

# Project Leadership

*from Theory to Practice*

action  
ethics

accountability  
transformational  
results

strategy

trust

vision

objectives

leadership

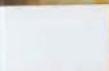
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# DEDICATION

- j.k.p. - To Joey, a wonderful surprise and ongoing joy.
- p.t. - To Myke and Dave-my most important projects.
- j.t. - To Flower, the Mouse, and the Bee, and to the crew of the USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70), who taught me hard lessons in leadership.
- t.s.p. - To the best of the good old boys: Tomlsoy; Jethro Bodine, Big P, Big Daddy; Warren, and, of course, Jake the Snake.
- m.g. - To the M.B.A students whose demand-pull approach demanded developing these ideas, the team of colleagues who knew we could, the spouse who read countless redrafts, and the Labrador retriever who put on many miles while I stretched my brain.



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# PREFACE

The importance of leadership in project management has long been acknowledged as one of the key ingredients for project success. Indeed, in a more general sense, the last few years have seen a tremendous resurgence of interest in this vital topic as books and articles explore in ever-increasing detail the various aspects and effects of leadership in organizations. These studies all point to the vital role that leadership plays in enhancing innovation, creativity, new product development, and competitiveness in an international marketplace.

Leadership is vital within the project management realm. Project managers play a key *lynchpin* role in their organizations, serving as the link between various stakeholder groups and working to create a strong and cohesive team atmosphere, all while maintaining budget and schedule constraints. Indeed, because of the essential centrality of project managers, many authors note that leadership skills are one of the most important qualities that managers can possess.

While there are currently a number of books on leadership in the popular and academic literatures, few such books attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of the wide variety of leadership behaviors. That is, many such books focus on one or two critical components of leaders exclusively—for example, personality characteristics or team-building skills. Far rarer are the books that attempt to develop a more complete model of the role of the project leader in modern corporations, addressing such diverse but equally important roles as those of visionary, strategic manager, ethical leader, and so forth.

This book represents our attempt to develop a comprehensive, project management-oriented approach to project leadership. *Project Leadership: From Theory to Practice* is designed to fill an important and heretofore previously unexploited niche in the manager's bookshelf through presenting a practically written discussion of the important but diverse roles that leaders play and the impact that they have on successful project implementation. As the chapter titles indicate, we have developed a pragmatic guide to project leadership, making clear the direct links between general leadership theory and direct project management practice.

The idea for this book came about as the result of a team-taught course for the M.B.A. program at Penn State-Erie. Students had been increasingly interested in a course in applied leadership, and the management faculty members decided to pool their talents and create a course that was comprehensive (offering breadth), while focusing on

gaining and applying leadership skills (intended to provide depth). Writing this book was a challenge in itself, as it required the collective efforts of five individuals to work in collaboration, to support and correct each other, and serve as both inspirational sources and critics of each other's efforts. It was truly a case of our having to live what we teach every day; through putting into practice the steps necessary to create effective teams.

## **APPROACH**

Our approach is a combination of theory and practice. In the first chapters of the book, we lay a groundwork foundation, using some important guiding principles from the research on leadership and leader behavior, to put the idea of project leadership within its proper context. It was necessary to first demonstrate some of the relevant models of leadership before the reader can better understand the key role that leader behavior plays in successful project management. Once readers are led through the diverse duties and aspects of leadership behavior, they can better understand the comprehensive, ubiquitous nature of project leadership, learning to develop their leadership abilities in a variety of different but equally important dimensions. Our intention is to help project managers do a better job of running their projects through the valuable lessons that can be learned from understanding and applying the current state-of-the-art in research and practice on project leadership.

This book covers a variety of topics related to the study of project leadership. The first chapter will establish a framework of leadership in which we will demonstrate that *leading* is a multifaceted process, involving aspects of vision skills, ethical and political knowledge, strategic management and goal setting, and project team building. Following development of our full model, follow-on sections will explore each of these key areas in more detail, analyzing personality and trait theories of leadership, contingency models, and so on. Finally; we offer a concluding chapter, which offers some final, practical advice to project managers on how to make the most effective use of this information in developing or honing their own leadership styles.

## IN SUMMARY

As we noted above, it is impossible to engage in a task of this nature without developing a keener sense of the importance of teamwork and leadership in any collective endeavor. Collaborations are always difficult because they comprise both the best and most difficult aspects of the writing process—gaining the advantage of multiple viewpoints while having to create a work in a purely consensual manner. That this book succeeded is due primarily to our desire to share the results of our experience in a pragmatic fashion. It is also the result, in no small part, of the success we have had in presenting similar material in a team-taught environment that has enabled us to appreciate more fully each other's work as teachers and scholars. We hope that project managers who read this work are left with a better understanding of the various perspectives of transformational project leadership and realize two other important points. First, that leadership training is a journey all can take (leadership behavior can be learned), and, second, we never completely arrive at our destination (there is always more to know). And so, the journey begins.

