

Communication and People Management Skills for Project Success: Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how communication and people management competencies among project managers contribute to project success, with a particular focus on the mediating effect of job satisfaction. While existing literature has often listed extensive soft skill requirements for project managers, there remains limited empirical clarity on which skills directly influence project outcomes. Using a quantitative approach, survey data were collected from 219 project management professionals in Malaysia's Information Technology sector. The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to test seven hypotheses. Results show that communication skills have a strong positive relationship with job satisfaction, which in turn significantly influences project success. People management skills were also found to have a direct impact on project outcomes, although their link to job satisfaction was not statistically significant. Moreover, job satisfaction serves as a mediator between communication skills and project success but does not mediate the link between people management skills and project success. These findings underscore the nuanced role of soft skills in project delivery, suggesting that fostering job satisfaction through effective communication may be key to enhancing project performance. The generalisability of the results may be constrained by the industry and geographic scope, offering opportunities for broader future studies.

Keywords: Communication Skills, Critical Success Factors, Job Satisfaction, People Management Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Project managers are often under pressure to meet stakeholder expectations by delivering projects on time, within budget, and according to agreed-upon specifications. However, it is frequently overlooked that the success of a project depends not only on technical proficiency and methodology, but also on the project manager's capacity to lead people and communicate effectively (Uzoka et al., 2018). The evolving nature of project management underscores the importance of equipping managers with a broader set of competencies that go beyond traditional technical skills.

Communication and people management skills are increasingly recognised as essential for achieving project objectives. These competencies, often referred to as soft skills, enable project managers to guide their teams, manage interpersonal relationships, and align stakeholders around a shared vision.

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Despite this, many organisations still undervalue soft skills, prioritising technical expertise when selecting and training project professionals (Afzal et al., 2018). This mismatch may hinder project success, especially in complex environments where team dynamics and stakeholder collaboration are critical.

In Malaysia, there is growing attention on the need to enhance project managers' interpersonal capabilities. Project delivery failures are often attributed to poor communication or ineffective management of team members. As project managers are the central figures in coordinating project activities, their ability to manage relationships and foster cooperation plays a vital role in steering projects to successful outcomes (Rezvani et al., 2016). Developing communication and people management skills is therefore imperative, particularly in sectors such as Information Technology, where rapid change and cross-functional collaboration are the norm.

Although previous research has largely focused on technical expertise and process-related competencies, empirical investigations into how soft skills, particularly communication and people management, affect project success and job satisfaction in the Malaysian context remain scarce (Cheah et al., 2024). This research addresses that gap by investigating how these two competencies contribute to successful project execution and how job satisfaction may mediate this relationship.

In light of these observations, the aim of this study is to explore the extent to which project managers' communication and people management skills influence project success, and whether job satisfaction plays a mediating role in these relationships. By doing so, this study provides evidence-based insights to help organisations understand which soft skills are most impactful for improving project performance and retaining motivated project leaders.

This study narrows its focus to two soft-skill-based Critical Success Factors (CSFs), namely communication and people management, and evaluates how these competencies contribute to successful project delivery and enhance job satisfaction. The objectives of the study are fourfold:

- To examine the relationship between communication skills and people management skills with project success and determine whether project managers who possess these abilities are more likely to deliver successful projects.
- To investigate whether communication and people management skills influence job satisfaction.
- To assess the connection between job satisfaction and project success.
- To evaluate whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between these critical success factors and project success.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Project-based work is becoming increasingly widespread across various sectors and regions. As organisations globally embrace project structures, the number and scope of projects continue to expand. Within this dynamic environment, the behaviour, personality, and skill set of the project manager are pivotal, as they have a direct influence on employee motivation, scheduling, budgeting, and project delivery outcomes (Alam et al., 2010). Although project success or failure can be attributed to numerous factors, the project manager's competence is consistently identified as a central determinant (Khan & Anwar, 2021).

Given the evolving and uncertain nature of project environments, consistent collaboration between project managers and their teams can be difficult to maintain, often impacting overall performance. Therefore, it is essential to examine project management strategies, particularly CSFs, that impact project performance, with consideration given to the role of job satisfaction. Existing studies underscore the importance of cultivating soft skills, including communication and people management skills, as key competencies for project managers to successfully lead projects to completion.

To identify the most impactful factors contributing to both project success and job satisfaction, this study reviewed a range of journal articles indexed in platforms like Web of Science and Google Scholar. This review formed the foundation for the conceptual framework used in this research, which aims to recommend best practices in project management that foster not only project success but also greater job satisfaction among project managers.

