

PROJECT MANAGER: INNOVATION FOR HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY IN A DYNAMIC WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract. This scientific article examines the issue of health sustainability in the context of the demanding role of the project manager.

This scientific article focuses on the issue of project managers and the topic they are currently dealing with, which is how to stay healthy in the long-term while being productive at work. The aim of the paper is to analyse the key factors that affect the health and well-being of project managers in the Czech Republic and to propose possible solutions to improve the physical and mental health of project managers.

The research was divided into two parts. First, a literature search was conducted and based on this, the questions for the qualitative research were developed and divided into two parts. In the first part a questionnaire was sent to project managers in the Czech Republic and in the second part structured interviews were conducted. Based on the findings, recommendations were made for the project managers themselves and also recommendations for working with the project team.

Keywords: project manager, stress, work life balance, mindfulness activities, stress management.

JEL Classification: M0.

1. Introduction

In recent years, project management has experienced a significant boom, driven by an ever-changing environment and an increasing emphasis on innovation, sustainability and productivity. This trend has led to the role and importance of the project manager becoming essential in a wide range of industries, from IT to construction and healthcare. Project managers face increasing pressure to improve their qualities, skills and leadership capabilities to respond to dynamic market demands and stakeholder expectations. At the same time, they are expected to deliver high quality projects and create optimal working environments for their teams, which requires not only technical expertise but also the ability to effectively communicate, motivate and manage diverse teams within complex and frequently changing project environments.

Given the high demands on project managers and the dynamics of project management where deadlines, budgets and expectations are high, it is important to ask the question: How does workload affect the health of project managers and how can habits be created to achieve sustainability in health and mental well-being.

The aim of this article is to analyse the factors that may influence the health and well-being of project managers in the Czech Republic. The article focuses on the challenges associated with the dynamic and often stressful work environment in which project managers operate. Internal aspects and external aspects that affect project managers were considered. The paper concludes by suggesting measures that should lead to the setting of rules leading to a sustainable balance between productivity and project manager health.

It is essential that the issue of sustainability of project managers' careers and personal lives becomes a priority not only for project managers themselves, but also for the management of the companies in which they work and contribute to their profitability and value. The health of project managers and teams should be considered as one of the key factors in any company's long-term strategy, which includes not only the physical but also the mental and emotional aspects of their performance. This approach requires the systematic incorporation of wellness programs, development and training activities aimed at the sustainability of the work and personal life of project managers, thereby

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promoting not only their personal well-being but also the long-term effectiveness and productivity of their work for the benefit of the company.

2. Theoretical background

The project manager is critical to the success of organizations of all sizes because they manage unique projects that may involve the development and launch of new products and technologies. The success of a project depends on the collaboration of the entire team and the leadership of the project manager, whose roles and competencies are indispensable to achieving the goals set (Cech & Chadt, 2015; Giri, 2020). In projects, the role of a project manager is crucial as it involves team management, leadership skills, teamwork, motivation, communication, influencing decision making, planning, and coaching. The project manager is considered as a liaison between the project teams and stakeholders. Therefore, it is crucial to staff projects with project managers with the appropriate competencies to achieve project objectives, maintain competitive advantage, and ensure the expected performance of the organization's projects (Pettersen, 1991; Shastri et al., 2021; Sumner et al., 2006).

The project manager is a key role that requires a combination of leadership skills, practical problem-solving ability, communication skills, emotional intelligence (EQ), authority and personal influence to successfully lead projects (Cheng et al., 2005; Turner & Müller, 2005). Project and team management performance is measured by project effectiveness, on-time completion, meeting functional, quality and profit requirements, as well as team cohesion and work efficiency (Anantamula, 2015; Li et al., 2007). Digiskills emphasizes that the current project manager must be able to build and maintain interpersonal relationships, communicate, and motivate the team (Digiskills, 2024). PM Consulting states that project managers today face challenges associated with a rapidly and constantly changing environment, shifting stakeholder requirements, and increasing demands on technology (Dolezal, 2020).

