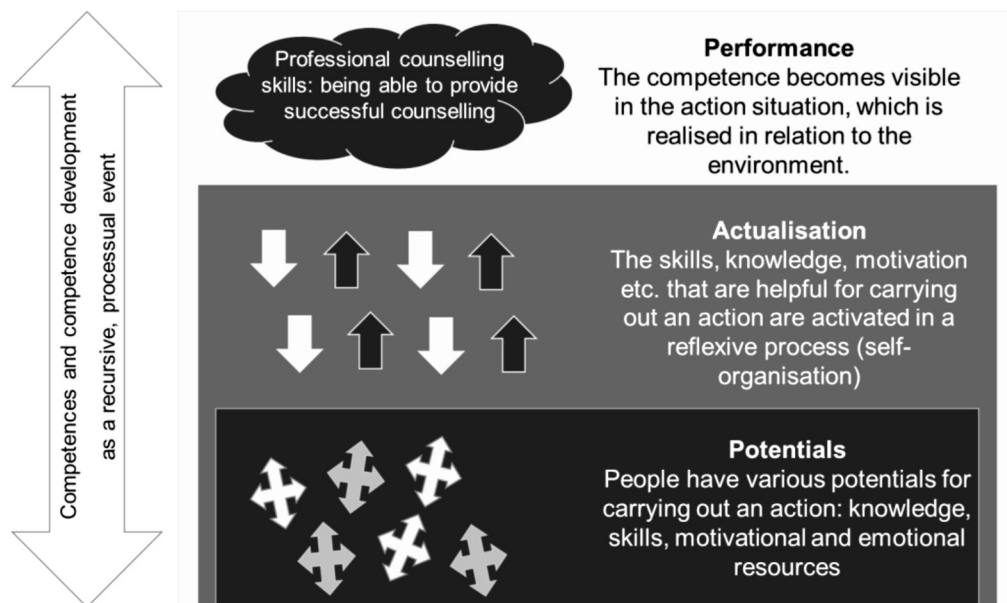


Figure 2: Competence and Competence Development as a procedural and recursive Process (Source: based on Schiersmann, Petersen and Weber, 2017)

Weinert (2001), on the other hand, emphasises the importance of meta-competences, which enable people to access their knowledge and skills in specific situations. The mobilisation of knowledge is crucial here (Erpenbeck and Sauter, 2016).

In contrast Kuster et al. (2019) outline particular competences that need to be established prior to the commencement of educational projects in their competency model (Figure 3). Educational organisations are increasingly integrating soft skills or key qualifications into their curricula, as technical skills alone are no longer sufficient to optimally prepare employees (Salvisberg, 2010). Women frequently possess such soft skills to supplement technical and these strengths in areas such as communication, patience, empathy, and understanding position them well for leadership roles in change management processes. Thus, women are therefore frequently found in leading roles in change management processes (Becker, 2015).