2.1 Systematic Review Process and Output

Key competencies identified as critical to successful project management include effective communication and strong people management abilities. Prior research suggests that leaders who demonstrate sound people management practices, particularly in their leadership styles, tend to boost job satisfaction and build trust within teams, which in turn leads to successful project outcomes. These studies support the idea that job satisfaction is an important enabler of project success. Additionally, a project manager's communication skills have also been positively linked to project performance. Collectively, these findings underscore that soft skills are fundamental to driving the critical factors that determine project success.

Table 1 summarises a selection of empirical studies that explore how soft skills contribute to both job satisfaction and project success.

Table 1 Studies on the Relationship between Soft Skills, Job Satisfactions and Project Success		
Author (year)	Research Focus	Key Findings
Zuo et al. (2018)	Investigated the effect of soft skills on project success	Identified that behavioural competencies significantly contribute to successful project delivery
Rezvani et al. (2016)	Explored how emotional intelligence impacts project success and team satisfaction	Found that managers with high emotional intelligence positively influence job satisfaction and trust, which drive project outcomes
Afzal et al. (2018)	Analysed how soft leadership skills relate to project performance	Demonstrated that interpersonal skills are essential in guiding teams toward success
Gurbuz et al. (2016)	Examined the influence of soft skills on academic job satisfaction	Showed that soft skills play a crucial role in shaping employee job satisfaction
Castro et al. (2022)	Studied the link between emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, and project success	Concluded that emotional and interpersonal skills are strong predictors of both satisfaction and project success
Acheampong et al. (2023)	Assessed the role of emotional intelligence in performance within construction projects	Confirmed that emotional intelligence enhances communication, collaboration, and ultimately project performance

2.2 Project Success

The role of project managers has long been acknowledged as central to the successful delivery of projects. Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to understanding how their skill sets specifically affect project success (Ishfaq et al., 2022). Traditionally, project outcomes have been assessed using CSFs, where success is often defined by measurable benchmarks such as completing the project on schedule, within budget, and according to quality specifications. While this approach remains widely used, some scholars have argued that it overlooks essential behavioural competencies, particularly soft skills (Rezvani et al., 2016).

Project success is also increasingly viewed as multidimensional, involving not just operational efficiency but also stakeholder satisfaction, long-term benefits to the organisation, and the strategic relevance of project outcomes (Castro et al., 2022). Studies have pointed out that success can be better ensured when project managers lead their teams toward clearly defined goals through effective coordination and motivation (Zuo et al., 2018). Furthermore, emotional intelligence is seen as a critical enabler of success, helping managers manage team dynamics and stakeholder expectations (Zuo et al., 2018).

2.3 Communication Skills

Communication has consistently been highlighted as a vital soft skill in project management. Several researchers, including Zuo et al. (2018), have found a strong link between a project manager's communication capabilities and the success of the project. A competent communicator can digest large amounts of complex information and relay it effectively to diverse stakeholders. This ability promotes clarity and alignment within teams and contributes to overall job satisfaction.

Moreover, gaps in communication, recognised as one of the primary components of critical success factors, are frequently cited as causes of project failure, especially when project goals are misunderstood or updates are not shared efficiently (Zuo et al., 2018). Communication can take both formal forms (e.g., meetings, reports) and informal forms (e.g., spontaneous hallway conversations), with the latter often being more effective in disseminating information quickly (Lindsjörn et al., 2016). Nevertheless, informal communication is generally unsuitable for decision-making due to its lack of structure.

Miscommunication, team conflict, and ineffective collaboration have also been identified as contributors to poor project outcomes (Manazar et al., 2015). To improve communication and foster a constructive team environment, project managers should develop high-quality interpersonal relationships and promote clear, value-driven dialogue. For instance, using perceptual congruence to obtain feedback on leadership practices can strengthen team cohesion and boost motivation (Manazar et al., 2015).

2.4 People Management Skills

Managing people effectively remains a significant challenge in project leadership due to the nuanced and often unpredictable nature of human behaviour. People management encompasses coaching, empathising, and engaging team members beyond task-oriented interactions. It emphasises treating individuals not merely as productivity tools, but as valuable contributors with unique strengths and emotional needs.

These skills are especially critical in project environments where networking and collaboration are essential for meeting deliverables. Scholars have emphasised that project success is not solely reliant on technical capabilities but also on emotional and interpersonal competencies (Alvarenga et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence enables project managers to understand and regulate emotions, both their own and others', which helps in forming productive and trustworthy relationships with internal and external stakeholders (Rezvani et al., 2016).