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November 1997

# What Is Leadership?

---

*SUSAN WAS NERVOUSLY watching the clock in her office as the hour slowly approached nine o'clock. Her first project staff meeting was about to begin. Three days ago, Susan had been named project manager for the newly initiated upgrade of one of her company's top-selling computer-networking software products. Susan has been with AtComm for three years and was recently promoted to a job as project manager in the New Products Division. Although she has had experience as an engineer on a number of projects since she joined AtComm, this will be her first opportunity to run a project on her own.*

*Susan slowly scanned the names on the list that she held: Phil Conrad from Sales and Marketing, Jonas Sutherland and Lois Robinson from Software Development, Ellen Holmes from Hardware Engineering, and Bill Winston from Systems Development. These five people were to comprise her core team, and she didn't know a thing about any of them.*

*"typical," she thought, "my career is on the line here, and I have to depend on a group of total strangers."*

*Susan had had a meeting with her boss last week in which he told her that her project, initially budgeted at \$1.5 million and with a six-month time frame, was viewed as one of the company's high-profile projects for the coming year. He also impressed on her the importance of hitting her target window. The product had to be launched on time, or AtComm would lose its competitive edge vis-a-vis its rivals. Everything she heard led Susan to believe that her performance on this project would go far toward moving her up the corporate ladder or propelling her out the front door.*

*Now, as she waited for the staff meeting to get under way, Susan reviewed everything she knew about her new job. The key, she was convinced, would be her ability to develop her core team into an integrated unit. She knew enough about project management to know that it required a team's commitment to be done well.*

*How would she gain that commitment? What could she do to get the project moving on the right foot? How could she lead when she knew so little about leadership?*

*The abrupt knock on her office door brought an end to these ruminations and announced the beginning of her project staff meeting. ❁*

---

## I WANT TO BE A COWBOY: THE LEADERSHIP MYTH

We all want to be cowboys, and why not? Cowboys have always held a special place in our hearts. When we are kids, we point our fingers, yell *bang*, and then argue for hours whether we are dead or just wounded. When we grow up, who has not daydreamed of hogtying her overbearing boss and riding off into the sunset to the cheers of coworkers? Cowboys are resourceful, daring, and are as quick with their wits as they are with their fists. They are always right. They always win.

In many ways, we see cowboys as the embodiment of leadership. Business leaders, like cowboys, are often presented as mythical figures doing amazing things. Standing alone and apart from ordinary folks, they are dreamers perched upon their mustangs, making their plans as they gaze off into a lonesome moon. Yet, when the time comes for action, they dig their spurs into their horses' sides, gallop down to the town people, and tell them to circle the wagons. There they are, at the front of the fight, with their six-guns blazing, dropping the vermin dead in their tracks. And when the battle is over, off they go riding into the sunset to receive their rewards—the school marm for the cowboy, stock options for executives.

Of course, the problem is that life is not a John Wayne horse opera. We know this. For most of the hundreds of things that we do every day at work, we have a realistic view of what is expected and what is required. Most managers do not go into cloud-cuckoo-land when contemplating quality, deadlines, performance appraisals, strategic planning, and so on. But, when it comes to leadership, most of us jump back on our horses and head right back to the range (where the deer and the antelope play).

Problems arise when the myth of the leader becomes the end-all and the be-all of our learning processes. If we buy into a myth that is so overpowering, how can we ever hope to become one with our dreams? The result is that too many of us look at these ideals as something unobtainable. You have to be born a leader. You can never *become* one.

In no other area of management education is the concept of myth as prevailing as in leadership. We have all seen the books down at the local bookstore: *The Twenty-Seven Habits of Semi-Effective People*, *The Leadership Secrets of a Fascist Dictator*, *The One Nanosecond Manager*, and so on. Each claims to sell the secret of life, to impart unto you the magic word to make you a leader. Part of the problem arises in the use of terminology. *Vision*, for example, may lead one more often to think of Moses than of everyday business activity. But perhaps the larger problem crops up when people start talking about myths; they often have no idea what they are talking about. Myths are ways of simplifying our universe. Sometimes we simplify so much that myth and reality are no longer on speaking terms.

For example, cowboys do have a lot to teach us about leadership but not the cowboys that we are used to. What do cowboys do? Lead cows. Have you ever seen anything that indicates that John Wayne knows how to lead cows? What would he do? Go to the front of the herd and yell, "Charge"? Or perhaps just punch the lead cow in the face? What about Roy Rogers? Would he yodel until the cows moved or threaten to stuff them like he did to old Trigger? Obviously; Roy and the Duke are great Hollywood cowboys. They ride horses, shoot guns, and always get the girl. But have you ever seen them with a cow? Would you want them around a cow? Your cow?

Go behind the myth, and true leadership characteristics emerge. A herd of cows is a lot like an organization: massive and, at times, rather aimless. It takes dedicated leadership using a score of methods to energize this bovine bulk. A good cowboy knows how to select a lead cow, direct the herd into natural flows, and rely upon his well-trained subordinate, his horse, to help lead the herd. Moving a herd into Dodge City required considerable skill. It is the real cowboy; not a stylized caricature, that teaches us something about leadership.