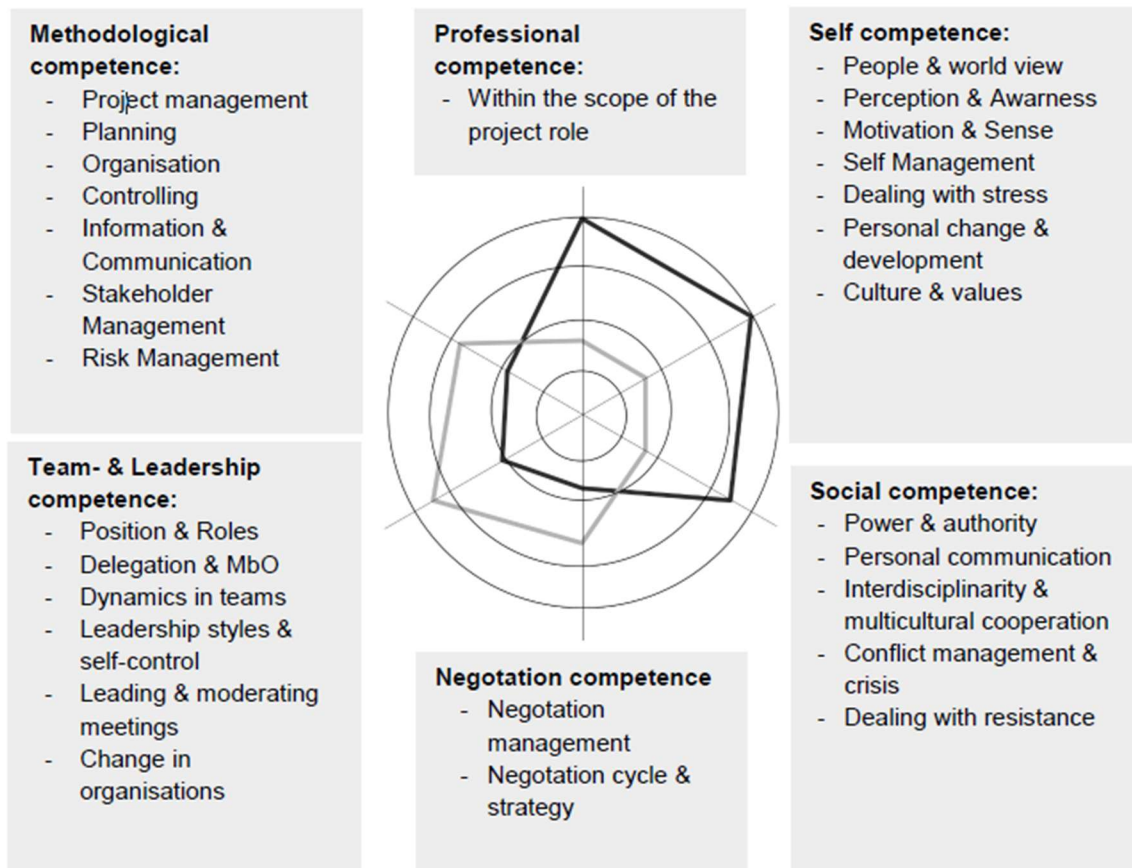


Figure 3: Competence Model (Source: based on Kuster, et al., 2019)

3 Literature Review

Personnel recruiting was first used in the military to describe the process of finding and selecting recruits (Achouri, 2007), Today personnel recruiting now falls within the responsibility of HR departments (Lohberg, 2012) and depending on the size of the company, individuals may also have the authority to appoint personnel (Lohberg, 2012). Demographic changes are making it harder to find competent individuals, which calls for improved recruitment strategies (Scholz, 2011). Organisations must adopt more innovative and flexible recruitment methods to attract and retain qualified talent in an increasingly competitive labour market. This is essential as effective personnel recruiting is crucial to a company's success in the market. A central objective of recruitment is to cover the demand caused by staff losses or the demand resulting from the company's expanded activities (Dincher and Mosters, 2011).

A well-defined requirements profile is the basis for every personnel selection. Without such a profile, no targeted selection can be made. In order to optimise the profile, it is important to consider skills management and the skills required for the vacancy (Achouri, 2007). Personnel selection must also take into account the company's strategic objectives, as it is one of the most far-reaching and profitable operational decisions (Schuler, 2013). Aligning personnel selection with the company's strategic objectives ensures that merging the skills of

potential employees with the requirements profile effectively addresses the challenge of balancing demands and maximising productivity (Rühl, 2013). Guggenberger (2017) recommends creating a requirements profile by defining professional competences on a scale of 1–5 in order to design profiles step by step. Meier, Weiß and Wiener (2003) emphasise the need to clarify the following questions before drawing up the requirements profile:

1. When will the personnel requirement become acute or how great is it?
2. Who are the potential target groups?
3. When, how and where can the target groups be addressed?
4. What additional measures can be taken to reach the target groups?

Given the shifting demographics, every new hire needs to mesh well with the group as team performance is crucial. Ranking the criteria for creating the requirements profile can help to incorporate the temporal focus and past experience in order to draw conclusions about future requirements (Troger, 2016). With regard to the study by Gaulhiac (2018), personnel selection remains strategically important as it is orientated towards the company's goals and target figures when hiring new employees (Schmidtborn and Mussel, 2011). It is closely linked to other HR measures such as personnel development, recruitment and appraisal, which are all based on requirements analyses. In light of the evolving nature of job requirements due to unforeseen circumstances, it is essential to consider future needs alongside existing ones and various approaches (Table 1) can be employed for the targeted selection of personnel following a tendering process (Schuler, 2013):

- Biography-orientated approach: focuses on the applicant's past, based on training certificates, job references and experience abroad. This procedure is expedient for comparable activities.
- Simulation-orientated approach: Evaluates the performance of applicants through work samples, situational interviews and tests.
- Construct- or trait-oriented approach: Determines the competences of applicants that are relevant for future or changing jobs using psychological tests such as ability tests, personality tests and motivation tests.

