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Lifelong learning and skill development for project managers in the dynamic labor market landscape

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of project managers working in the distinct environment of clinical trial organizations as project management changes in dynamic labor markets. The literature emphasizes the changing skill set needed for project managers and stresses the value of cognitive flexibility, interpersonal skills, and lifelong learning. Nonetheless, there is still a great deal to learn about how these dynamics appear in the setting of clinical trial organizations. By investigating project managers' perspectives and involvement in lifetime learning and skill development inside clinical trial organizations, this study seeks to close this gap. To elucidate the nuances of their professional experiences, 64 project managers were interviewed using a qualitative methodology. Key themes emerged from the thematic analysis, including the importance of interpersonal and personal qualities, the dynamic nature of abilities like creativity and critical thinking, and the strategic application of lifelong learning. The findings add new evidence to the body of knowledge by offering a sector-specific understanding of the lifelong learning needs and skill requirements for project managers in clinical trial organizations. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to continuously learn to improve healthcare outcomes and adjust to industry-specific problems. Contextual implications encompass perspectives for entities seeking to maximize training regimens and augment the flexibility of project management groups in clinical trial environments. This work advances theoretical ideas and practical concerns for lifelong learning and skill development in clinical trial organizations. It also adds subtle insights into a specialized domain to the discourse on project management.

Keywords: lifelong learning; skill development; project managers; clinical trial; labor market; technology; professional development

1. Introduction

In a time of swift technological progress, evolving industry trends, and a growing need for creative project resolutions, project managers have become indispensable to the success of organizations. Project managers must constantly adapt, develop, and improve their skill sets due to the dynamic nature of the modern labor market to address the challenges presented by a constantly shifting work environment.

Project managers play a crucial role in coordinating intricate plans, guaranteeing project completion on schedule, and matching project results with company goals. However, the traditional skill set needed for project management is expanding and no longer limited to technical knowledge (Munir, 2022). Today's project managers face a wide range of difficulties, such as incorporating cutting-edge technology, encouraging productive teamwork, and adjusting to the growing complexity of project scopes (Ubfal et al., 2022). Project managers encounter never-before-seen difficulties in the quickly changing field of project management, which is defined by

globalization, technological breakthroughs, and changing industrial dynamics. A broad skill set that goes beyond conventional technical knowledge is required due to the dynamic nature of the work market. This study explores the viewpoints of 64 project managers in clinical trial organizations about lifelong learning and skill development, taking into account their experiences in this changing environment. By concentrating on this particular industry, we hope to capture the subtleties particular to the clinical trial space, where project managers are essential to the smooth running of trials that increase medical knowledge.

Through the following research question, this study explores the necessity for project managers to participate in ongoing learning programs by looking at the variety of abilities that the changing labor market requires.

How do project managers in clinical trial organizations perceive lifelong learning as a strategic tool for skill development?

This study's main goal is to clarify how project managers understand the complex dynamics of skill development and lifelong learning. This study is important for project managers who want to succeed in fast-paced work situations, as well as for organizational leaders, legislators, and educators who are involved in creating professional development initiatives. It is predicted that the results will provide insightful information that will influence training programs, help make strategic decisions, and eventually develop a workforce of project managers who are more adaptable and resilient.

2. Literature review

Project managers now play a role that crosses traditional boundaries and requires a wide skill set beyond technical skills in the quickly changing field of project management. The literature on project management skill development and lifetime learning highlights the significant changes taking place in the sector, emphasizing adaptability, multidisciplinary abilities, and the relationship between personal qualities and career success. Professional development now revolves around lifelong learning, particularly in fast-paced fields like project management. Project managers must be able to continuously learn and adapt to stay effective in a world where stakeholder expectations are changing and technology is advancing (Drewery et al., 2020; Kim and Park, 2020). It is becoming more widely acknowledged that organizations looking to stay competitive must prioritize lifelong learning as a strategic goal rather than only as a personal endeavor (Dachner et al., 2021). This is consistent with the increasing consensus that to effectively negotiate the intricacies of the dynamic labor market landscape, project managers must actively seek out new knowledge and skills (Kerzner, 2022).