Rapid changes in market conditions, development of new technologies, short product availability cycles in the market and many other social and business aspects influence the way projects are managed (Thesing et al., 2021). According to research conducted by Tabassi and team, it was found that the biggest challenges for today's project managers include risk management, human resource management, project definition, performance management, knowledge management, stakeholder management, value management, cost management, agile approach, conflict management and communication (Tabassi, 2017). Riberio focused on identifying project manager competencies in the context of Industry 4.0. He comes up with the finding that the most important competencies of a project manager include influence skills, communication skills, teamwork, emotional skills, management skills, knowledge management, time

management, cost management and quality management (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

These challenges often cause project managers and team members to become stressed. Employees use various stress management techniques such as time management, meditation, and relaxation. Yet individuals seem to face challenges in applying these methods effectively (Powell & Enright, 2015). This is evident in the increased incidence of health problems and high rates of absenteeism due to illness and fatigue, which over the years has led to lower employee performance (Robbins & Coulter, 2004; Soegoto & Narimawati, 2017). It is essential for any well-functioning organisation to carefully monitor those employees are not subjected to excessive workloads and that work-life balance is maintained. Employee job satisfaction increases when employees are rewarded fairly, have meaningful work, opportunities for career progression and opportunities for personal development (Biaison, 2020; Ahmad et al., 2022).

Reasons to pay attention to improving work-life balance may include getting a more motivated and efficient workforce with less stress, which increases the attractiveness to a broader group of candidates such as seniors or part-time caregivers. It also leads to higher productivity, lower absenteeism, enhanced company reputation, retention of quality employees, reduced expenses, and more efficient use of human resources (Fleetwood, 2007; Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Employees in companies with work-life balance support are more effective at managing home, work, and social responsibilities without guilt, use flexible working to better balance work and personal commitments, and are part of a valorising and trusting work environment. Work-life balance refers to a personal feeling where professional and personal activities are in harmony, supporting personal development in line with individual priorities. Studies show that a good work-life balance not only brings job satisfaction and performance, but also increases overall life satisfaction and reduces the negative effects of stress, such as psychological problems and exhaustion (Casper et al., 2018; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

3. Methodology

The research was divided into two parts. First, a literature search was conducted and based on this, questions for qualitative interviews with selected project managers were developed.

The intention was to investigate how workload and environment affect the health and well-being of project managers in the Czech Republic.

The respondents were project managers working in different industries in the Czech Republic. The emphasis was on ensuring as broad a sample as possible, so the sample included different types of organisations (from start-ups to large corporations), different industries (IT, construction, banking, education, healthcare, etc.).

A total of 45 respondents were included in the online survey, of which 14 were women and 31 were men.

Data was collected through online questionnaires and guided interviews. The online questionnaire was chosen because of its flexibility, efficiency, and ability to reach a wider group of respondents. This method allows the inclusion of different perspectives of project managers and increases the representativeness of the data collected. The questionnaire included a range of closed and open-ended questions focusing on workload, ways of managing stress, perceptions of organisational support and the impact of work on physical and mental health.

Structured interviews were chosen because of the opportunity to obtain in-depth information from all respondents. This approach allows for better comparison of the responses obtained and promotes effective communication, interaction with respondents and immediate feedback and clarification of any uncertainties.

Structured interviews were conducted via video interviews or in person. Seven project managers participated in the structured interviews, of which two were female and five were male.

3.1 Questions in the questionnaire survey

1. General information about the respondents: in which field do you work as a project manager? How long have you been working in project management? (Options: Less than 1 year, 1–3 years, 3–5 years, more than 5 years). Gender.
2. Workload and Stress: Describe typical challenges and stressors in your role as a project manager. What specific situations or aspects of your job do you find most stressful and why?
3. Stress management strategies: what techniques do you use to manage stress and maintain mental well-being? Do you also set up any stress management techniques within your management team?
4. Company support: does the company you work for consider stress management issues important? Is there a position in your organisation that is dedicated to this issue?
5. What support systems would you like to see from your company to better support your physical and mental health?

3.2 Questions used in structured interviews

1. General information about the respondents: in which field do you work as a project manager? How long have you been working in project management? (Options: Less than 1 year, 1–3 years, 3–5 years, more than 5 years). Gender.
2. How do you rest and regenerate when you have a busy working period?
3. What stressful situations do you get into during your work? Can you describe what causes these situations?
4. How do you work with stress within your team? Do you have any proven methods or practices for

relieving stress?

