

# What practitioners consider to be the skills and behaviours of an effective people project manager

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## Abstract

It is recognized by academics and the community of practice that the management of people plays an important role in project management. Recent people skills research expresses the need to develop a better understanding of what good people management is. This paper proposes what project management practitioners consider to be skills and behaviours of an effective people project manager. A combination of literature review, face to face interviews and focus group meetings was applied to complete the research objective. Six specific skills and associated behaviours were identified as being most important. The results suggest that project managers would benefit from adopting these skills and behaviours to strengthen their managing people skills and behaviours to improve the successful delivery of projects. The findings also suggest that some skill sets and behaviours may be more appropriate for application in certain project environments such as IT or the construction industry.  
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*Keywords:* People skills; Behaviours; Managing people

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Introduction

The importance project management plays in today's and tomorrow's changing working environments and working practices has increased quite dramatically since the 1990s (Turner, 1993; Gareis, 1990 and Cleland, 1994). More companies than ever before have adopted project management methodologies and processes such as Prince 2, Six Sigma or Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) to deliver work packages in a more cost-conscious and controlled way, to make the best use of their often limited human resources to create competitive advantage and to meet customer requirements. Morris (1994) suggests that 'Management by projects has become a powerful way to integrate organisational functions and motivate groups to achieve higher levels of performance and productivity'. Customers have also placed higher

demands on product and service quality. They no longer accept product or service limitations forced upon them by suppliers such as limited colour choices or design options. This has led to widespread organisational restructuring across the industries to respond appropriately to these new demands. Crawford (2000) suggests that as more organizations adopt project management as a modus operandi to deliver work packages, and the demand for project managers grows, that there is an increasing interest in people skills of project managers and in standards for development and assessment of project management competence. Blackburn (2001), Huemann (2002), Dainty et al. (2005) and Moore et al. (2003) suggest further insights that support the need for new and improved effective people skills and associated behaviours for project managers. Findings presented in this paper suggest that people skills and associated behaviours can be adopted by project managers anywhere in the world provided that people consider, for example, that project managers in the West have different expectations to project managers operating in the East or Asia Pacific areas. There are corporate cultural differences, too. What works well in one company, for example, does not necessarily work equally well in other companies. The suggested skills and

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behaviours considered by this paper are not limited for application in any specific industries such as profit and non-profit organisations and construction, or types of projects such as infrastructure and software development. This paper discusses people skills and associated behaviours for project managers and, therefore, had to deal with the meaning that people put on their observations. As a consequence, their descriptions have been collected, analysed and interpreted by applying a constructivist interpretivist approach within a phenomenological research paradigm. Deductive reasoning has been applied, starting off from the more general (literature review) to the more specific (face to face interviews and focus group meetings). The rest of the paper is structured as follows: first the outcome of a literature review of the general and project management literature is presented on what is already known about effective people management. The research methodology and data analysis are described next. And finally, the results are presented, discussed and concluded.

### 1.2. Literature review

A general review of the management literature suggests that the early motivational theorists and authors such as [Mc Gregor \(1967\)](#), [Blake and Mouton \(1964\)](#) and [Likert and Hayes \(1957\)](#) consider that an effective manager needs to show concern for people, build trust, show sympathy and involve people's emotions, for example, in solving problems. [Honey \(1988\)](#) developed this further in the early 1980s by suggesting that interpersonal skills are face to face behaviours that people use when they wish to achieve something useful with the help and through others. [Peters and Waterman \(1982\)](#) consider that it is behaviours and competences that make an effective people manager. They suggest that an effective people manager needs to be able to communicate well, inspire others, lead their people and show empathy. It appears that, in more recent years, there has been some development in the perception that managerial competences, on their own, do not make an effective people manager. [Fisher \(2006\)](#) suggests that the behaviours that underpin these competences are becoming increasingly recognized as the driving force that makes a difference to the effective management of people. [Kets de Vries \(2001\)](#) suggests that the well-functioning of the individual should be high on managers' agendas. He considers that behaviour is observable and that managers need to display open and authentic or genuine behaviours if they wish to build long-lasting relationships with their project teams. Managers need to build an understanding of what it is that makes the other person tick or what is important to them. He refers to this as authentizotic behaviour. [Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner \(1993, 1997\)](#) consider that understanding different cultures is an important people skill. They suggest that managers need to understand the values and beliefs people from different cultures hold, why this is the case and what the direct impacts are on their behaviours in certain, for example, work situations. Managers need to understand what works well in one culture, does not necessarily work equally well in another culture. They suggest that managers need to develop an understanding what the various trends, sequences and traditions are for the people they work with to manage people effectively