Procedure	Look at:	Proof(s)	Note
Biography-orientated	- Past behavior - Performance results	- Educational certificates - Job references - Internships - Stays abroad - Work experience - Biographical interview - Biographical questionnaire	This approach provides useful information if the future field of activity is very similar to the old one.
Simulation-orientated	- Performance in the work sample	- Work samples - Situational interviews - Situational Judgment - Tests	No determination of past merit.
- Construct- or traitorientated	- Performance options	- Psychological tests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ability tests ○ Personality tests ○ Motivation and interest tests 	Job requirements are not (yet) fully known or are likely to change rapidly.

Table 1: Personnel selection procedure (Source: based on Schuler, 2013)

4 Current study – aim and research question

This scientific study aims to evaluate the differences between the abilities necessary in job advertisements and those really required, given the high standards in job advertisements and the related uncertainties in project management. By examining the gap between the competences listed in job advertisements and those truly needed in practice, this study seeks to clarify the expectations placed on candidates. Taking into account Gaulhiac's (2018) finding that even 50 % fulfilment of the requirements often leads to an invitation to apply, the article analyses which skills and competences are considered must-have and which are nice-to-have. Based on a survey of people in German-speaking countries who are already working in project management and people who could potentially work in this field (students of the Project and Process Management programme), the aim is to determine how job advertisements can be better designed to meet the needs of both companies and applicants.

This research is guided by the following question: How do the perceptions of current project managers regarding the competences reflected in job postings differ from those of potential future project managers?

5 Methodology

The online questionnaire method was chosen for this study in order to collect data from people who are either already working in project management or are preparing for it during their studies. According to Berekoven, Eckert and Ellenrieder (2009), this method enables a

targeted selection of survey participants that meets the specific requirements of the study. Participants include MBA students enrolled in the Project and Process Management programme as well as individuals who are not currently employed in the project management field. It is considered that students' studies are preparing them for work in the field of project management, even for those who do not yet have any practical experience in this area.

5.1 Participants

The most relevant parameters are presented in Table 2 to describe the sample. The basic population for the survey was 205 students at the start of the survey on 30 May 2022. With a population of 205 people, a confidence level of 95 % and a margin of error of 5 %, this results in a minimum sample size of 134 participants. A total of 104 people took part in the survey, 59 of whom were women (56.7 %) and 45 men (43.3 %). The age ranged from 21 years to 60 years. On average, the women were 32.3 years old. The male survey participants were slightly older at 36.1 years. Three age groups (younger, middle-aged and older) were formed for further calculations and analyses. 50 % of respondents stated that the highest level of education they had completed was a degree. 36.5 % had a school-leaving certificate or A-levels and a small proportion had completed a master's examination (6.7 %), a technical college (3.8 %) or an apprenticeship (2.9 %). Of those surveyed, 39.4 % are currently employed in project management, 4.8 % are self-employed and 55.8 % do not currently work in this field.

Variable	Parameter	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	59	56,7
	Male	45	43,3
	Total	104	100,0
Age	Younger (up to 29 yrs.)	42	40,4
	Middle-aged (30 to 39 yrs.)	32	30,8
	Older (40 yrs. and older)	30	28,8
	Total	104	100,0
Highest Level of education completed	Apprenticeship	3	2,9
	Technical college	4	3,8
	Master craftsman examination	7	6,7
	Secondary school with A-Levels	38	36,5
	University degree	52	50
Total	104	100,0	
Currently working in PM	Yes, employed	41	39,4
	Yes, self-employed	5	4,8
	No	58	55,8
Total	104	100,0	

Table 2: Description of the sample (own table)

Participation in the survey was optional. Those who did not wish to disclose their information did not take part. Moreover, no data was collected that would enable specific conclusions to

be drawn about individual persons. The results are therefore completely anonymised and do not allow the identification of individual persons.