Likewise, when examining leadership from the business perspective, one should view many of the myths about this subject with a grain of salt (a ten- or fifteen-pound grain should suffice!). Nobody can teach you leadership with a four-by-four diagram. Rather, it is a time-consuming and engaging task, requiring a great deal of thought and resources.

The book you are holding is not a cookbook. You will find no recipes for *leadership stew* here. Rather, this book is intended as a guide to leadership thought and practice. It is premised upon the following principles.

- Good theory underlies good leadership. Theory has received a bad rap. After all, we want doers, not thinkers, right? But, at its heart, leadership is concerned with transforming ideas and concepts into action. Your knowledge of basic principles is essential to you taking the first step to being an effective leader. In many ways it is like playing baseball. The difference between a good and a great hitter is the ability to *think through* the ball, to anticipate the ball's path and trajectory. Good, consistent hitting is more a matter of understanding the underlying principles than possessing a strong arm.
- Focus on leadership, not leaders. A lot of people make claims to being leaders. Every day the bookstores are filled with badly written, much ballyhooed books by CEOs proclaiming their leadership brilliance. Yet, what they attribute to their leadership, many others would more accurately link to sound managerial skills, first-mover advantage, industry structure, and just good, old-fashioned luck. Just because a person succeeds does not mean that what he did can be ascribed to leadership skills. And this is the reason why focusing on leaders can often lead to the wrong conclusions. Also, it can be difficult translating one

person's life experiences to assist another. Alexander the Great was a great leader, yet to try and understand his life and then transfer wholesale the principles upon which he built his kingdom would be dangerous.

- Leadership can be exercised daily. Leaders can only come into their own during extraordinary times, à la Lee Iacocca, right? Wrong. Leadership is a day-in and day-out activity. To insist that leadership is exceptional or above the norm condemns us to situations in which we can never develop leadership skills. Then, when the extraordinary does happen, we are set up to fail because we have had no opportunities to learn, to test our wings.
- Leadership can be developed. At the heart of leadership is a set of skills that can be honed and cultivated through insightful self-discovery. Furthermore, managers can make attitudinal adjustments through the visioning process (described in Chapters 4 and 5). With patience, leadership can be developed as much as any other managerial activity.

The quest for better leadership practices in managing projects is one that remains a compelling motivation in one company after another around the globe. More and more organizations are using project management as a key tool for implementing a variety of strategic organizational moves, including everything from new product development to new systems installations. Indeed, as many readers are aware, project management has literally taken off in the past decade. Companies are beginning to understand how effective project management allows them to operate both more efficiently and capably in their competitive environments. At the same time, however, these organizations are coming to realize that while it is an effective technique, project management requires a tremendous commitment from the organization if it is to be done appropriately.

One of the keys to successful project management has always been strong, incisive leadership. Project management is a *leader-intensive* undertaking, meaning that, for it to be successful, project management requires the efforts of individuals willing to engage in the numerous and diverse activities needed to promote project success. Successful projects, as we all know, simply do not *happen*. They are the result of the collective energies of a number of key project team members and stakeholders. None of these members is more important to project success than the project manager, operating as the project's leader, in every sense of the word.

If leadership is so important for project success, why is so little written about it within the project management arena? Part of the answer to that question comes from the fact that we are still learning about the various aspects of leadership. The field itself is continually

evolving as we come more and more to understand the wide manner of ways in which leadership can affect project success. A second reason, closely tied to the first, has to do with the difficulty of coming to grips with the concept of leadership. It seems that when we refer to someone as a *leader*, there is a natural potential to ascribe a wide variety of different meanings to the term. In other words, if we cannot agree on what a leader is, how are we to promote effective leadership in our project management organizations?

## THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

Few words evoke as much imagery or provoke as many varied interpretations as *leadership* does. While we often assign leadership abilities to captains of industry, heads of political or military organizations, and other equally highly visible individuals, in fact leaders emerge in all facets of our daily lives. People serving on school boards or with charity organizations possess the same qualities of leadership as their more well-publicized counterparts. As a topic of research and publishing, leadership is equally popular. It has been estimated that over thirty thousand articles and books have been written on leadership and leader behavior in this century alone (DuBrin 1995). A word search over the Internet, using *leadership*, generated over 309,000 responses. Clearly; leadership has become a well-used part of our everyday vocabularies.

With all that has been written and discussed about leadership, do we have any sense of an underlying definition of the term? While a number of working definitions of leadership exist, some that illustrate both the nature of leadership and the duties of leaders include the following (Bass 1990):

- using our interpersonal influence on team members to attain organizational and personal goals
- having the ability to generate a compelling collective vision and communicate it in a way that motivates others
- acting in a way that causes others to respond in a shared direction.

What are the common themes running through these definitions? Clearly; they suggest that leaders possess a vision of the future, a sense of where they see themselves, their team, and the organization. Having a vision, however, is useless without the concomitant ability to communicate it in an effective manner to others. We can either lead by example or through establishing a message so compelling that it motivates compliance. Further, leaders understand the art of influence—the ability to initiate actions in others, regardless of respective ranks within the company. The goal of leaders, it has been said, is to produce change.