Well-executed people management can transform plans into action. Effective project managers act as social architects, balancing organisational goals with team motivation. They create inclusive environments that promote engagement, responsibility, and focus on outcomes (Azim et al., 2010; Cheah et al., 2018). This human-centred approach contributes significantly to project delivery.

2.5 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to an individual's emotional and cognitive evaluation of their work, reflecting how positively they perceive their role and working environment (Rezvani et al., 2016). Satisfied project managers tend to perform better, build stronger relationships, and contribute to a more harmonious work culture. Conversely, dissatisfaction can lead to demotivation, increased project risks, and a decline in team morale.

Research indicates that job satisfaction plays a moderating role in the relationship between soft skills and project outcomes. For instance, project managers who are proficient in communication and interpersonal skills often report greater job satisfaction, particularly in environments requiring frequent collaboration. The dynamic and diverse nature of project work, often involving new teams and evolving goals, offers opportunities for continuous learning and professional development, which further enhancing job satisfaction.

Human resource practices also play a role. Effective Human resources strategies that prioritise soft skill development and team support are known to improve both satisfaction and project success (Cheah et al., 2024; Ling et al., 2018). Recognising that job satisfaction is shaped by multiple factors, including interpersonal experiences and organisational support, is essential for cultivating high-performing project environments.

2.6 Hypotheses Development

Effective communication is a cornerstone of leadership in project environments. It not only facilitates clear understanding of goals and expectations, but also fosters trust, reduces ambiguity, and strengthens interpersonal relationships. Project managers who possess strong communication skills are better able to engage with team members, resolve conflicts, and promote collaboration, all of which are factors that contribute positively to job satisfaction. Rezvani et al. (2016) found that emotionally intelligent leaders who communicate well tend to build higher levels of satisfaction and trust among their teams. Similarly, Acheampong et al. (2023) emphasised that project managers who consistently demonstrate effective communication foster a psychologically safe and productive environment, which enhances both individual and team-level satisfaction.

Job satisfaction is often shaped by the quality of interactions in the workplace. In project-based settings, where uncertainty and role ambiguity are common, communication plays a stabilising role. Manazar et al. (2015) argued that frequent, open communication contributes to a sense of belonging and purpose within project teams. Zuo et al. (2018) also highlighted that communication is essential

in managing expectations and reducing misunderstandings, ultimately improving project managers' engagement and satisfaction with their work. Hence, communication serves as both a relational and motivational tool in enhancing job satisfaction.

H₁: Communication skills positively influence project managers' overall job satisfaction.

While communication enhances individual satisfaction, it also plays a decisive role in determining project outcomes. Effective project managers use communication to clarify objectives, delegate responsibilities, coordinate resources, and manage stakeholder relationships. Zuo et al. (2018) emphasised that communication is not merely a managerial tool but a strategic competency that aligns project goals with team actions, ensuring smoother execution. Likewise, McKeivitt et al. (2022) found that communication competencies significantly affect planning accuracy, risk management, and stakeholder alignment, all of which are crucial for successful project delivery.

However, communication alone may not guarantee success unless it is practiced with clarity, consistency, and active listening. Castro et al. (2022) argued that project success depends on both the technical and relational dimensions of leadership, with communication bridging the two. Rezvani et al. (2016) further noted that when communication is poor, even well-structured projects can fail due to confusion, delays, or unaddressed conflicts. Therefore, the presence of strong communication skills in project leaders enhances coordination, minimises errors, and contributes to overall project success.

H₂: Communication skills have a direct positive effect on project success among project managers.

Satisfied project managers are more likely to be committed, motivated, and proactive in addressing challenges, traits that are closely associated with project success. When individuals feel valued and fulfilled in their roles, they tend to exert greater effort, exhibit stronger leadership, and foster positive team dynamics. Rezvani et al. (2016) found that job satisfaction positively correlates with project performance through its influence on engagement and trust. Similarly, Khan and Anwar (2021) reported that satisfied managers often inspire higher performance among their teams, contributing to smoother execution and better outcomes.

Moreover, job satisfaction enhances a manager's resilience and problem-solving ability, especially in the face of setbacks or project uncertainties. Ishfaq et al. (2022) demonstrated that project managers who are emotionally and professionally satisfied are more capable of leading complex projects to success. Castro et al. (2022) also linked job satisfaction to improved team morale and reduced turnover, factors that are essential for maintaining momentum and cohesion throughout the project lifecycle. Thus, job satisfaction can be seen as a precursor to consistent, high-quality project performance.