5.2 Instruments and data collection

Figure 4 illustrates the structural logic of the operationalisation for a study conducted between May 30, 2022, and July 11, 2022, using an online questionnaire and the Survey Monkey tool. The research construct includes elements of the labour market such as job advertisements, selection procedures and competences as well as the education sector in project management. These elements are crucial to understand the requirements and evaluation criteria of employers.

To ensure the accuracy of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted. This helped to eliminate ambiguities and optimise the questions, thereby improving the reliability and validity of the study. The final questionnaire aims to capture the perceptions and experiences of the respondents regarding the aspects mentioned.

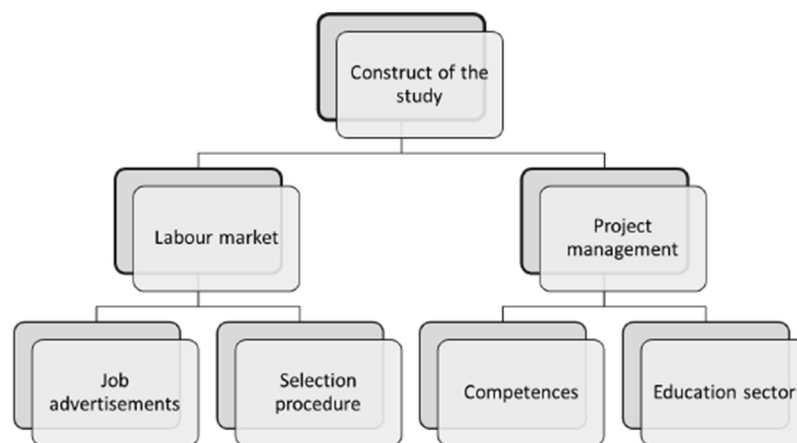


Figure 4: Structural logic of operationalisation (own illustration)

5.3 Data analysis

The statistics programme SPSS 27 is used to analyse the data. This makes it possible to summarise data and create figures, tables or graphs. Testing the results using significance tests is useful if wellfounded research questions have been formulated in advance, the object of research has been operationalised accordingly and careful data preparation has been carried out (Bortz, Döring and Pöschl, 2016).

6 Results

There is a wide range of competences and sub-competences for project management jobs, indexed in later calculations on the scales of professional competence, self-competence, social competence, negotiation competence, team and leadership competence and methodological competence. Respondents were asked for their assessment on a five-point Likert scale (1 'strongly agree' to 5 'strongly disagree'). The order of the sub-competences in Figure 5 results from the calculated mean values based on the assessments. In addition to the mean values (MV), the standard deviations (SD), in other words the average distances from the mean values, are also shown in the figure 5. In first place, with a mean value of 1.4, is the ability to organise and plan, a sub-competence of methodological competence. This is followed by active participation in resolving conflicts and crises as a subcompetence of social competence (MV: 1.6). In third place, respondents cited the confident delegation of work and the distribution of roles (team and leadership skills) with a mean value of 1.7.

This is followed by the pursuit of strategies in the implementation of projects (negotiation competence), knowledge and skills in the area of project management (professional competence), the willingness for interdisciplinary or multicultural cooperation (social competence) and negotiation skills (negotiation competence), each with a mean value of 1.8. Six further sub-competences achieved a mean value of 1.9 based on the respondents' assessment. These include dealing with stress and the perception of the environment (self-competence), methodological knowledge and expertise in project management tools (methodological competence), leading and moderating meetings (team and leadership competence), communicating with stakeholders (methodological competence) and the willingness to change and develop personally (self-competence). With mean values of 2.0 to 2.5, the last third includes leadership of employees, a sub-competence of team and leadership competence (MV: 2.0), dealing with resistance (social competence | MV: 2.1), knowledge of controlling and risk management (methodological competence | MV: 2.2), professional training (professional competence | MV: 2.3), dealing with power and authority (social competence | MV: 2.4), living culture and values (self-competence | MV: 2.5) and changing the organisation if this is necessary for the progress of the project (team and leadership competence | MV: 2.5).