Through the vision of future possibilities and their efforts toward creating collective action, they work to change the status quo, to move their organizations or their teams in new and challenging directions in pursuit of their goals.

Leaders are goal directed. As we will demonstrate in later chapters, leadership behavior does not consist simply of taking care of one's team. Certainly there is a strong need to consider the project team members' feelings and attitudes, working to keep job satisfaction and motivation high. At the same time, however, effective leaders also understand that they must remain mission driven. Their goal is the successful completion of a project. The steps they take, both for the welfare of the team and the pursuit of the project's goals, are all aimed at successful project implementation.

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL VERSUS TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

One method for understanding the unique characteristics of effective project leaders is to examine the difference between two distinct forms of leadership: transactional and transformational. The term, *transactional leaders*, typically refers to those individuals who view their jobs as a series of discrete transactions between themselves and their subordinates. They generally are good administrators in that they operate as problem solvers. Because they deal with issues as they come up (transactions), they may be excessively reactive rather than inclined to develop a vision for themselves, their departments, or their projects.

Transformational leaders, on the other hand, seek to make their mark on the organization or their projects through operating in a forward-thinking, often charismatic, manner. They work to make a difference as project managers, through transforming their project teams and, ultimately, their projects, in positive ways. We will argue throughout this book that a transformational leadership model is very appropriate for successful project managers. They must learn to view their work as a challenge of transformation-taking a chaotic and disorderly situation (the beginning of a new project) and, through their personal energy and ability to inspire team members, creating a vision of project success that motivates high commitment from the team.

When we consider some of the characteristics of transformational leaders, it is easy to see how they apply to successful project management. As readers will see, these themes resonate throughout this text. Briefly, transformational leaders have the following attributes (DuBrin 1995).

- Vision-Transformational project leaders are vision-driven individuals. Unlike transactional, reactive project managers, successful project leaders offer their teams and stakeholders an exciting view of where the project is headed, its goals, and potential. A vision, representing the ideal state of project success, gives the team a rallying point and a goal to strive for throughout the project's development.
- Good communication skills-It makes no sense to have a vision of the future if we are unable to communicate that vision to our teams. Successful project leaders understand that at the hub of all effective project activity lies the ability to communicate, inspire, instruct, and inform.
- Ability to inspire trust- A recent study by two noted experts on leadership found after interviewing thousands of managers that the number-one characteristics possessed by effective leaders were honesty and trustworthiness (Kouzes and Posner 1995). Transformational leaders' greatest legacy is often the fact that their team members will risk their own careers to support the project leader's vision.
- Ability to empower-Effective leaders make their team members feel capable. They build rather than constantly tear down. Transformational leaders understand that it is not just the project's success by which they are measured but their ability to develop team members to their fullest potential.
- Energy and action orientation-Transformational leaders are characterized by high levels of personal energy and enthusiasm. Indeed, they understand that it is impossible to inspire others if they themselves are lethargic or lukewarm in their reactions to their latest challenge.
- 11 Emotional expressiveness and warmth-Most transformational leaders are able to express their feelings openly They do not leave their team constantly guessing about their latest mood; they do not play their cards close to the chest. Team members are not constantly tiptoeing around them in fear of explosions. These leaders know that they are expected to play cheerleader.
- 11 Willingness to take personal risks-Transformational leaders share a common characteristic with successful entrepreneurs: they are not risk averse. In leading by personal example, they understand that if they expect their teams to use dynamic and potentially untried (risky) approaches to solve project-related problems, then they must exhibit similar attitudes.
- Use of unconventional strategies-A common term coming up in business these days is expressed as a willingness to *think outside the box*. What this phrase refers to is an attitude of refusing to be bound by conventional thinking and programmed decision-making. Thinking outside the box shows the project team that creativity and nontraditional thinking are encouraged and rewarded.

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## Figure 1. Elements Involved in Successful Project Operations

**Vision** (1) of the leader guides the direction of the project by imagining what the completed project will produce.

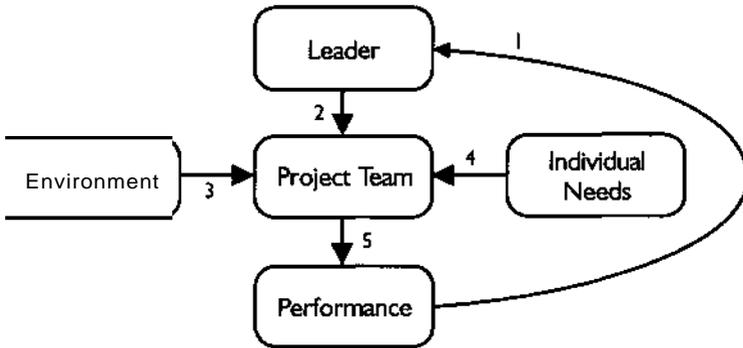
**Strategy** (2) reminds us to maintain an awareness of the project's fit into the larger context.