at international level. This is an important consideration. More businesses operate at global level, often stretching their business activities beyond the borders of many countries simultaneously. As part of a general review of the project management literature, [Kliem and Ludin \(1992\)](#) consider that successful project managers recognize the importance of managing people in projects effectively by having and applying a number of managing people skill sets. They suggest that project managers need to develop and apply good interpersonal skills such as showing empathy for the feelings of others, being able to see things from the perspectives of others and respecting others for what they are. [Verma \(1996\)](#) considers that conflict management in a project environment is as inevitable as change. He suggests that project managers need to understand that there are a number of levels of conflict and that each level, for example, requires a different approach to resolve it. Project managers need to adapt their behaviours, depending on the type and level of conflict they are dealing with. [Thamhain \(2004\)](#) considers that effective project leaders inspire their people and make everyone feel proud to be part of the project organization and its mission. Clarity, purpose and alignment of personal and organizational goals are necessary for a unified team culture to emerge. He suggests that effective people project managers encourage their people, show personal recognition for work achievements and make the details of contributions highly visible to others within the organization. This refuels and sustains people's commitments and unites the team behind its mission. [Kadefors \(2004\)](#) suggests that the building of trust is an important people competence for project managers to have. She considers that project managers need to build levels of loyalty with team members in such a way that both parties show respect for each other and what they stand for. They need to show high levels of caring and display this in an open and genuine way.

[Rosenau \(1998\)](#) considers that project managers are more likely to accomplish their tasks if they win the respect of their team members by displaying behaviours such as being polite and reasonable. People will respond more favourably to such approaches. Project managers will find their wishes are carried out voluntarily and frequently with enthusiasm. He suggests that effective people project managers must be people-oriented with strong leadership and superb communication abilities. They must be flexible, creative, imaginative and adaptable to cope with a myriad of unexpected problems, Project managers need good and effective people skills rather than technical skills to manage the people in their projects. [Edmondson et al. \(2005\)](#) consider that effective leaders of people create an environment that is conducive to team learning. They consider that project managers need to be accessible in order to make clear that others' opinions are welcomed and valued. They need to be available, not aloof and create an atmosphere of information sharing that can be reinforced by an explicit request from the project manager for contributions from team members. [Wysocki \(2007\)](#) suggests that effective people project managers encourage their team members to think 'outside the box' and find creative solutions to problems and to make informed decisions based on the strength of evidence from collected information. Project managers should apply a collaborative

approach to resolve conflicts in projects, encouraging team members to take an active part in the resolution of conflicts and not to seek to create conflicts unnecessarily.

This paper acknowledges that different managing people skills sets may be required for different types of projects such as Information Systems (IS), Integrated Project Management environments and the construction industry. Jiang et al. (2003) addressed the concerns of an article by Byrd and Turner (2001) who reported that interpersonal skills on the part of information systems personnel had a negative influence on the success of systems as measured by competitive advantage. They consider that users and IS staff must come to an understanding of what skills are required to deliver an IS system. Jiang et al. (1999) suggest that some people skills that make an effective project manager are: being diplomatic and tactful when dealing with others, showing empathy, understanding what motivates individuals, effective conflict management and reinforcing messages to others through gestures and facial expressions. In the context of integrated project management (bringing components of the whole project together in an operating system), Barkley (2006) suggests that effective people project managers create an environment of honesty, trust, open communications, pride of workmanship and commitment. They motivate team members to perform and improve. They develop a positive ‘can do’ attitude and they listen actively to others. Dainty et al. (2005) investigate the behaviour profile of superior project managers working within the construction industry, one of the most complex and dynamic project-based industrial sectors, to suggest what makes a good project manager. Their review of the literature and existing project management competency standards reveals that standards for the assessment and development of competence are grounded in skills and performance-based competences, rather than the behavioural attributes that support effective performance in a functional role. Huemann (2010) considers in a more recent longitudinal multi-method case study of a company from the Telecom industry that Human Resource Management (HRM) needs to play a far more proactive role in developing and supporting project-oriented management. This includes developing project managers’ competences such as leadership, team building and managing people skills and behaviours. The case study contributes to a better understanding of developing a company towards becoming a project-oriented company through the development, for example, of the people skills and behaviours of their project managers.