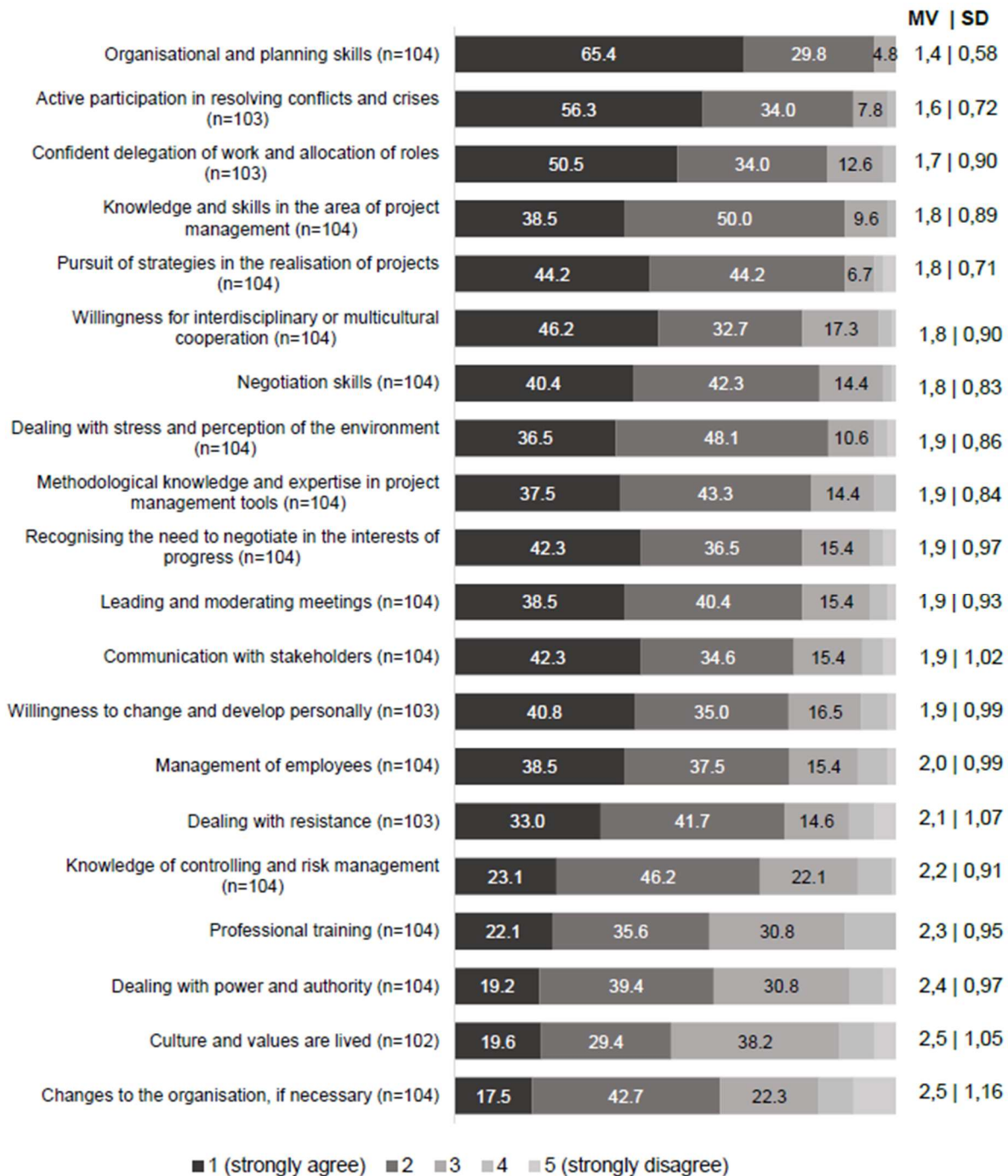


Figure 5: Assessment of the necessity of areas of expertise in tenders (own figure)

Two of the competences, which were assessed by the respondents according to the importance of their characteristics for jobs in project management, differ in terms of gender. Due to the significant deviation from the normal distribution, the U-test according to Mann and Whitney was used for the calculation. The higher mean ranks show that self-competence ($p=0.014$) and social competence ($p=0.003$) are each rated significantly less important by men. All other scales and items show no differences in gender.