H₃: Job satisfaction contributes positively to the successful execution of projects by project managers.

The ability to effectively manage people is closely tied to how project managers experience their roles. Those who can mentor, support, and empower their teams often derive satisfaction from their leadership impact. People management skills, such as conflict resolution, empathy, and motivation, foster stronger team cohesion, which in turn provides managers with a sense of achievement and purpose. Khan and Anwar (2021) found that project leaders who are confident in managing interpersonal relationships report higher levels of job satisfaction. Similarly, Rezvani et al. (2016) showed that managing people well enhances a project manager's self-efficacy and emotional well-being.

Furthermore, people management skills reduce stress and role conflict by creating an environment of mutual respect and collaboration. Acheampong et al. (2023) noted that emotionally intelligent leaders are better at addressing individual needs, leading to more fulfilling and productive work environments. Alvarenga et al. (2020) also identified people management skills as a core competency that supports both team performance and managerial satisfaction. Thus, effective people management skills not only benefit the team but also enhances the job experience of the project manager.

H₄: People management skills are positively associated with job satisfaction in the context of project management.

People management skill is a central driver of successful project outcomes. In environments characterised by complexity, interdependence, and frequent change, project managers must inspire, align, and coordinate diverse teams. Alvarenga et al. (2020) found that project managers who excel in people management skills are more likely to deliver projects on time and within scope, as they are better equipped to handle team dynamics and stakeholder engagement. Elmezain et al. (2021) reinforced this by showing that strong interpersonal skills facilitate clearer delegation, faster conflict resolution, and more efficient resource utilisation.

Moreover, people management skills serve as a buffer against project disruptions. Azim et al. (2010) argued that successful managers act as 'social architects' who influence culture and performance through active engagement with their teams. Cheah et al. (2018) highlighted that effective people leaders are able to integrate organisational goals with team interests, thus enhancing accountability and shared purpose. When team members are well-managed, motivated, and emotionally supported, the probability of achieving project goals increases substantially.

H₅: People management skills positively impact the project success led by project managers.

While communication can influence project success directly, its impact may be amplified when mediated by job satisfaction. Project managers who communicate well tend to foster stronger relationships and more cohesive teams, which leads to higher personal fulfilment and professional contentment. Rezvani et al. (2016) demonstrated that job satisfaction serves as a significant mediating variable, enhancing the link between leadership behaviours such as communication and project outcomes. Similarly, Castro et al. (2022) found that project managers who derive satisfaction from their roles are more resilient and better positioned to lead their teams effectively.

This mediation suggests that communication is not only a transactional function but also an emotional driver of job satisfaction, which in turn motivates project managers to perform at higher levels. McKeivitt et al. (2022) emphasised that managers who feel heard and respected through communication are more committed to organisational objectives. Therefore, job satisfaction strengthens the causal pathway between communication and success by reinforcing psychological engagement and managerial commitment.

H₆: Job satisfaction significantly mediates the effect of communication skills on project success.

The influence of people management skills on project success may also be enhanced through the mediating role of job satisfaction. Project managers who effectively manage teams often experience higher levels of satisfaction, which translates into greater commitment, energy, and leadership focus. Khan and Anwar (2021) suggested that job satisfaction strengthens the effect of people-centred

leadership on project delivery. Acheampong et al. (2023) similarly noted that emotionally intelligent managers, who manage people well, are more motivated to achieve high performance standards.

However, not all studies support a strong mediating role, as the relationship between people management skills and job satisfaction can vary by context. For example, in highly technical or routine projects, interpersonal dynamics may be less influential than in creative or cross-functional teams. Nonetheless, Rezvani et al. (2016) and Alvarenga et al. (2020) argued that when people management skills enhance job satisfaction, it indirectly improves project outcomes by promoting a more engaged and stable leadership style. This supports the hypothesis that job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between people management skills and project success.

H₇: Job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between people management skills and project success.