Some authors of recent project management publications such as Cicmil and Hodgson (2006) suggest that project managers, it appears, are play-acting rather than apply authentic behaviours. They imply that project managers who work within these constructed entities, perhaps also display acted behaviours in order to conform. Lewis (2003) suggests that people generally behave consistently with their beliefs. It does not matter what people say they believe in-it is usually possible to tell what they really believe in by observing their behaviour. In a project management environment this means that many project managers are play-acting either to live up to expectations or to fulfil their own self-esteem needs. Whitty and Schulz (2006) consider that project managers often act the part. They put

forward the argument that project management is spreading because it is a well-adapted collection of memes, giving the appearance of capability for productivity rather than actual productivity and using speech, gestures or rituals to do so.

They suggest that project managers are like actors within the theatre of project management and that they wear costumes, read a script and use props, in front of an audience made up of senior management and key stakeholders within their projects.

The literature review for both the general and project management publications has revealed that some people skills from the early management years such as effective communications, negotiations and conflict management have now become part of what management experts refer to as general management practice. More recent publications suggest appropriate people skills managers should have and adopt such as authentic behaviours, being culturally aware, apply some play-acting and managing the emotions of people. The literature review revealed a number of people skills but did not provide conclusive evidence which of these skills makes an effective people project manager. There was a general lack of putting forward suggestions what the associated behaviours should be to underpin the people skills. This would have provided a major insight into what makes an effective people project manager. This paper considers that it is the application of the associated behaviours that are important to the successful application of the people skills. The main research questions (Section 1.3) need to be answered to lead to the following desired outcomes:

1. To suggest what the most important people skills are that make an effective people project manager
2. To suggest what the associated behaviours are for each of the these skills

### 1.3. Main research questions

The main research questions for this research are:

1. What are the most important skills practitioners consider make an effective people project manager?
2. What specific behaviours do practitioners associate with each of these skills?

## 2. Research methodology

### 2.1. Method

Real people behave differently in the real and socially-constructed world (practice) as compared to a world that only exists within people’s imagination (theory). The literature review from this paper did not provide conclusive evidence of what specific skills and associated behaviours make an effective people project manager. This suggests that the main research questions (Section 1.3) from this paper are relevant and important but that further insights were needed to answer these questions. To close this gap and provide some practical insights as to what makes an effective people project manager, ten members of the community of practice were interviewed individually and together in two

focus group meetings (one year apart) to share their practical knowledge and experience to help answer the main research questions (Section 1.3). A key characteristic of interviews is their depth of focus on the individual. Interviews allow a detailed investigation of each person's personal perspective to gain an in-depth understanding, for example, of the personal experiences and their contexts of those being interviewed. Interviews allow for the subject matter to be covered in depth and to focus on what is important for the desired outcome of the research. Interviews in a focus group environment have the benefit of allowing individuals to reflect on and draw comparisons with their own contributions, by listening to what others have to say about the subject matter. Members of the community of practice were engaged to gain new insights into what practitioners considered to be the skills of an effective people project manager. The practical experiences and insights of members of the community of practice were of paramount importance. Erickson and Gutierrez (2002) consider that '...we need practitioner research.....the knowledge of practitioners and of research specialists must grow together in new ways'. Practitioner research is based on knowledge and practical experiences. It is challenging and opportunistic and is not hindered by traditional obstacles and boundaries. It often ignores or challenges research guidelines, presenting arguments why something does, or does not work in the real world and why it may be necessary to do something differently, for example, when collaborating with member of the academic community. Practitioners provide valuable perspectives of what they suggest works in the real and commercial world project managers operate in. Based on their extensive experiences, practitioners make important contributions towards the development of a clear disparity between what academics and practitioners consider will work, for example, in project environments and why this is so. Their perspectives and insights made a major contribution to answer the main research questions (Section 1.3) of this paper.