**Ethics** (2, 5) guide the actions of the leader and establish a positive project environment.

**Team Building** (2,4, 5) guides the evolution and the development of a high-performing project team.

**Classical Theories** (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) identify the general characteristics found to be important in effective leadership.

**Accountability** (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) guides the leader's use of reward power to create a productive project environment.



II Self-promoting personality-Transformational leaders are not shy; they do not hide their lights under bushels. Successful project managers understand the importance of playing the key political games, using influence and self-promotion to advance their projects. Transformational leaders have many characteristics; reticence, however, is not one of them.

■ Capable in crises-True leadership is difficult to assess when things run smoothly Projects, as we know, rarely do. In fact, it is precisely in how project managers handle the myriad problems of a typical project that we find the greatest measure of their leadership abilities. Transformational leaders rise to the challenge, seeing opportunity where others see only threat.

This book is organized around the unifying theme of transformational leadership. As Figure 1 demonstrates, we view project leaders' actions as essentially the result of a number of issues, including their personal leadership styles, visioning ability; and understanding of team and

personal accountability. Although the chapters will develop these points in considerable detail, they suggest that some of the most well-known leadership actions—including inspiring and building effective project teams, using influencing skills, and so forth—are directly related to our understanding of leader characteristics.

Transformational project leadership requires readers to understand at the outset that we are not offering a set of freestanding and independent leadership characteristics that can be adopted, or not, as the reader is inclined. Rather, leadership behavior is an integrated whole, based on possessing or developing both underlying personal characteristics and understanding their impact through applying specific leader behaviors. Attempting to develop one side of the model without the other is fruitless. It is no more possible to manifest leadership actions without understanding their underlying causes than we would be inclined to refine our leadership abilities to their highest potential without ever testing them by putting these theories into action.

Leadership behavior can be acquired. Despite the opinions of some that leadership is an innate personality characteristic that some have, and the majority do not, research and practical experience demonstrate quite clearly that this is not so. It is possible for all project managers to improve their leadership styles, first, through a clearer understanding of their preferred methods for running projects.

## THE UNIFYING NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership behavior exists at the heart of successful project development. Having made this point, it is necessary to look at precisely how leader behavior affects all aspects of project implementation. Figure 1 illustrates the various elements involved in successful project operations, arguing that the combination of both internal and external environments, leader behavior, and an understanding of individual team members' needs all can positively or negatively influence project team development. This team development will have a direct effect on the resultant project performance.

As a unifying theme, Figure 1 also demonstrates the linkages between the various chapters developed in this book. In order to understand the nature of the leadership challenge, it is important to devote some time to explaining the various models of leadership—which ones apply to the project management process, how they relate to each other, their practical implications, and so forth. Chapter 2 will take the reader through a short *survey* of important leadership ideas. We suggest that even though *theory* has gotten something of a bad reputation, implying somehow that it must

therefore be divorced from reality; a solid grounding in basic leadership theories will go far toward making the ideas presented in this book clear and immediately applicable.

The important underlying theme of these theories is presented in our chapter on accountability. All leadership is a balancing act; it consists of an implicit understanding that we have to find the appropriate balance between an all-out desire for task accomplishment and an equally strong need to nurture and develop our team. This chapter will demonstrate the problems with an overemphasis on either philosophy. Too-high task concern may turn us into autocratic, insensitive monsters. On the other hand, an excessive focus on our team members and their feelings can lead to projects wallowing in uncompleted inertia, as we never seem to have the ability to drive the task to completion. Creating accountability is our desire as project leaders to find a middle ground working with and developing team members, but only within a strict set of project guidelines.

At the heart of leader behavior is the ability to develop the unique vision for the project that guides its direction. Project vision means an a priori understanding (and ability to communicate) what the completed project will resemble, the problems it will solve, and the benefits it will provide. An anonymous wit once noted that, "any road will get you there if you don't know where you are going." Vision gives the leader the ability to project a positive and defined message to the project team and relevant stakeholders. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the importance of and practical steps involved in developing a clear project vision and communicating it effectively to team members.

Because any *leader* only operates within the context of his team, it is clear that team-building abilities are key to effective project leadership. Team building acknowledges some important truths about successful project implementation: 1) It can only come about as the result of a motivated, integrated project team, and 2) *Teams* do not happen by accident. Successful projects occur as the result of successful teamwork. Competent and effective interactions among team members sound much easier in theory than they are in real life. The truth, as many readers will attest, is that taking a diverse group of individuals, usually with different functional backgrounds, experiences, and training, and molding them into a cohesive unit is one of project management's greatest challenges. It does not happen naturally or by chance. This metamorphosis occurs through careful preparation, understanding of human and team-related needs, and a knowledge of our own leadership style.

Embedded in effective leadership is the ethical side of our decision processes. Research has suggested that one of the traits most people look for in leaders is a sense of honesty or integrity (Kouzes and Posner 1995). This basic honesty implies that we are using our leadership for positive means, through creating an atmosphere for project development

that encourages the best from each team member. In this sense, ethics is not simply an add-on feature to leadership—"Sure we want good leaders. Oh, and if they can be honest too, that would be nice."—it is a key component of the leadership function.