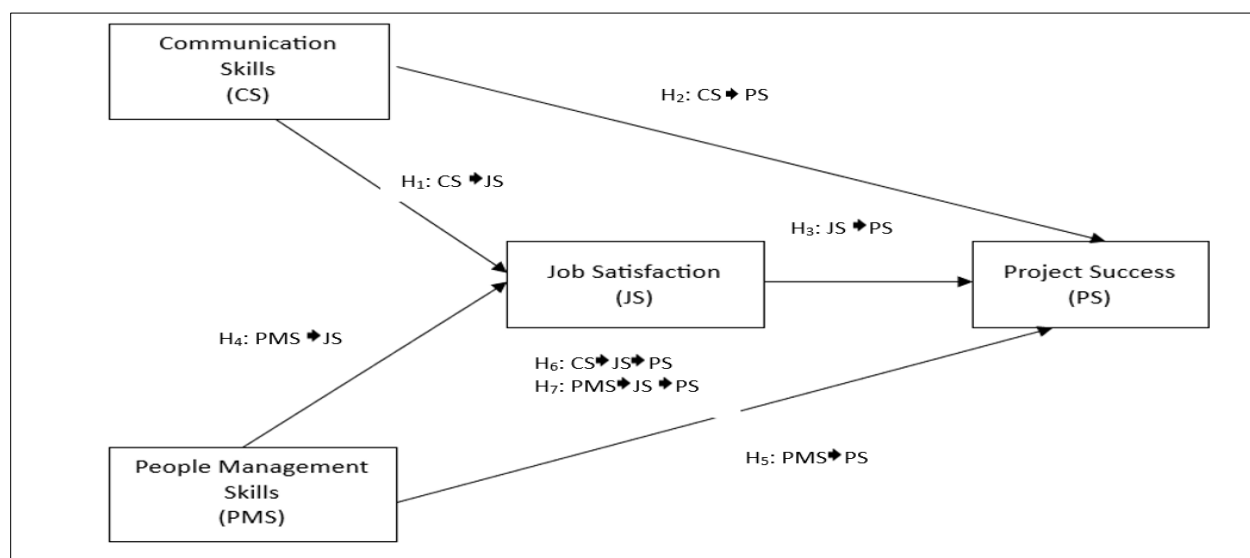


Figure 1. Summary of Hypotheses

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire to examine the relationships between project managers' communication and people management skills, job satisfaction, and project success.

3.2 Sampling Method and Selection Criteria

A purposive sampling technique was used to target professionals with relevant experience in project management, specifically within the Information Technology sector in Malaysia. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Currently employed in a project management-related role (e.g., project manager, programme manager, Project Management Office (PMO), Quality Control Officer (QCO))
- Minimum 1 year of working experience
- Based in the Information Technology sector

This approach ensured that respondents had the appropriate background to provide informed insights into the research constructs.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study were gathered through an online, self-administered questionnaire developed using Google Forms. The survey was open for a period of one month and was disseminated via email invitations, LinkedIn professional groups, and industry-specific networks targeting individuals working in project management roles. A total of 250 survey invitations were distributed. After screening for completeness and validity, 219 fully completed responses were retained for analysis, resulting in a high response rate of 88%. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are detailed in Table 2. Among the 219 participants, the majority (143 individuals, or 65.3%) held the role of project manager. This was followed by 23 programme managers (10.5%), 21 individuals working in project management offices (9.6%), 21 quality control specialists (9.6%), and 11 tribe leads (5.0%).

Table 2 Background Summary of Respondents (n=219)

Category	Count	Proportion (%)
Gender		
Male	126	57.5
Female	91	41.6
Not disclosed	2	0.9
Age Range		
23-30 years	13	5.9
31-40 years	68	31.1
41-50 years	103	47.0
51 years and above	33	15.1
Not provided	2	0.9
Current Role		
Project Manager	143	65.3
Programme Manager	23	10.5
Project Management Office (PMO)	21	9.6
Quality Control Officer (QCO)	21	9.6
Tribe Led	11	5.0
Years of Experience		
Below 1 year	6	2.7
1-3 years	22	10.0
3-5 years	30	13.7
5-10 years	49	22.4
Over 10 years	112	51.1
Highest Qualification		
Diploma	10	4.6
Bachelor's Degree	149	68.0
Master's Degree	57	26.0
Doctorate (PhD)	3	1.4

3.4 Instrumentation and Measurement

This study measured four latent constructs using a total of 29 items, as summarised in Table 3. The development of the measurement scales was guided by established research from prior empirical studies. The measurement items for project success were adapted from McKevitt et al. (2022), whose instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$). Constructs assessing the

relevance of soft skills, namely communication and people management skills, were sourced from Zuo et al. (2018) and Castro et al. (2022), both of which reported path coefficients of 0.767 in previous structural models. The items used to evaluate job satisfaction were derived from the studies of Castro et al. (2022) and Gurbuz et al. (2016).