The objective of this research was to report what practitioners of project management considered to be the skills and behaviours of an effective people project manager. Five male and five female project managers were interviewed to manage any gender bias. They worked in the Telecommunications, Banking, Consultancy and Engineering industries. Their ages ranged from 28 years to 47 years. The number of projects they managed ranged from: 5 to 50 for projects up to 6 months' duration and from 0 to 12 for projects up to 18 months' duration. Years of experience as a professional project manager ranged from 3 to 15 years. Interviews, typically, lasted for one and a half hours. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants, transcribed and then checked for accuracy. It was, therefore, possible to check that the views of participants wanted to bring across, were actually received as intended, without distorting their meaning. The practitioners were initially asked questions that related to their own people skills, looking at the past and the present. Everyone's attention was then focused on what they considered to be specific skills and associated behaviours of an effective people project manager.

Practitioners are an important part of research and provide valuable inputs that are based on the strength of evidence from their extensive practical experiences and knowledge, for example,

in the area of managing people in project environments. A focus group meeting was held with the same practitioners from the face to face interviews to validate and to check the reliability of the findings from the literature review and the face to face interviews. In addition, practitioners used their own practical experiences and suggested the skills and behaviours of what they considered to be an effective people project manager. They applied these in their own projects at work and reconvened a year later to review their initial suggestions and to make final recommendations.

## 2.2. Data analysis

It is important to undertake the collection and the analysis of research data in a systematic and well planned manner, in accordance with the chosen research paradigm so that verifiable conclusions can be drawn from it. The data collection, data analysis and the development and verification of the resulting conclusions interrelate and interact. The researcher chose a constructivist interpretivist research approach that sits within a phenomenological research paradigm. A quasi-judicial method for analysing qualitative data was chosen for analysing the qualitative research data. Rational argument was applied to interpret empirical evidence from the interviews which is data based on observation or experience. Thus, the quasi-judicial approach was concerned with the nature, source and quality of the evidence and the argument it supports. Fig. 1 provides an overview of the research design process.

The data analysis was not left until the end but was used continuously as the research was conducted to analyse the collected data from each research method such as literature review and face to face meetings as and when these were completed. This made it possible to assess whether the research questions were being answered by examining and re-examining the collected data (the evidence) at the various stages of the research and seeking explanations that fit the data. The data from the three research methods (literature review, face to face interviews and focus group) was triangulated. It was therefore possible to counterbalance strengths from one to another and to build on the outcomes of the literature review, for example, by testing the theory from the literature review against the new data drawn from contemporary practice. The triangulation of the theoretical (literature review) and empirical data (face to face interviews and focus group meetings) was highly relevant to answering the main research questions (Section 1.3). Table 1 shows the people skills, their application and ranking of the examined skill sets after the triangulation of the research data from the literature review and the face to face meetings. Table 2 shows the six suggested specific skills and associated behaviours practitioners from the focus group meeting considered most important to make an effective people project manager.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Face to face interviews

Project managers placed a high importance on valuing people and rewarding them for a job well done. They considered