5. What changes in your company or team do you think would have a positive impact on reducing stress and improving well-being?
6. What role does technology play in your ability to manage workload and stress?
7. Can you identify specific moments or events during a project that typically led to increased stress or strain for you or your team?

Two approaches were used to evaluate the questionnaire survey due to the use of two types of questions. The first approach focused on the analysis of the quantitative data that was obtained in the first question. Here, frequency analysis was used as the primary quantitative analysis. This allows us to quantify how often different responses occur in the dataset and to identify and present the distribution of respondents according to these categories (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Fossey et al., 2002).

To analyse the open-ended questions, content analysis was used. This method allowed the textual data to be analysed, identifying major themes, patterns, and trends from the respondents' answers.

Regarding the structured interviews, thematic analysis was used here to help identify, analyse, and interpret themes in the data.

4. Findings and results

4.1. Questionnaire survey

The results of the first question could be summarized as follows. A total of 45 respondents were included in the online survey, of which 14 were women and 31 were men. Most of the respondents were from the IT sector (40%), construction 20%, health 15%, education 10% and banking 15%). The seniority of project managers was 10% with less than 1 year of experience, 25% with 1–3 years, 30% with 3–5 years and 35% with more than 5 years of experience.

Question number two focused on describing typical challenges and stressors in your role as a project manager. The most common stressors and challenges for project managers respondents included high workload, pressure in terms of meeting deadlines, coordination between the team and stakeholders, communication with the team and individual stakeholders, and lack of human resources and finances. Some respondents mentioned the rapidly changing environment, and the associated changing requirements of stakeholders.

The third question asked respondents to focus on the techniques and strategies they use to reduce stress and whether they use anything for the team. In this question, most respondents said that they do not address the issue of stress in their work environment because they do not have the time, resources and because they do not feel supported in the company to address the issue.

A minority of the responses indicated that project managers try to work with their time management and

prioritise their tasks so that they are not overwhelmed. It also emerged that they use regular exercise and setting work-life boundaries as a stress management technique.

The fourth question asked whether companies pay enough attention to this issue.

Most respondents answered that companies in the Czech Republic do not pay enough attention to stress management. Flexible working hours and wellness programmes within benefits were most frequently cited as examples of what the company uses. Thus, interest in addressing stress and promoting health in the workplace is growing, but there is still room for improvement compared to international best practices.

The fifth question sought to find out the answer to the question: What support systems would you like to see from your company to better support your physical and mental health?

Respondents here most often mentioned interest in workshops on stress management and work life balance, improved internal communication, flexible working hours, home office options, support from management, creating space for rest at work, reducing workload and the possibility of regular therapy at work.

4.2. Summary of the results of the questionnaire survey

The following main conclusions can be drawn from the questionnaire survey among project managers: Demographics and location of respondents: of the 45 respondents who participated in the online survey, 14 were female and 31 were male. Majority of the respondents worked in the IT sector (40%), followed by construction (20%), healthcare (15%), education (10%) and banking (15%). In terms of seniority, 10% had less than 1 year of experience, 25% had between 1–3 years, 30% had between 3–5 years and 35% had more than 5 years of experience. The most common stressors and challenges for project managers were high workload, pressure to meet deadlines, coordination between the team and stakeholders, communication with the team and individual stakeholders, and lack of human resources and finances. The rapidly changing environment and associated changing stakeholder requirements were also mentioned.

Most respondents said that they do not deal with the problem of stress in their work environment due to lack of time, resources and support from the company. A minority of responses suggested that project managers struggle with their own time management, prioritising tasks and using regular exercise and setting work-life boundaries as a stress management technique. Most respondents felt that Czech companies pay insufficient attention to stress management. The most frequently mentioned examples of what the company uses were flexible working hours and wellness programs within employee benefits. Interest in addressing stress and promoting health in the workplace is growing, but there is still room for improvement compared to international best practices. Respondents most frequently expressed

interest in workshops on stress management and work-life balance, improved internal communication, flexible working hours, the ability to work from home, support from management, creating space for relaxation at work, reducing workload, and the opportunity for regular therapy in the workplace.