Table 3 Summary of Construct and Measurement Items

Latent Variable	Code	Item Description	Source(s)
A. Job Satisfaction	JS1	Satisfaction with income progression	Castro et al. (2022); Gurbuz et al. (2016)
	JS2	Satisfaction with career advancement	
	JS3	Satisfaction with achievement of long-term career goals	
	JS4	Satisfaction with new skill development	
	JS5	Satisfaction with career success	
	JS6	Satisfaction with current job or role	
B. Soft Skills Competency			
<i>i. Communication Skills</i>	CS1	Clearly understands and conveys communication content	Zuo et al. (2018); Castro et al. (2022)
	CS2	Maintains structured and formal communication channels	
	CS3	Uses appropriate information sources for project-related tasks	
	CS4	Tailors information to suit the audience and situation	
	CS5	Proactively shares project updates with team and stakeholders	
<i>ii. People Management Skills</i>	PM1	Actively listens to team members and stakeholders	Zuo et al. (2018); Castro et al. (2022)
	PM2	Maintains strong interpersonal team relationships	
	PM3	Understands the roles and responsibilities of team members	
	PM4	Collaboratively plans project activities with others	
	PM5	Shares expertise within the project team	
	PM6	Discusses emotions with team members when needed	
	PM7	Respects differing opinions from team members	
	PM8	Openly considers ideas from others	
	PM9	Uplifts team morale during challenging times	
C. Project Success	PS1	Project met performance expectations	McKevitt et al. (2022)
	PS2	Fulfilled end-user requirements	
	PS3	Achieved project goals and objectives	
	PS4	Stakeholders were satisfied with the outcomes	

Latent Variable	Code	Item Description	Source(s)
	PS5	Soft skills of the project manager were well-received	
	PS6	Client expectations were fulfilled	
	PS7	Positive feedback from project team members	
	PS8	Clients expressed satisfaction with final results	
	PS9	Project led to repeat business with the client	

The validity and reliability of the measurement model were evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) for each latent construct, as presented in Table 4. The AVE scores ranged between 0.692 and 0.809, surpassing the standard benchmark of 0.50 and thereby demonstrating adequate convergent validity. Likewise, the CR values, falling between 0.945 and 0.951, exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency across all constructs. Additionally, discriminant validity was established, as all Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios were below the accepted limit of 0.85.

Table 4 Reliability and Validity Summary of Measurement Model

Construct	Item Codes	Factor Loadings (≥ 0.70)	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Project Success (PS)	PS1–PS9	0.778–0.874	0.698	0.946	0.951
Job Satisfaction (JS)	JS1–JS6	0.785–0.882	0.692	0.911	0.915
Communication Skills (CS)	CS1–CS5	0.871–0.929	0.809	0.941	0.945
People Management Skills (PMS)	PM1–PM9	0.559–0.901	0.697	0.943	0.947

Note: All constructs met the minimum thresholds for convergent validity (AVE > 0.50) and internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.70$; CR > 0.70). Although PM6 loaded slightly below 0.70 (0.559), it was retained due to its theoretical contribution and acceptable overall reliability metrics.

Following the completion of data collection, responses from 219 project management professionals were analysed. A majority of respondents (51%) reported having more than a decade of professional experience, primarily within the Information Technology industry. The study aimed to examine seven hypotheses related to the influence of communication and people management skills on project success and job satisfaction. Table 5 illustrates that four of the proposed hypotheses were supported by statistically significant results, while the remaining three did not demonstrate meaningful significance.

Table 5 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypotheses	Path Relationship	Mean	Std. Dev	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Lower–Upper)	Supported
H ₁	Communication → Job Satisfaction	0.416	0.118	3.590	0.000	0.218 – 0.604	Yes
H ₂	Communication → Project Success	0.027	0.117	0.254	0.400	–0.168 – 0.219	No
H ₃	Job Satisfaction → Project Success	0.166	0.062	2.715	0.003	0.062 – 0.268	Yes
H ₄	People Management Skills → Job Satisfaction	–0.054	0.123	0.532	0.297	–0.250 – 0.153	No
H ₅	People Management Skills → Project Success	0.542	0.102	5.224	0.000	0.380 – 0.714	Yes
H ₆	Comm. → Job Satisfaction → Project Success	0.069	0.033	2.153	0.031	0.015 – 0.139	Yes

Hypotheses	Path Relationship	Mean	Std. Dev	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Lower-Upper)	Supported
H ₇	People Management Skills → Job Satisfaction → Project Success	-0.009	0.022	0.506	0.613	-0.054 - 0.034	No

Note: H₁–H₅ were tested as one-tailed hypotheses; H₆ and H₇ as two-tailed.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results reveal that communication skills have a strong positive impact on job satisfaction ($p = 0.000$), making this the most statistically significant finding in the model. This aligns with past research highlighting communication as a vital managerial skill that enhances team cohesion, clarity, and motivation (Castro et al., 2022; Cheah et al., 2023). Effective communication fosters shared understanding and reduced decision-making delays, conditions that are necessary for high-performing teams. This result supports the hypothesis that project managers who possess effective communication skills are more likely to experience job satisfaction.