The chapter on strategy and leadership brings into focus the sense that all projects are effective to the degree that we have made them fit into the larger environmental context. History abounds with examples of *successful* projects that did not fit the organizational context and, hence, were abandoned as expensive white elephants. Oregon's Department of Transportation recently spent millions to develop a computerized automobile-registration system that was only belatedly found to be so flawed, both in its technical snags and conceptual misunderstandings, that it was simply abandoned as a very expensive write-off. In the chapter, we offer some guidelines for project managers to make sure that while their projects are on the developmental track, their underlying strategies are still appropriate; in other words, the engine driving the project is still moving in the correct direction.

Writing a book on project leadership is an ambitious undertaking. Yet, based on our years of research, personal project management experiences, consulting, and interview data, it is clear that too much is at stake on both personal and organizational levels with our projects to go into them without a clear view of what effective leadership can do for a project's chances for success. Every reader can easily recall examples within their own organizations of projects that both succeeded and bombed due, in large part, to the actions or errors of the project leader.

At the heart of many people's difficulties with exercising leadership is our misunderstanding of what leadership means. Once we start to *demythologize* leadership, to make the term understandable and accessible to all, we take the first step toward opening up great opportunities for a number of novice project managers, scared to death at the thought of their first step into the live-fire range of project management. This book is another sort of *first step*. It represents a first step at stripping away the veil of mystique surrounding leadership, making it easier for project managers to both understand and practice. And that is the most important first step of all.



# Classical Theories of Leadership

A GOOD MAGICIAN is a good theorist. Compare the elegant conjuring of David Copperfield to the fumbblings of your neighbor's ten-year-old son showing you his newly learned tricks from his Great Zookini Junior Magic Kit. It is more than just technical proficiency and subtle handwork that propels you into the sorcerer's magical realm of transmuting doves and endless pitchers of milk. Rather, it is the magician's understanding and application of the basic principles of manipulating his audience that allow you to suspend your belief so that he then can levitate you right out of your seat.

Leadership, like magic, is based upon a similar understanding. Your comprehension of basic leadership theory is essential for your growth and potential as a leader. The trick, so to speak, is that your understanding of theory should be so deeply ingrained in your psyche that its application appears casual. A mark of great magicians is that their efforts appear to be effortless! If you see some cut-rate Houdini struggling to make the cards jump from his hands, then you refuse to admit him to that special place in your mind that allows you to suspend your belief. It is that suspension of belief that is the real trick of a great magician.

As with the Zookini Junior Magic Kit, this chapter will not make you a great leader. Yet, it is only through an understanding of these theories and their possible applications that true leadership can result. Leadership, like magic, is premised on some rather basic principles. Both the Great Blackstone and your neighbor's kid essentially employ the same bag of tricks. But the results can be markedly different. When Blackstone saws a woman in half, we rise to our feet in cheers. When your neighbor's kid attempts the same trick, we rise to our feet to diaI9-1-L.

For project managers, the need to understand these theories and their possible applications is vital. The problem, as in much of project management, is that you have only a limited amount of time to exert leadership. As a result, many managers are like your Uncle Ned at the

all-you-can-eat salad bar at the Sizzler, loading your plate with a little bit of everything, without a true appreciation for any of it.

The focus of this book is on the transformational model of leadership. But other theories can obviously give us invaluable perspective. In order to help us understand these theories, we have divided them into four basic groups that focus on the leader aspects or the situational aspects of leadership. (A model to understand models-now we are cooking with gas!) We can look at leader aspects through either traits or behaviors. We can examine situations from the perspective of whether they are universal or contingent upon specific situations and personalities. Our goal is to create perspective, to give the reader a framework for understanding these theories within a larger context. It is important to remember that they are not necessarily competing theories. We can get maximum benefit from understanding how each approach complements the others. Together, they offer a powerful theoretical look at leadership-theoretical, yes, but also practical. After all, no competent magician ever sealed himself in a milk container about to be submerged in water until he had his theory down pat!

## **CONTINGENT LEADERSHIP THEORIES**

The premise of contingency theories is that optimal leadership is achieved only by synthesizing the requirements of the situation with the leader: either by matching the leader to the situation, or by matching leader behavior to the situation. In either case, these theories offer the identification and assessment of situation factors, which are necessary toward explaining effective leadership. We will discuss contingent leader-behavior theories and a contingent leader-trait theory.

## **CONTINGENT BEHAVIOR THEORIES**

The common premise of these theories is that leadership improves as the *fit* between leader behavior and the needs of the situation are optimized. These approaches assume that leader behavior can be adapted to the situation, and that, therefore, these theories have a strong potential for developing and improving leadership. Three of these theories are discussed-Situational Leadership, Path Goal Theory, and the Vroom-Jago Model-and the discussion is concluded with the Bonoma-Slevin-Pinto leadership model, which synthesizes and simplifies the contributions of these approaches to help the project manager choose a leadership style that *fits* the situation.