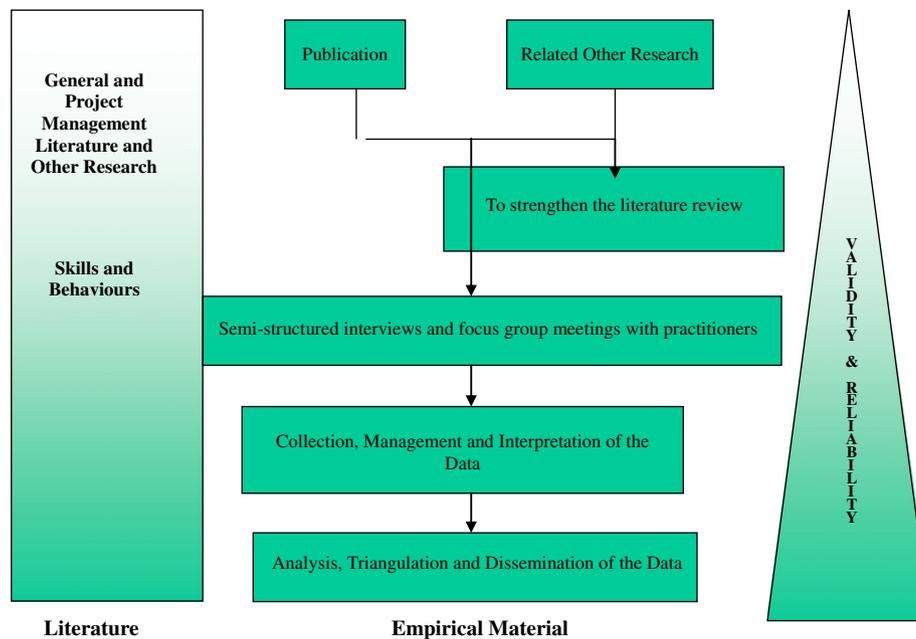


Fig. 1. Research design process diagram (adapted from Blackburn, 2001).

that this is a highly desirable skill for effective people project managers. They suggested that project managers need to tell their team members more often when they have done something right to reinforce good behaviours to get the most out of their team and the individuals. They placed high importance on understanding what it is that actually makes individuals tick. It is this understanding that the practitioners considered important. Project managers need to acquire genuine knowledge of the values, beliefs and feelings others have. This will give them a good starting point to develop a better understanding of what is really important to other people. They can use this knowledge to good effect to give people something in return for asking them to do more, with fewer resources, funds and in less time, for example. Effective communication scored highly amongst the practitioners. They considered that project managers need to spend more time talking to others informally if they really wish to find out how others really feel, for example, about the project, the project manager or other team members. To just talk and communicate well is not sufficient. Active listening is part of effective communication. Project managers need to make more time to listen carefully what others have to say. They need to use techniques such as paraphrasing to play back the message received to ensure the message sent equals the message received. Some practitioners considered that being culturally aware is not an important managing people competence for the future. The ten project managers who were interviewed individually, identified a number of people skills and behaviours that make an effective people project manager: 'Project managers need to build up an ability to manage the people in their projects more effectively by becoming more people competent and by displaying appropriate behaviours that go with these. Project managers of the future need to understand their company culture better and apply this knowledge through good people project management to achieve better results'

(Andrew). 'Effective people project managers need to bring people together who do not want to work together. They need to become skilled negotiators, hard on issues and soft on people. They need to show their own behaviour in a calibre and quality that others can respect' (Martin, Kelly). 'Project managers need to have better training in skills in working with people so they understand the people side better and to communicate to others more effectively what project management is all about. They need to understand much better how people are made up, for example, how they might react to the project manager's approaches and how they themselves need to change their approaches towards people' (Christopher). 'Project managers need to be more cross-culturally aware and apply what they have learned about the different cultures more effectively. They need to build stronger trust with team members and they need to exercise better influencing skills to get, for example, what they want or need for their projects, or themselves' (Steve). 'Project managers need to have improved leadership skills, matching these to the local conditions and company cultures they operate in. They need to communicate clearly and build the team well. They must demonstrate enthusiasm and drive to get things done' (Melissa, Lawrence). 'Effective project managers of the future need to understand more what makes people tick. They need to be friendlier with people, being helpful and seen to be more in control of their projects. They need to praise people more for work well done' (Maria). 'Project managers need to lead more by example. Team members react positively to positive leadership styles and behaviours. It has a knock-on effect. They need to respect others for what they are and stand for. They need to communicate effectively, both in writing and verbally. They need to display higher levels of confidence in their own abilities' (Sarah). 'Good people project managers need to have good effective communications skills with people at all levels of the organisation. They need to understand cross-

Table 1  
Skills, application and rankings of the examined skill sets (literature review/face to face).