Variable	MV	Group	n	Mean rank	Sig.
Social competence	1,5	Female	59	45,14	0,003**
		Male	45	62,16	
Self competence	1,9	Female	59	46,25	0,014*
		Male	45	60,69	

*p < 0.05 significant | ** p < 0.01 high significance | U-test according to Mann and Whitney

1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree

MV=mean value | Sig. = Significance

Table 3: Differences in gender with regard to the importance of the competence (own table)

If you look at the importance of the competences in relation to the age groups, there is a significant difference in methodological competence (p=0.030). Middle-aged respondents consider this competence to be significantly more important than the young survey participants. All other competences and items show no differences between the age groups.

Variable	MV	Group	n	Mean rank	Sig.
Methodological competence	1,6	Younger	42	61,57	0,030*
		Middle aged	32	43,97	
		Older	30	48,90	

*p < 0.05 significant | ** p < 0.01 high significance | U-test according to Mann and Whitney

1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree

MV=mean value | Sig. = Significance

Table 4: Differences in the age groups with regard to the importance of the competences (own table)

Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis test was carried out with regard to the highest level of education completed. This shows no differences in the different levels of training. This means that the level of education has no influence on the assessment of the importance of the competences.

Table 5 shows that gender variations exist in four assessments of the stated sub-competences. The organisational and planning talent (MV:1.4), a sub-competence of methodological competence, is significantly more likely to be depicted in tenders for female respondents than for male respondents (p=0.009). With a mean value of 1.7, the item self-confident delegation of work and allocation of roles is ranked relatively high and this can be attributed to team and leadership skills. The lower middle ranks show that female respondents request this sub-competence significantly (p=0.024) more in job advertisements than men. Part of the social competence shows a highly significant difference. With regard to the mapping of willingness for interdisciplinary or multicultural cooperation (MV: 1.7), women agree significantly more than men (p=0.000). In the mapping of the sub-competence of pursuing strategies in the implementation of projects (MV: 1.8), it is again the women who agree significantly more than male respondents (p=0.005). This is part of the negotiation competence.

Variable	MV	Group	n	Mean rank	Sig.
Organisational and planning skills	1,4	Female	59	46,86	0,009**
		Male	45	59,90	
Confident delegation of work and allocation of roles	1,7	Female	59	46,77	0,024*
		Male	45	59,01	
Willingness for interdisciplinary and multicultural cooperations	1,8	Female	59	43,70	0,000**
		Male	45	64,03	
Pursuit of strategies in the realization of projects	1,8	Female	59	45,97	0,005**
		Male	45	61,06	

*p < 0.05 significant | ** p < 0.01 high significance | U-test according to Mann and Whitney
1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree
MV=mean value | Sig. = Significance

Table 5: Differences in gender in relation to sub-competences to be mapped (own table)

Looking at the sub-competences in relation to the age groups, there are significant differences in two items. Older people find it significantly more important to map the required knowledge and skills in the area of project management ($p=0.005$) than younger people.

The situation is similar for methodological knowledge and knowledge of project management tools. The older respondents agreed significantly more with the mapping of the sub-competence to methodological competence than the younger respondents. There were no differences between the three age groups for the other 18 competence areas. This means that the assessments were very similar.

Variable	MV	Group	n	Mean rank	Sig.
Knowledge and skills in project management	1,8	Younger	42	61,24	0,005**
		Middle aged	32	52,63	
		Older	30	40,13	
Methodological knowledge and expertise in project management tools	1,9	Younger	42	60,29	0,048*
		Middle aged	32	50,00	
		Older	30	44,27	

*p < 0.05 significant | ** p < 0.01 high significance | U-test according to Mann and Whitney
1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree
MV=mean value | Sig. = Significance

Table 6: Differences in the age groups with regard to the sub-competences to be mapped (own table)

The Kruskal-Wallis test was carried out to find out whether there are also differences in terms of current involvement with project management. The results indicate that the assessments of both employees or self-employed individuals in project management and those not yet active in the field are very similar, with no significant differences observed.

The assessments of the depiction of competences in job advertisements only differ in one item between those who work in project management and those who do not (Table 7). The item „dealing with power and authority,“ which falls under social skills, was rated significantly more important by individuals not working in project management compared to those who are employed in the field, with a p-value of 0.024. The Kruskal-Wallis test median ranks indicate that self-employed individuals hold positions that fall between the opinions of the other two groups. For all other items, no statistically significant differences were observed, suggesting that the assessments across the three groups are largely comparable.