In project management, the emphasis on technical skills has evolved to include a dynamic set of cognitive talents. The importance of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities in a project manager's toolset has grown (Singh Dubey et al., 2022; Ubfal et al., 2022). Project managers need to be flexible enough to innovate and adjust as projects grow more complicated and uncertain (Arefazar et al., 2022; Cobb, 2023). According to Munir (2022), to manage changing project needs, project

managers need a comprehensive skill set that includes technical proficiency and cognitive flexibility.

The widespread tendency to incorporate technology into project management procedures necessitates that project managers possess digital literacy abilities. Project managers are supposed to use technology not only for communication and project monitoring but also for making strategic decisions (Marion and Fixson, 2021). Research highlights the need for project managers to develop and maintain their digital literacy to take advantage of new technology (El Khatib et al., 2022). To maximize project outcomes, project managers need to stay up-to-date on developing technologies as more organizations adopt digital project management tools (Ju et al., 2020).

The literature now places a greater emphasis on interpersonal abilities, demonstrating a paradigm shift from the idea that project managers are only technical specialists to that of leaders who can build productive teamwork. Crucial interpersonal skills for project managers have been highlighted as effective communication, diversity adaptation, and team leadership (Elkbuli et al., 2023; Moradi et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2021). According to Kukah et al. (2022), effective project managers possess a high level of emotional intelligence, which helps them resolve conflicts with others and form cohesive project teams.

The body of research emphasizes how personal qualities like emotional intelligence, resilience, and an entrepreneurial attitude influence project managers' success. To successfully navigate the risks and setbacks that come with project management, resilience is essential (NAJEH and Morched, 2023). Effective stakeholder management and teamwork are facilitated by emotional intelligence, which includes social skills and self-awareness (Al Hosani et al., 2023). Moreover, project success has been linked to an entrepreneurial attitude, which is typified by a proactive and inventive approach (Al Hosani et al., 2023).

The body of research on project managers' skill development and lifetime learning agrees that the modern job market necessitates a diverse skill set (Al Hosani et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2021). In addition to being highly skilled in technical areas, project managers also need to possess cognitive flexibility, interpersonal grace, and other qualities that foster resilience and creativity. This literature analysis provides sector-specific insights into the lifelong learning experiences and skill requirements of project managers. It also forms the basis for the current study, which investigates how these themes appear within the unique setting of clinical trial organizations.

There is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding clinical trial organizations, even though it acknowledges the dynamic nature of project management roles and the importance of lifelong learning. Project managers may need to acquire certain skills and undergo specific learning experiences due to the various obstacles and regulatory complexities associated with clinical trials. There is a dearth of research in the literature today that specifically examines how project managers in clinical trial firms see and participate in lifelong learning, especially in light of the constantly shifting labor market conditions that are unique to this industry. This research fills the identified gap by offering fresh data and an in-depth look at project managers' experiences in clinical trial organizations. Within the context of a specialized industry,

it provides a concentrated analysis of the complex interactions between skill development and lifetime learning. Also, the knowledge of how project managers negotiate the changing labor market, with an emphasis on interpersonal skills, creativity, critical thinking, and digital literacy, is sector-specific and makes a significant contribution. The paper contributes to the theoretical discourse on project management in specific contexts and the practical optimization of professional development programs in clinical trial organizations by illuminating these experiences.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the experiences, viewpoints, and practices of project managers working in clinical trial organizations in the dynamic labor market environment, with a particular emphasis on skill development and lifelong learning. To ensure diversity in experience, specialization, and organizational setting, a total of 64 project managers with at least five years of project management experience were included in the study.

Each participant has an in-depth, semi-structured interview. The purpose of the interviews is to learn more about the project managers' experiences with skill development and lifetime learning within the framework of their jobs. Each interview lasts between sixty and ninety minutes, long enough to allow for a thorough examination of the viewpoints of the participants.