These findings suggest that project managers face a number of challenges and stressors in their work and feel that the issue of stress is not given enough attention by companies. At the same time, there is a strong interest in implementing support systems and measures.

4.3. Structured interviews

The structured interviews allowed us to look at this issue in much more detail and to complement the findings of the questionnaire survey.

The first question was aimed at obtaining general information. In this part, seven project managers were interviewed, five men and two women from the IT, construction, and health sectors. In terms of length of experience, the most common answer was five years.

The second question was directed at whether project managers devote their time to rest and regeneration. This issue is being discussed more and more in the Czech Republic and awareness of its importance is constantly growing, yet the project managers interviewed feel that they do not pay enough attention to this area. This is partly because the work environment prioritises performance over balance at work. Project managers mostly relax in their free time by playing sports and spending time with family.

The next question was to find out what stresses project managers most often and what causes these situations. In answering this question, project managers were generally in agreement that the sources of stress for them are workload, changing demands from customers, pressure in terms of meeting deadlines, challenges in working with the team and stakeholders, and limited resources available to them.

The fourth question shifted the focus from the project manager to the team and how project managers deal with stress in their teams. Project managers said that they do not use any technique to eliminate team stress, but they try to communicate openly with the team, organize team meetings, implement flexible working hours, and create a work environment where they feel comfortable.

The fifth question focused on the company; what management could do to reduce stress in their employees. This included introducing flexible working hours, the ability to work from home, creating a space where employees could relax during their working day and organising workshops to address this issue.

The next question opened a very interesting topic and that was what role technology plays in stress management. Respondents stated that they perceived technology as a tool to help them communicate more effectively, track tasks and project progress. On the other hand, they are aware that they are constantly available due

to technology, which leads to increased work pressure. Among the specific applications they use they mentioned Slack, Trello, Asana and MS Teams.

The last question asked project managers to focus on what moments or events lead to increased stress. The answers were mostly agreed upon. The most reported stress-increasing moments during the project were approaching deadlines, changes in requirements from stakeholders, discovering shortcomings and errors before the end of the project, and challenges related to leadership and team communication.

4.4. Summary of the results of the structured interviews

The research conducted through structured interviews, which complemented the findings from the questionnaire survey, led to the following conclusions: General information: interviews with seven project managers (five men and two women) from the IT, construction and healthcare sectors revealed that the most common length of experience in the field is five years. Although the importance of rest and recuperation is increasingly discussed and awareness of its importance is growing in the Czech Republic, project managers feel that not enough attention is paid to this area. This is due to the prioritisation of performance over balance in the work environment. Mostly they relax by playing sports and spending time with family.

Project managers agree that workload, changing customer demands, pressure to meet deadlines, challenges in working with the team and stakeholders, and limited available resources are sources of stress. Managers do not use specific techniques to eliminate stress in teams, but strive for open communication, organize team meetings, implement flexible working hours and create a relaxed working environment. To reduce stress among employees, management can introduce flexible working hours, the option to work from home, create spaces for relaxation during the working day and hold workshops on the subject. Technology is seen as a tool for more effective communication and tracking tasks and project progress. At the same time, however, respondents feel that technology makes them constantly available, leading to increased work pressure. Applications specifically used include Slack, Trello, Asana and MS Teams.

The most commonly mentioned stressful moments include looming deadlines, changes in requirements from stakeholders, discovering gaps and mistakes before the end of the project, and challenges related to leadership and communication within the team. The results show that although there is an awareness of the importance of regeneration and work-life balance, project managers face significant stress due to workload, changes in demands and deadline pressure. It also indicates that there is scope for management to improve the situation by introducing more flexible working arrangements and support measures. Technology plays a dual role in stress management, as a tool.