**Figure 2. Leader and Situation Aspects of Leadership**

Leader Aspects	Situational Aspects	
	<i>Contingent</i>	<i>Universal</i>
<i>Behavior</i>	Situational Leadership Path-Goal Leadership Vroom-Jago Model	Leadership Grid®
<i>Traits</i>	Least Preferred Co-Worker (LPC)	Charismatic Leadership Transformational Leadership

Adapted from Jago, 1982.

### Situational Leadership®

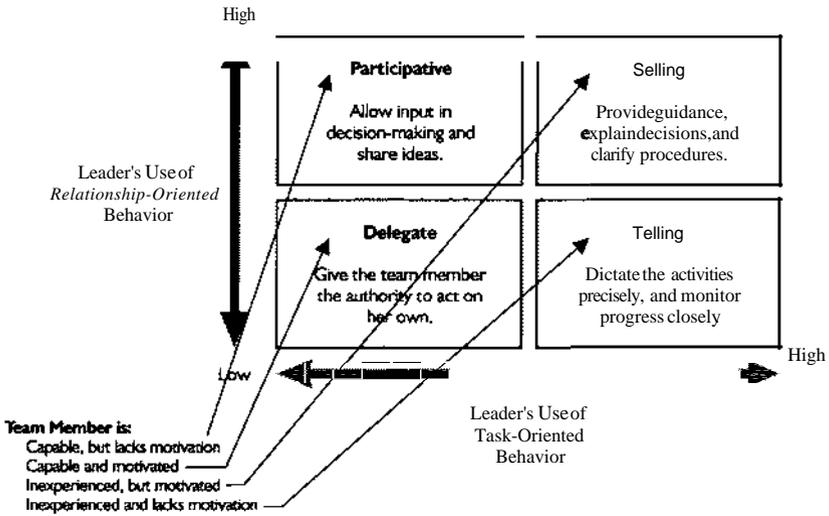
In this theory, the two important dimensions of leader behavior are *relationship behavior* and *task behavior*. The important characteristic of the situation is follower (i.e., project team member) *maturity*:

- relationship behavior-leader actions that demonstrate a concern for people; facilitating participation in decision-making, coaching, sharing ideas, explaining decisions, and so on
- II task behavior-leader actions that emphasize a concern for the task; clarifying procedures, duties, responsibilities, and so on
- follower maturity-the readiness of the follower is determined by assessing ability to perform the task and motivation to perform the task. The motivation of the follower is predominately associated with the general willingness to perform or confidence in the ability to perform.

### LEADERSHIP STYLES FOR AN OPTIMAL FIT

The optimal leadership style is argued to be driven by both the characteristics of the job and psychological readiness, or maturity; of the individual (see Figure 3). Action by the leader with respect to task behavior is argued to vary according to the level of follower maturity with respect to the job: when a team member lacks experience (maturity is low), leader involvement is necessary, and task-oriented behavior should be a priority; As the follower gains experience and confidence with respect to the task, the need for intervention by the leader falls to the point when, ultimately, the follower is acting autonomously Correspondingly; leader relationship-oriented behavior is argued to vary according to the level of

**Figure 3. Situational Leadership Model**



Adapted from Hersey and Blanchard. 1988.

the follower's confidence and ability (psychological maturity). High levels of relationship-oriented behavior by the project leader are appropriate only for medium levels of team member psychological maturity

Categorized as leadership styles, the four general levels of maturity and their corresponding leader behaviors are described as telling, selling, participating, and delegating.

- **Telling**-Team members, who lack required abilities and confidence or motivation to perform, require intervention by the project leader. The team member requires clear instruction as to how to effectively perform but is considered unlikely to accept coaching. Thus, the optimal project leadership style involves only high levels of task-oriented behavior.
- **Selling**-Team members, who lack required abilities, yet are motivated to perform, require instruction as to how to effectively perform and will likely accept coaching. Thus, the optimal leadership style includes high levels of task- and relationship-oriented behavior.
- **Participating**-Team members with strong ability; who lack the motivation to perform, do not require instruction on the task but require intervention by the project leader to increase their confidence or will-

ingness to perform. Thus, the optimal leadership style includes high levels of relationship-oriented behavior **only**.

- Delegating-Team members with strong ability and strong motivation to perform do not require extensive intervention by the leader; The team member may find such intervention an insult, as it implies that she is not capable or motivated when, in fact, she is. Thus, the optimal project leadership style is to avoid interfering with the team member by delegating the task.

The major contribution of this approach is in identifying an important situation variable, *follower maturity*, and presenting an argument as to why an imbalance in leader behavior in favor of either concern for the task or concern for people is functional. Note that this in general modifies the leadership grid argument for an unbalanced emphasis approach.