To find, examine, and present patterns in the qualitative data, thematic analysis was utilized using NVivo 12. The identification of themes about skill development and lifelong learning guarantees a deep and complex comprehension of the project managers' experiences.

3.1. Ethical considerations

Participants get comprehensive information about the goals, methods, and any dangers of the study. Before the interview, each participant gives informed consent. Participants' privacy is rigorously protected. Pseudonyms are given to participants to conceal their identities, and all data is anonymized.

3.2. Limitations

Generalizability: Results might be unique to the setting of clinical trials and might not apply to project managers in other sectors of the economy.

Self-report biases: Since the study uses self-reported data, social desirability and memory biases may have an impact on participants' responses.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic

The study included a total of 64 respondents, with a mean age of 28.6 years and ages ranging from 20 to 49. There were 29 women and 35 men among the respondents. Eleven of the respondents held doctorates, and five held a postdoctoral degree in the medical sciences. All of the respondents had completed their master's degree in higher

education. The majority of respondents stated that their entity's operational range encompassed the whole of the United States, while fourteen respondents suggested it was international and eight indicated it was regional. Every study participant participated in project execution at the managerial level within their respective organizations. The respondents' descriptions of the projects they carried out showed that the study group's implemented initiatives were clinical trials.

4.2. Lifelong learning as a tactical tool

Respondents shed light on the strategic importance of lifelong learning for project managers negotiating the constantly changing landscape of the contemporary labor market. Lifelong learning encapsulates the proactive approach needed to prosper in a quickly evolving world where fresh knowledge is always in demand and traditional skills could become outdated (R31). Lifelong learning is a strategic strategy that aims to provide a competitive advantage, improve adaptability, and guarantee ongoing relevance in a quickly changing professional environment (R28). Professionals who actively participate in lifelong learning are better able to foresee changes, seize new opportunities, and overcome obstacles (R8). Project managers continuously improve, adapt, and flourish in their professions through lifelong learning (R64).

The participant's response captures the essence of the idea that lifelong learning is a strategic and intentional method for people to navigate the complexity of today's environment. Lifelong learning is a purposeful, planned approach rather than a passive reaction to change (R1). Lifelong learning is a deliberate and methodical attitude toward learning new things throughout one's career, including perspectives, abilities, and information (R25). Project managers use lifelong learning as a tool to improve their skills throughout their careers, obtain a competitive edge, and adjust to new trends (R8). Lifelong learning is not only advantageous but also necessary to remain effective and relevant in the face of changing work environments (R2). Project managers smartly choose and learn the information and skills most pertinent to their positions and market trends (R55).

4.3. Dynamic nature of skills

Respondents clarify why it is so important for project managers to adopt a mentality that sees talents as dynamic, ever-evolving assets that are essential to success in the labor market of the future, rather than as static things. Skill sets are always changing due to changes in economic, social, and technological paradigms (R12). Respondents highlighted important qualities like creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving as essential parts of the dynamic skill set needed in today's workplace. The majority of the respondents (56 respondents) mentioned that creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving are crucial skill sets that project managers need to have in the dynamic labor market landscape. Respondents exhort project managers to cultivate a creative attitude, stressing that creativity is a strategic tool for coming up with original and workable project solutions rather than being limited to artistic pursuits. According to the respondents, project managers can improve their ability to solve problems, make wise judgments, and negotiate the complexities of a project with a nuanced understanding by encouraging a culture of

critical thinking. It encourages project managers to critically assess information, challenge presumptions, and conduct in-depth analysis (R32). Respondents talk about how problem-solving is iterative, highlighting the importance of flexibility and ongoing solution improvement. Project managers need to adopt a strategic problem-solving mindset that can foresee and mitigate future challenges, rather than just focusing on solving immediate problems (R18).

4.4. Technology and digital literacy

Respondents talk about how technology is changing the workforce and emphasize how important it is for project managers to become digitally literate. Technological adaptation is a proactive step toward improving project effectiveness and maintaining relevance in a changing technological landscape (R12). In the modern corporate environment, technology is not just a tool but also a driving force that is changing the nature of projects and how they are managed (R26). Project managers need to anticipate technology changes and make proactive adaptations (R10). Technology is a dynamic force that is always changing, and for project managers to continue being effective, they must keep up with these developments (R27).