Skill	Application	Ranking
Managing emotions	Show an honest understanding for the needs of other people and show an understanding of the motives of others and act accordingly (authentizotic behaviour).	Identified as being highly important by all parties <sup>a</sup> .
Building trust	Show open concern for others. Accept people for what they are. Empower people more and ask them to take on board more responsibilities.	Highly important skill set according to all involved parties <sup>a</sup> .
Effective communication	Hold off-line communications with others to develop effective relationships such as ad hoc and informal talks. Explore the viewpoints of others before making decisions.	Identified as being important by only the literature review and the face to face interviews. Members of the focus group have indicated that effective communications are an integral part of, for example, good leadership and influencing skills.
Motivating others	Tell people that they are talented and skilled. Talking more to people to gain more long-term commitments rather than compliance.	Identified only by the literature review and face to face meetings as being important for effective people management. Focus group members included this competence as part of being a good and effective leader of others.
Influencing others	Selling others that benefit for doing something or doing something differently. Share with others what it feels like to work in a highly successful team so they adopt the behaviours that are associated with success.	Identified as being highly important by all parties <sup>a</sup> .
Cultural awareness	Develop, display and apply an awareness of the cultural differences of team members. Show an understanding and knowledge of the values and beliefs of other cultures.	Identified as being highly important by all parties <sup>a</sup> .
Leading others	Knowing when not to act authoritatively. Lead by example through behaviour and by displaying appropriate levels of competence and self-confidence.	Identified as being highly important by all parties <sup>a</sup> .
Team building	Show an open appreciation for the contributions of team members. Reward people openly for good work.	Identified by all parties as being an important competence <sup>a</sup> .

<sup>a</sup> Literature review, face to face and focus group meetings.

cultural behaviours better and need to accept people more for what they are. They need to be more resilient to adverse situations in the project, both at people and at work level' (Lisa).

### 3.2. Focus group meetings

The focus group made a major contribution to validate and to check the reliability of the research data from the literature review and the face to face interviews to suggest what makes an effective people project manager. The face to face meetings per se did not elicit this new valuable knowledge on their own. The group confirmed, through in-depth discussions based on their combined years of practical experience, what they consider the skills and behaviours of an effective people project manager are. The focus group members identified associated behaviours for each of the competences they considered project managers need to apply to make these work for them, applying their own experiences to consider how these could be applied. This is crucial. Knowing about and acquiring competences, in itself, is no guarantee for success. Project managers need to apply these, observe the outcomes and likely changes the application has on people and then consider whether to modify them to make them work even better. This is a continuous process that the focus group recognised as being important: 'Project managers need to be seen to be leading the project team through an appropriate manner and self-confidence (the how is important, not going over the top)' (Melissa). 'Project managers need to organise all meetings appropriately, talk to the right people at the right time,

be compassionate, be approachable, be touchy-feely but let people know how they feel. And sometimes they may have to display behaviours that do not come natural to them in order to create a professional image in others' (Andrew, Kelly). 'Project managers need to be good natural influencers and persuaders and people need to feel at ease in the presence of the leader. Effective project managers need to know their onions, drawing on the experiences of the team, make the team feel as one team and that they are working together on the project. They need to be consistent and produce good quality documentation to improve the communications in their projects.' (Christopher). 'Effective people project managers own issues, encourage their teams to discuss these openly and honestly and driving their teams towards finding solutions to problems. They need to be careful not to play act as people will sense that they are saying one thing but doing another' (Lisa). 'Effective people project managers admit when they are wrong' (Maria). 'Competent people project managers display confidence when speaking to any audience. They stay in control at all times and are not swayed by what the audience is throwing at them, no matter how negative or irrelevant the subject matter may be' (Martin, Lawrence). 'Effective people project managers need to be autocratic when situations demand them to display this behaviour' (Steve). 'Self-development is an important competence for project managers to have. This often leads to the recognition of other areas for improvement, for example, how they manage their team members or the way in which they communicate with the team' (Sarah). 'It is not a weakness of an

Table 2  
Six specific skills and behaviours of an effective people project manager.