## Path-Goal Theory

The premise is that leadership is the ability to clarify the follower's path to his goal. The premise is based on the expectancy theory of work motivation' which holds that motivation of an individual team member is determined by his assessment of three things: 1) the likelihood that he can successfully complete the given task; 2) the likelihood that successful completion of the task will be rewarded; and 3) the meaningfulness of the reward to the team member. Thus, when the individual perceives that the task can be completed and will be rewarded, and the reward is meaningful, the individual will be motivated to perform. Consequently, the leader can play an important role in facilitating the team's attainment of organization goals by:

- taking actions to increase the team members' perceptions that they can complete their tasks
- ensuring that team members are consistently rewarded
- modifying the type of rewards to fit the needs of the individual members.

Based on this argument, four generic styles of leadership are identified to be appropriate to most situations: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented.

**Directive.** This comprises leader actions that emphasize clarifying the means of task accomplishment: structuring activities, coordinating, planning, organizing, controlling, and so on. This is an autocratic leader approach, which is most appropriate when the team members lack experience. The idea is to build the team members' confidence that their efforts will result in successful completion of the task. Clearly; for project managers, this approach can only work when project leaders possess sufficient technical expertise so that they can involve themselves in the day-to-day

development activities of the project. When the project leader is a generalist, or unfamiliar with the specific technical aspects of the development process, directive leadership is inappropriate.

**Supportive.** In this style, leader actions are predominantly concerned with maximizing the welfare of the team members. This style is most appropriate when the task is stressful, boring, tedious, and generally dissatisfying, or when team members have a high fear of failure. The purpose is to modify the task structure and the type of rewards to best meet the individual needs of the team members. This requires actions that open communication to gain an awareness and understanding of the team members' values.

**Participative.** This style involves leader actions that provide team members with the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process. This democratic leadership style is most appropriate when tasks are nonroutine, the team members have a high level of technical knowledge, and the team members are well motivated. The idea is to increase the team members' commitment and expectations that their efforts will lead to successful task accomplishment through participation in decisions on task structure and goals.

**Achievement Oriented.** This type of leadership comprises leader actions that focus on challenging the team: setting high standards, delegating responsibility for the work, and so on. This style is most appropriate when the task is unstructured, and the competence of the team members is high. The idea is to increase the meaningfulness of the team members' accomplishments by emphasizing the intrinsic rewards of success in a challenging environment. Many examples exist of project development in high-tech organizations in which team members are motivated by the technical challenges rather than by external directives. Wise project managers in these environments routinely rely on achievement-oriented actions to encourage their team members to meet these challenges with as little interference from the project manager as possible.

## Vroom-Jago Model

The premise of this leadership model is that project leaders can improve team performance through increased goal acceptance, commitment, and task motivation when followers participate in the decision process. In other words, the greater the team members' participation in goal development, the greater their buy-in to the development process. The problem of how much involvement and under what circumstances participation should occur is the focus of the model. The solution to determining optimal participation is achieved by first delineating the leader's alternative methods for structuring the follower's participation in the decision. Second, the

important situation variables are defined, and third, a decision tree is provided that shows the leader how to select among the alternative decision-participation methods based on the leader's assessment of each of the situational variables.

The types of decision methods in Figure 4 reflect not only a range of participation by the subordinates but also a range of time necessary for the decision methods. We assume that the levels of participation determine the amount of time required for making the decision; higher participation requires more time. Thus, decisions that are constrained by time should be more autocratic. Alternatively; it is assumed that participation in the decision-making process is an important element in the development of the subordinate, as well as in creating a basis for building trust, commitment, and so on. Thus, decision-making should be more participative or democratic when the decision is not time critical. The incorporation of these situational attributes is the primary improvements of the Vroom-Jago decision model over the original Vroom-Yetton model.

The major limitation of the Vroom-Jago model is the difficulty for the novice in using the model pragmatically. This model is the most complex of the classical theories presented, and this can make it impractical for general use unless the leader devotes the serious study time necessary to internalize the rules in a way that allows the leader to assess the situation and structure optimal participation quickly from memory.

## Choosing Your Leadership Style

Given that we, the project managers, are willing and able to consciously choose a leadership style to fit the situation, we would benefit from a model that simplifies the manner in which we assess the situations we find ourselves in. The model presented in Figure 5 illustrates two dimensions of project management situations found to be critical in choosing our leadership style: information input, and decision authority.

■ **Information input:** When we are making a decision, large amounts of information from the team may be required in order to make a properly informed choice. When this situation arises, we seek high levels of input from the team, and we can follow one of two leadership styles: consensus, where we allow the team to make the decision; or consultative autocrat, where we absorb the input but make the ultimate decision ourselves. Conversely, there are decisions that require little, if any, input from the team to make a properly informed choice. In this situation, we can choose from two alternative leadership styles: autocrat, where we make the decision alone; or shareholder, where we allow the team to make the decision. In each of these situations, the proper level of decision authority is the critical means of deciding which leadership style is best.

Theory In Practice biography Swedish progressive metal band THEORY IN PRACTICE was brought to existence in July 1995. Founded by Henrik Ohlsson (Drums), Peter Lake (Guitar), and Matias Engstrand (bass/keyboards), Johan Ekman(vocals/guitars) was soon added to the original trio. During May 96, the band decided to record a demo after spending half a year with rehearsals and live performances.