Respondents emphasized the necessity for project managers to understand and effectively use digital tools. Digital technology improves collaboration, expedites project procedures, and boosts overall project success (R17). To fully utilize technology in project management, project managers have to consistently improve their digital literacy (R21).

Respondents talked about how project management software, data analytics, and virtual collaboration tools are being used more frequently. Respondents recommended that project managers accept these changes, seeing them as necessary to maintain their competitiveness in a workplace that is increasingly digitally oriented.

4.5. Interpersonal skills

Respondents emphasized how crucial it is for project managers to have strong communication and collaborative skills in the setting of a more diversified and linked workplace. Clear, open, and flexible communication is essential for project managers (R1). Effective communication is essential to building mutual understanding amongst team members, stakeholders, and various partners (R17). Project managers should adapt their communication techniques to suit a variety of audiences (R29). Project managers' performance is closely linked to their ability to successfully traverse a complex and globally interconnected work context, even beyond their technical skills (R8). One of the most important interpersonal skills for project managers is good communication (R20). It is important to communicate intelligibly across linguistic and cultural divides (R8).

Respondents emphasized the growing importance of cooperation and cross-functional collaboration. Fostering a collaborative mindset, appreciating different points of view, and utilizing the combined intelligence of varied teams are tips that project managers should follow (R34). Collaboration is a strategic advantage in utilizing the skills of a diverse workforce, in addition to a way to achieve project goals (R20).

Respondents recommended that project managers cultivate a sophisticated comprehension of cultural subtleties in order to provide an inclusive and courteous workplace. Building cohesive and high-performing project teams needs the capacity to negotiate a variety of cultural norms and perspectives (R36).

4.6. Personal attributes

Respondents emphasized the importance of non-technical personal and professional attributes and acknowledged their critical significance in determining project managers' performance. Respondents talked about the importance of resilience, emotional intelligence, and an entrepreneurial attitude in handling the opportunities and difficulties posed by a quickly evolving work environment. It is advised that project managers develop a resilient mindset, seeing challenges as chances for development and education rather than impassable hurdles (R8). Emotionally intelligent project managers may effectively navigate interpersonal interactions, comprehend and regulate their own emotions, and demonstrate empathy towards the viewpoints of their team members (R4).

5. Discussion

The concept of "lifelong learning as a tactical tool" has emerged, highlighting the strategic importance of ongoing education in project managers' professional development. The participants conveyed the necessity of continuous skill development to stay current in the dynamic field of project management. As a tactical tool, lifelong learning helps project managers adjust to evolving industry trends, organizational dynamics, and methodology. This result is consistent with a larger body of research that highlights the value of flexibility and ongoing learning in modern work environments (Dachner et al., 2021; Drewery et al., 2020; Kim and Park, 2020).

The discussion about the changing nature of skills emphasizes how important problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking are to a project manager's skill set. Participants stated that project managers need to be able to think critically about the requirements of the project, solve problems creatively, and negotiate complicated issues. The focus on how skills are dynamic, especially creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving, is consistent with research showing how traditional technical abilities are giving way to a more adaptable skill set (Munir, 2022; Singh Dubey et al., 2022; Ubfal et al., 2022). This is in line with the changing requirements for project management positions, which place a high focus on cognitive skills necessary for creativity and sound decision-making in addition to traditional technical expertise.

The "Technology and Digital Literacy" subject highlights how technology has revolutionized project management. The participants recognized that to successfully negotiate the incorporation of technology into project workflows, they would need to acquire digital literacy abilities. This result is consistent with the present trend, which calls for project managers to use technology more for collaboration, communication, and project monitoring (El Khatib et al., 2022; Ju et al., 2020; Marion and Fixson, 2021). To guarantee the best possible project outcomes, the discussion urges organizations to fund training initiatives that improve project managers' technological competence.