The direct relationship between communication skills and project success was found to be statistically insignificant ($p = 0.400$). Although communication is generally regarded as a vital competency in project management, its isolated impact may be less pronounced in settings where technical capabilities or system-driven processes take precedence. This finding implies that communication contributes more meaningfully to project success when it operates indirectly, primarily by enhancing job satisfaction, rather than acting as a direct determinant of successful outcomes.

The findings confirm a positive and significant relationship between job satisfaction and project success ($p = 0.003$). Satisfied project managers are more committed, productive, and engaged, which translates to higher team performance and project efficiency (Khan & Anwar, 2021; Ishfaq et al., 2022). Conversely, low satisfaction can lead to disengagement, turnover, and project delays. This result underpins the importance of fostering job satisfaction as a strategic driver of project outcomes.

Surprisingly, people management skills did not show a significant effect on job satisfaction ($p = 0.297$). This suggests that other factors, such as career goals, rewards, work-life balance, and organisational support, may have a greater influence on job satisfaction than interpersonal competencies alone (Amran et al., 2023; Cheah et al., 2023). This finding contributes to the ongoing discussion about the multifaceted nature of job satisfaction, especially in knowledge-driven industries.

The impact of people management skill on project success was statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), confirming the hypothesis that people management skill is a critical success factor. Project managers who can manage interpersonal dynamics, motivate teams, and handle stakeholder expectations are more likely to deliver projects on time and within budget (Alvarenga et al., 2020; Cheah, 2018). These findings validate the importance of soft skills, particularly in navigating the human complexities of project environments.

Job satisfaction was found to play a significant mediating role in the relationship between communication skills and project success ($p = 0.031$). This result indicates that communication

impacts project performance indirectly by improving project managers' satisfaction with their roles (Rezvani et al., 2016; Castro et al., 2022). The finding highlights job satisfaction as a key mechanism through which communication skills exert their influence on overall project outcomes.

The analysis revealed that job satisfaction did not significantly mediate the relationship between people management skills and project success ($p = 0.613$). Although people management skills demonstrated a direct positive impact on project outcomes, as evidenced in H_7 , this effect does not seem to operate through job satisfaction. This suggests that project managers can effectively drive project success through strong interpersonal and team management capabilities, even in the absence of heightened personal satisfaction. Such a finding may reflect the unique demands and role dynamics within Information Technology focused project environments, where achieving project goals can depend more on task execution and stakeholder alignment than on individual job fulfilment.

The results of this study underscore the pivotal role of soft skills in influencing both project outcomes and job satisfaction among project managers. Communication skills emerged as the most significant factor positively affecting job satisfaction (H_1), indicating that the ability to communicate effectively enhances a manager's sense of fulfilment in their role. However, the direct effect of communication skills on project success (H_2) was not statistically significant, suggesting that communication contributes more meaningfully when it also improves job satisfaction. Job satisfaction itself was found to significantly predict project success (H_3), highlighting the importance of engaged and motivated leadership. In contrast, people management skills did not significantly predict job satisfaction (H_4), though they had a direct and positive impact on project success (H_5). Job satisfaction was also shown to mediate the relationship between communication skills and project success (H_6), but not between people management skills and project success (H_7). Overall, the findings reinforce the value of soft skills, especially communication and people management skills in project environments, while emphasising the mediating role of job satisfaction and the nuanced nature of these relationships.

5. CONCLUSION

Traditionally, communication and people management skills abilities have been viewed as supplementary in project execution, based on the belief that such soft skills do not play a direct role in determining a project manager's effectiveness in delivering project outcomes. As a result, the importance of CSFs such as interpersonal competencies have been underestimated. However, the findings of this study challenge that perception by demonstrating a strong and statistically significant relationship between people management skills and project success. Project managers who cultivate these soft skills are better equipped to lead high-performing teams, meet stakeholder expectations, and contribute to organisational performance and profitability.