Skill	Behaviours
Understanding behavioural characteristics	Be genuine and open and honest with others. Show openly that you believe in your team members' abilities. Show an open and authentic concern for others that is based on true feelings and not on invented ones. Develop an understanding of the relationship between behaviours and feelings and how you can make this work for you in your teams. Adopt a repertoire of behaviours so you can deal with people in different situations and circumstances.
Leading others	Show a high level of motivation towards innovation to inspire others to become more creative and innovative. Adopt a leadership style that is appropriate to the situation, for example, situational, transitional, visionary or charismatic. Ensure that your team members comply with your wishes. Apply directive, firm or demanding behaviours according to the attitudes and behaviours of your team members.
Influencing others	Convince, influence or impress others in order to support their agenda, or the desire to have a specific impact or effect on others. Influence others by selling them the benefit, for example, why they should change so they can see the benefit and make the appropriate changes to their behaviour or attitude. Share with others what it feels like to work in a highly successful team so they adopt the behaviours that are associated with success. Influence team members to unblock the values and beliefs people have to help them develop better. Share with others what it feels like to work in a highly-valued team.
Authentizotic behaviour	Show open concern for others. Accept people for what they are and do not try to force them to change. Empower people by delegating tasks to them and ask them to take on board more responsibilities. Develop an understanding of what makes the other person tick and what is important to that person. Show genuine concerns and feelings for the needs of others. Make people feel good about work, themselves, others and the project itself.
Conflict management	Establish the root causes of the conflict by talking to others openly and honestly to find out. Concentrate on the work issues and do not get personal. Show loyalty, integrity, trust, help and support when dealing with conflicts. Be tolerant and prepared to compromise. Observe behaviours of team members to sense early when conflicts begin to develop, and then take corrective actions to resolve these.
Cultural awareness	Develop, display and apply an awareness of the cultural differences of team members. Show an understanding and knowledge of the values and beliefs of other cultures. Adapt some of other people's own home country behaviours appropriate to the situation when managing people from diverse cultures. Adopt cultural awareness behaviours to manage people in their projects effectively. Show an open optimism about cultural differences and show views that confirm that you see cultural diversity as an enhancement to your own values and beliefs.

effective people project manager to ask for help. I consider this to be rather a strength' (Lisa). 'Good people project managers sell themselves in the best possible light at all times' (Christopher). 'Competent project managers keep positive in adverse situations and do not let the situation control them' (Steve). 'Good people project managers listen actively to the problems discussed by their team members and do their best to help them as best as they can, and be seen to be doing this' (Andrew, Kelly). 'Effective people project managers are able to do more than one thing and are able to stay focused with the team at all times. Playing games is not acceptable-people will know straight away if the PM is acting or not. Acting might give some short-term gains but it will damage the personal relationships of the PM in the long term' (Maria).

Practitioners suggest that skills on their own do not make an effective people project manager. It is the associated behaviours that drive the effectiveness of the skills. They consider that both need to be adopted and applied by project managers to improve their managing people skills. It appears that not every people skill set is of paramount importance to make an effective people project manager. The sharing of the in-depth practical knowledge and experience of the practitioners made a major contribution to develop the six important skills and behaviours practitioners consider make an effective people project manager (Table 2).

#### 4. Discussion

The research was limited to project managers from industries such as Telecommunications, Engineering, Consultancy and Banking. The research data from this research was thus limited to these industries. It would have been beneficial to capture the insights from project managers in other industries such as Defence, IT and Government. The number of practitioners engaged in the research was limited, too. A larger number of practitioners would have been useful to increase the validity and reliability of the research data. This paper suggests a number of skills and behaviours that could, if adopted, help project managers to become better at managing people in their projects and deliver projects successfully in the increasingly challenging and competitive working environments. Project managers need to show open and honest concerns for and genuine interests in the people they work with. Play-acting is an acceptable behaviour when applied from time to time, for example to reinforce some of the natural behaviours of project managers. Project managers must not use this to coerce people into carrying out unprofessional or unethical actions. They must not use people as a means to an end as this appears to lead to short-term fixes only. It is important for project managers to understand the feelings and emotions of people better. This understanding will help them to predict likely future behaviours of their team members better so they can plan ahead to avoid, for example, people conflicts much earlier. Showing respect for others and what they stand for is another behaviour that carries a lot of weight in effective people management. Showing respect, it appears, is applicable to any culture. People value being respected for what they are and stand for. It makes them feel good about themselves but also about the