The issue of interpersonal skills surfaced as being multidimensional and including team leadership, collaboration, effective communication, and adaptation to diversity. Project managers stressed how important these abilities are to creating cohesive project teams and a productive workplace. The conversation emphasizes how interpersonal skills affect team dynamics and project success. The identification of interpersonal skills such as team leadership, collaboration, effective communication, and diversity adaptation corroborates previous research showing how project managers are increasingly playing the role of leaders who can promote productive teamwork (Elkbuli et al., 2023; Moradi et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2021). The industry-specific details provide value by highlighting how crucial these abilities are in the setting of clinical trials, where teamwork and clear communication are essential.

The last theme focuses on the character traits of project managers, such as emotional intelligence, resilience, and an entrepreneurial spirit, and it aligns with literature recognizing the importance of these qualities in project success (Al Hosani et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2021). The significance of resilience in surmounting obstacles and managing uncertainty was acknowledged by the participants. Emotional intelligence, as a key competency, contributes to effective stakeholder management and team collaboration. Project managers can also address problems with a proactive and creative perspective by developing an entrepreneurial mindset. This theme promotes the inclusion of personal development activities in professional training programs and highlights the importance of the human element in project management.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study examined the experiences of 64 project managers working in clinical trial organizations, delving into the complex dynamics of skill development and lifelong learning in the dynamic labor market. The emerging themes illuminate important aspects that influence project managers' career paths and have consequences for both organizational objectives and individual career paths.

The "Lifelong Learning as a Tactical Tool" topic draws attention to the strategic importance of ongoing education in project management. Project managers realized that continuing education and skill development were essential to their jobs. To keep their project management teams at the forefront of industry innovations, organizations are recommended to cultivate a culture that supports and fosters lifelong learning programs.

The understanding of how abilities, especially creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving, are dynamic highlights how project managers are held to changing standards. These cognitive abilities go beyond technical competence and are recognized as crucial parts of a project manager's arsenal since they promote creativity in project outcomes and allow for flexibility in handling difficult problems.

How technology has revolutionized project management techniques was also emphasized. Project managers understood that to successfully incorporate technology into their processes, they needed to continuously improve their digital literacy abilities. It is recommended that organizations make investments in technical training programs to guarantee that project managers fully utilize digital tools for enhanced project productivity.

Interpersonal skills surfaced as a central theme that included team leadership, collaboration, effective communication, and adaptation to diversity. Project managers emphasized how important these abilities are to creating cohesive teams and encouraging work cultures. The conversation promotes giving interpersonal skill development top priority through focused training initiatives, in line with the industry's growing understanding of the role soft skills play in project success.

The last theme highlights the qualities that project managers bring to the table, such as an entrepreneurial mentality, emotional intelligence, and resilience. Project managers recognized the value of these characteristics in overcoming obstacles and encouraging creativity. The study recognizes the holistic nature of a project manager's skill set and supports the inclusion of personal development activities in professional training programs.

Overall, the themes that have been found offer significant perspectives on the complex terrain of competencies and educational prerequisites that project managers must master in ever-changing labor markets. Both project managers and organizational leaders can benefit from the practical insights provided by this study. It is recommended that project managers have a proactive approach to lifetime learning, consistently honing their technical, interpersonal, and personal proficiencies. In response, businesses are recommended to fund extensive training initiatives that tackle the mentioned issues to develop a workforce that is flexible, tech-savvy, and highly competent in both interpersonal and personal domains.

It is critical to recognize the study's limitations, such as the fact that the results are context-specific for clinical trial organizations. To increase the results' generalizability, related issues could be investigated in other industries in future research. Longitudinal studies may also shed light on how lifetime learning programs affect project managers' career paths in the long run.

In conclusion, this study adds to the expanding body of research on project managers' skill development and lifetime learning. Project managers and organizations may negotiate the dynamic labor market landscape with resilience, adaptability, and a dedication to continuous professional progress by understanding the subtle interactions between technical, interpersonal, and personal abilities.

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