Moreover, this study affirms that project managers with strong communication and people management skills are more likely to deliver successful project outcomes. When senior management recognises and invests in the development of these competencies, organisations are better positioned to achieve both strategic and financial goals. Earlier research has identified deficiencies in soft skills as a major factor leading to project failures among project managers (Uzoka et al., 2018). Building on this insight, the present study reinforces the notion that strong communication and people management skills competencies are critical not only for ensuring successful project completion within the defined time, cost, scope, and quality parameters but also for enhancing job satisfaction among project managers. Therefore, a balanced blend of technical expertise and interpersonal skills is critical for project managers to succeed in both execution and leadership dimensions.

5.1 Implications for Theory and Practice

This study reinforces the theoretical significance of soft skills, particularly communication and people management skills, as fundamental components of project success. By establishing a strong empirical link between these competencies and both job satisfaction and project performance, the findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes effective project leadership. The results support the integration of soft skills into the broader framework of CSFs, positioning them not as supplementary, but as core elements essential to delivering value to stakeholders and achieving intended project outcomes.

The theoretical underpinning of this study is grounded in Emotional Intelligence Theory (Acheampong et al., 2023) and Affective Events Theory (Ishfaq et al., 2022). These frameworks suggest that individuals who can regulate their emotions and navigate interpersonal dynamics effectively are more likely to succeed in complex, people-driven environments like project teams. Emotional intelligence, in this context, enhances a manager's ability to communicate with clarity, manage team relationships, and respond constructively to workplace challenges, all of which are vital for sustaining both project momentum and personal job satisfaction. The integration of these theories into the study advances academic discourse by highlighting the psychological and emotional dimensions of project success.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers valuable insights for organisational leaders, particularly in the areas of talent acquisition and performance management. Organisations should consider evaluating candidates for project management roles not only on technical expertise but also on their interpersonal and communication strengths. Hiring or promoting individuals with demonstrated competence in these areas is likely to yield more motivated and satisfied project managers, who are in turn better equipped to lead successful projects. Moreover, these findings underscore the importance of aligning recruitment and evaluation frameworks with competencies that reflect real-world project demands.

In terms of human capital development, the implications are equally significant. The study advocates for the inclusion of soft skills training, especially in communication and people-oriented leadership, as a standard component of project management education and leadership development programmes. Structured interventions such as emotional intelligence workshops, coaching, and role-specific simulations can build the interpersonal competencies required for effective project leadership. By investing in the continuous development of these skills, organisations not only foster higher job satisfaction among project managers but also enhance long-term project success and organisational resilience.

5.2 Limitation and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the influence of communication and people management skills on project success and job satisfaction, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualise its findings.

Firstly, the study is limited by its industry-specific focus. All respondents were professionals within the Information Technology sector, which may limit the applicability of the results to other sectors such as construction, healthcare, or manufacturing. Project environments differ in terms of structure, complexity, and stakeholder expectations, and future research should validate these findings across a broader range of industries to enhance their relevance and utility.

Secondly, the geographical scope of the study was confined to Malaysia. As such, the results reflect the cultural, organisational, and professional norms specific to the Malaysian context. These norms, such as attitudes toward hierarchy, communication style, conflict resolution, and leadership, may differ significantly in other countries. For instance, the effectiveness of communication or people management skills strategies may vary in cultures that emphasise individualism versus collectivism, or in regions with differing expectations for emotional expressiveness or power distance in workplace relationships. Therefore, generalising the findings to other geographical or cultural settings should be done with caution.

To address this, future research is encouraged to conduct cross-country or cross-regional comparative studies to determine whether the observed relationships hold across different socio-cultural and economic contexts. Such studies could help identify contextual moderators that influence how soft skills affect project outcomes and job satisfaction, thus enhancing the external validity of the current findings. Additionally, this study primarily focused on two soft skill categories, namely communication and people management skills. Future studies could explore the influence of other soft skills such as conflict resolution, adaptability, leadership style, or cultural intelligence. Incorporating these variables could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the soft skills landscape in project management.

Lastly, although the sample size was adequate, future research could also benefit from using longitudinal designs or multi-method approaches (e.g., qualitative interviews, 360-degree evaluations, or team-level assessments) to gain deeper insights into causal relationships and dynamic changes in soft skill applications over time. By addressing these limitations and extending the scope of inquiry, future research can build on the current study to better inform theory, practice, and policy in project management across diverse industries and cultural environments.

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