5. Recommendations identified through the research

Research through structured interviews and a questionnaire survey of project managers revealed that despite growing awareness of the importance of rest and work-life balance, managers face significant stress due to high workloads, changing demands and pressure to meet deadlines. The main sources of stress are coordination with the team and stakeholders, lack of resources and a rapidly changing environment. Although project managers use technologies such as Slack, Trello, Asana and MS Teams to communicate more effectively, they feel constantly unavailable due to technology, leading to further increased work pressure. The majority of respondents said that Czech companies do not give enough attention to stress, and they see improvements in flexible working hours, the possibility of working from home, workshops on stress management and better support from management. These findings suggest the need to introduce support systems and measures to improve the physical and mental health of employees.

Based on the findings of the survey, the recommendation for project managers is that they should spend enough time working with stress in themselves and in their team. They should establish open communication in their team from the beginning where team members are not afraid to communicate that they are overworked or overwhelmed. Project managers should get home office and flexible work hours for their team. It would also be helpful to create a place in the company where team members can come to relax during work hours. They could organise workshops on working with stress and work life balance. For project managers, recommendations could be work with your time, prioritize tasks, openly communicate your needs to your superiors and set rules for communication within the team and with stakeholders. In their free time, project managers could engage in sports and relaxation activities – it would be advisable to include some mindfulness activities such as guided meditation, yoga, practicing mindfulness in daily breath work activities and nature walks.

These recommendations are a direct result of and build on the findings from the questionnaire survey and structured interviews, which provided project managers with the opportunity for in-depth reflection on current issues. These interactions allowed managers to explore and discuss key aspects and challenges associated with the project in more detail, which helped to identify specific needs and approaches for improvement. This careful consideration and analysis contributed to the formulation of targeted recommendations that reflect a comprehensive understanding of the situation and represent practical steps to address the identified issues in order to improve processes, increase efficiency, and promote overall project success.

Integrating recommendations for working with stress into strategic documents and KPIs in organisations

requires a comprehensive and targeted approach that recognises and addresses the impact of stress on employee performance and overall wellbeing. Establishing wellness programs that promote physical and mental aspects of health and incorporating specific metrics to measure the success of these initiatives into KPIs, such as participation in stress management programs, is essential. Communication and education of employees and management to inform them of the importance and resources available for stress management is also important.

Management support is key to creating a culture that prioritizes wellness and stress management, with an emphasis on regularly evaluating the effectiveness of stress management measures and adjusting strategies based on lessons learned and employee feedback. This approach not only increases productivity and improves the workplace atmosphere, but also enhances overall employee satisfaction and health, which are key factors for the sustained success and competitiveness of any organization in today's dynamic and challenging work environment.

6. Conclusions

The aim of the article was to analyse the factors that affect the health and well-being of project managers in the Czech Republic. It focused on the challenges associated with a dynamic and often very stressful environment. The paper begins with an introduction, followed by a literature search of the subject. The research conducted highlighted the importance of proper stress management among project managers in the Czech Republic.

Research through structured interviews and a questionnaire survey of project managers revealed that although there is an increasing awareness of the importance of rest and work-life balance, project managers face significant stress due to high workloads, changing demands and pressure to meet deadlines. Major sources of stress include coordination with the team and stakeholders, lack of resources, and a rapidly changing environment. Most respondents said that Czech companies pay insufficient attention to stress issues and see improvements in flexible working hours, the ability to work from home, workshops on stress management and better support from management.

Recommendations from the research highlight the need for project managers to devote sufficient time to managing stress in themselves and their teams. They should establish open communication within the team from the outset, where members will not be afraid to communicate that they are overloaded or under pressure. Project managers should provide telecommuting and flexible working hours for their team, as well as create a place in the company where team members can relax during working hours. Organising workshops on stress management and work-life balance can also be beneficial. Project managers should work on their time

management, prioritize tasks, openly communicate their needs to their supervisors, and set rules for communication within the team and with stakeholders. In their free time, they should engage in sports and relaxation activities, including mindfulness activities such as guided meditation, yoga, breathing exercises and nature walks. Implementing wellness programs that promote physical and mental health and incorporating specific metrics to measure the success of these initiatives into KPIs, such as participation in stress management programs, is essential. Support from leadership is key to creating a culture that prioritizes wellness and stress management, with an emphasis on regular evaluation of the effectiveness of management measures.

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