person showing the respect. This often leads to improved interpersonal relationships between people.

More and more businesses operate at a truly global level. Project teams are no longer made up of nationals from just one country. It is quite common that global project teams have nationals from several countries as serving project team members. It is therefore essential that project managers have a better and deeper understanding of the values and beliefs people from other countries hold if they wish to deliver their projects successfully in these working environments. Effective people project managers show an open optimism about cultural differences and show views, through their behaviours, that they see cultural diversity as an enhancement to their own values and beliefs. They adapt their own home country behaviours when managing people from diverse cultures. Cultural awareness skills and behaviours are an important part of the repertoire of skills and behaviours that make an effective people project manager. Not all people skills will necessarily be applicable and effective in all projects anywhere in the world. Different cultures place different values on, for example, what is important to them. This necessitates the need to adapt some of the suggested behaviours to fit the local cultural environment, relating to both people and companies. The adoption and application of people skills are not a panacea for success. Technical competences and knowledge of the application of tools and techniques are as important. To be effective, project managers need both technical and people skills to deliver their projects successfully.

The findings of this paper are surprising. Existing theoretical and practical project management frameworks such as *APM Body of Knowledge (2006)* and *PMI (2004)* consider what makes an effective people project manager in their respective sections on the people side of project management. They suggest a number of skills project managers should have or adopt if they wish to manage the people in their projects well (the what). Associated behaviours (the how) are not discussed and yet practitioners from this research placed a very high level of importance on these based on the strength of evidence from their own extensive practical work experiences. This suggests that people skills without associated behaviours are perhaps not as effective as previously thought and that there is a need, for example, to improve existing Bodies of Knowledge, as a starting point, to reflect this new knowledge and to strengthen these for the benefit of practitioners and academics. Knowing about and acquiring competences, in itself, is no guarantee for success. Project managers need to apply these, observe the outcomes and likely changes the application has on people and then consider whether to modify them to make them work even better. This is a continuous process that the focus group recognised as being as important as the competences themselves. Without the focus group meeting, the validity of the suggested outputs from the face to face interviews could have been doubted by opponents of the phenomenological research approach. New insights and results data would not have been captured. Major valuable contributions to assess the main research question would have been omitted. The

contributions from the focus group, as reasoned earlier, have been invaluable to the outcome of this research.

## 5. Conclusions

Considering all the challenges project managers are facing it is evident that one area where project managers need to make big improvements, is in the area of people management. Skills on their own, including their applications, do not make an effective people project manager. Behaviours drive outcomes. Specific behaviours for each skill need to be applied by project managers to make these skills truly effective. It is the application of these that is of paramount importance and is the catalyst to being an effective people project manager. This paper contributes to a better understanding of what practitioners consider makes an effective people project manager. In a practical sense and as a direct result of this paper, a set of six specific managing people skills and associated behaviours have been presented (*Table 2*). Theory played a major role to identify what was already known about effective managing people skills such as managing emotions, influencing others and effective communications. It was also possible to compare the contributions from this paper against well-respected project management frameworks such as the *APM Body of Knowledge (2006)* and *PMI (2004)*. This was crucial in two respects. First, it confirmed that the contributions from this paper can be used in future editions of these Bodies of Knowledge as their current editions do not discuss what the associated behaviours are that underpin the people skills. Secondly, it confirmed that the main research questions were answered. The impact changes in attitude have on behaviours was not considered here. This topic might be covered by future research based on the existing work of *Fisher (2006)*.

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