Variable	MV	Group	n	Mean rank	Sig.
Dealing with power and authority		Yes, employed	41	61,93	0,024*
		Yes, self-employed	5	50,70	
		No	58	45,99	

*p < 0.05 significant | ** p < 0.01 high significance | U-test according to Mann and Whitney

1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree

MV=mean value | Sig. = Significance

Table 7: Difference in assessments of competence presentation in tenders with regard to professional experience in project management (own table)

7 Discussion

The level of required competences for roles in project management is influenced by multiple factors, with the items presented to respondents categorised into the competence domains of people, context, and practices (Kuster et al., 2019). Competent actions, which are central to effective project performance, manifest in the form of specific project implementation steps (Schiersmann, Petersen, & Weber, 2017). The findings highlight distinctions in social, personal, and methodological skills, each of which corresponds to a distinct competence area within the Eye of Competence framework (IPMA, 2022). Additionally, Erpenbeck and Sauter (2016) emphasise the critical importance of knowledge mobilisation in competence development, as it enables individuals in project management to effectively apply their skills and knowledge in response to specific situational demands.

It is essential to define the necessary competences in projects. Different assessments and differences in competences confirm the statement by Kuster et al. (2019). Gessler (2018) provides further confirmation of the differences in the areas of competence by stating that basic standardisation is required for the approach to project management, but that leeway and freedom are also needed to take such differences into account. Depending on the project content, different competences are required (Schelle, Ottmann and Pfeiffer, 2008).

The significantly higher evaluation of social and self-competence is supported by Becker's (2015) assertion that women tend to outperform men in areas such as communication skills, patience, understanding, and empathy, demonstrating distinct responses in these domains. These attributes align with the broader categories of social and self-competence.

Achouri (2007) highlights the essential role of skills management in the formulation of job advertisements, emphasising the importance of aligning competences with job requirements. Achieving the optimal balance between these two elements is a nuanced process, as it is crucial to avoid both under- and over-demanding applicants while striving to maximise productivity (Rühl, 2013). For this reason, there are sub-competences that potential employees want more than others in job advertisements (Figure 5). Each company must set its own limits when it comes to presenting the required competences in tenders.

There are differences in various sub-competences in terms of gender, age groups and the groups of students surveyed. In addition to Guggenberger (2017), Meier, Weiß and Wiener (2003) also provide suggestions for drawing up the requirements profile in order to be able to

decide which subcompetences should be included in the tender. The authors mention factors such as the technical requirements, timing of the personnel requirement, potential target groups or possible ways of reaching the target group, while Troger (2016) asserts that individual competences alone are insufficient for achieving organisational goals. In the context of declining birth rates and increasing personnel costs, team performance becomes equally critical. Consequently, new recruits must not only possess the necessary skills but also integrate effectively into the team, thereby contributing to the organisation's efforts to maximise productivity.

One argument against the importance of selecting the right sub-competences for job advertisements is the study by the recruiting agency Talent Works. Gaulhiac (2018) suggests that women who meet only 30 % of the job requirements or sub-skills have the same probability of being invited for an interview as those who meet 90 % of the criteria, whereas for men, this threshold is 50 %. These variations align with the recognition that there are no universally „right“ or „wrong“ competences; instead, the required competences are context-dependent and must be tailored to the specific needs of the organisation. It is therefore incumbent upon the company to clearly define and prioritise the necessary subcompetences, determining the level of fulfilment required for a given role.

8 Recommendations for practise

The recruitment of employees is crucial to the success of organisations, especially in project management. In the face of demographic change and globalisation, companies need to rethink their HR strategies. This section underscores the critical importance of strategic planning in aligning job advertisements with the specific resources and skill sets required for optimal role fulfilment. In addition to traditional selection methods, modern skills, especially in the digital field, should be taken into account. It is also crucial to create attractive job adverts to attract young talent to project management. Three recommendations (R) based on the results are presented below.

R1: It is important that organisations think carefully about the areas for which personnel resources are needed and when they are needed before advertising. In this way, job advertisements can be optimally adapted to the necessary resources and competences. Consequently, organisations can identify employees who not only possess a diverse skill set but also integrate seamlessly into teams, enhancing collective performance. This need for adaptable talent is further underscored by literature, which highlights how organisations, both within and beyond project management, are increasingly impacted by rapid demographic shifts and globalisation.

R2: Relying solely on traditional methods, such as CVs, should not be the primary basis for recruitment decisions. In the context of a pandemic, specialised skills such as digitalisation are increasingly replacing routine tasks and manual labour. Furthermore, the survey reveals that

project management is perceived as a less attractive career option for younger generations, underscoring the need to reassess talent acquisition strategies in light of evolving skill demands.

R3: To effectively attract young talent, job advertisements must be designed in a way that emphasises essential qualifications without being perceived as overly demanding or discouraging. The must-have criteria are different depending on the project type and technical content. It is important to know and define these and thus be able to recruit qualified personnel in a holistic sense. To successfully attract younger talent, job advertisements must be framed in a way that is not discouraging but instead focuses on clearly defined 'must-have' criteria. These essential qualifications vary depending on the nature of the project and its technical requirements. Understanding and articulating these criteria is crucial for the holistic recruitment of qualified personnel.

9 Conclusion

The changing demands on the modern workforce, particularly in educational project management, require a fundamental shift toward intersubjective understanding between organizations and potential employees. This study reveals critical communicative gaps in how competence is mutually constructed and interpreted across different stakeholder groups.

The findings demonstrate a significant disconnect: while organizations present extensive requirement profiles, candidates meeting only 50 % of advertised criteria often receive interview invitations. This paradox reveals that current recruitment communication lacks transparency and creates unnecessary barriers to dialogue. Rather than reflecting genuine needs, overly demanding job postings undermine trust and mutual understanding in the recruitment process.

Gender-specific and age-related differences further illustrate that competence is not an objective construct but a socially negotiated concept. Women rated social and self-competencies significantly higher than men, while older respondents emphasized methodological expertise. These divergent interpretations highlight the importance of recognizing plural understandings in fostering genuine dialogue between diverse stakeholders.

Different project types require not only different skill sets but also different forms of communicative exchange. A tailored approach to job advertisements must create space for intersubjective negotiation about what competence means in specific contexts. Organizations should invite dialogue rather than unilaterally define expectations, acknowledging that successful collaboration depends on shared meaning-making processes.

This study calls for a paradigm shift from competence-matching to competence-dialogue in recruitment. By clearly differentiating between 'must-have' and 'nice-to-have' competencies and articulating requirements transparently, companies can foster authentic intersubjective exchange. This communicative approach not only improves recruitment outcomes but

also establishes foundations for collaborative project cultures built on mutual respect and ongoing dialogue.

Ultimately, successful educational project management depends less on exhaustive credential matching and more on the capacity for intersubjective understanding—the ability to negotiate meanings, coordinate perspectives, and co-create shared goals. This shift represents both a practical improvement to hiring practices and a deeper commitment to mutual recognition, inclusive dialogue, and shared responsibility in educational project work.

10 Limitations and future directions

Whilst the sample size used in this study is sufficient for initial findings, it is not representative of the wider population of current and potential project managers in the education sector. A larger and more diverse sample would likely yield more generalised results. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from questionnaires introduces the potential for bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their competences and experience. Perceptions of competences can be subjective and influenced by individual experiences and cultural backgrounds.

While the study provides valuable insights specifically into education project management, its results may not be directly transferable to other sectors. Different industries may require distinct skills and face unique challenges that were not addressed in this research. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of the labour market, driven by technological advances and global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, could quickly render some of the findings obsolete. Continuous research is needed to keep pace with these ongoing changes.

Conducting comparative studies across different sectors and regions could provide a broader understanding of specific competences in various contexts, aiding in the development of more targeted recruitment strategies. Additionally, exploring the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, is crucial for shaping the skills required for project management. Understanding how these technologies can be utilised to enhance recruitment and training processes would be highly beneficial.

Furthermore, supplementing quantitative data with qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, could offer deeper insights into the nuances of competency requirements and the experiences of project managers. This approach would enrich the understanding of the complexities involved in project management.

Lastly, further research into the impact of soft skills on project management success, especially in the areas of teamwork and leadership, could help refine competency models and training programs. This would better prepare future project managers by emphasising the importance of these essential skills.

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