The Role of Leadership in IT Project Management Success

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ABSTRACT

Project management improvements have tremendous implications for economic performance.firms are facing challenges to improve success rate of their IT projects, this paper focusing on leadership as one of the most important factors for project success, by presented leadership as the art of project management , and project mismanegement, factors for success and failure, then the important differences between leadership and management, finally present proposed model for project success.
INTRODUCTION

The tendency to overlook "art" of project management is one reason why so many projects fail, as well as, the science project managers can increase the success rate of their projects, and well be better able to complete projects (on time, cost, scope, and quality) successfully. This can be achieved by the awareness of the project management process groups, which can lead to project integration management between the nine knowledge areas of projects to improve project success rate. This can be done by focusing on leadership skills.

In this paper, the researchers try to illustrate the role of leadership in project management success, through introducing the leadership as the art of project management in integrating and managing the nine knowledge areas, then represent the project mismanagement, reasons for project success and failure, explain the evolving requirements of IT leadership skills, and illustrate the main differences between management and leadership, and finally proposed a model for project management success.

Leadership: the art of project management

Perhaps because project management is closely associated with information technology (IT), many researchers had associated the term project management with technical skills. Corporations typically ensure that their employees have the technical skills, they need to work on, whatever tasks they are assigned, but, as Jin Johnson, chairman of the Standish group international, Inc. has said: when projects fail, it’s rarely technical projects, like businesses, often fail because they are not properly managed (1).

So, the significant driver of project management success is the effective and intelligent leadership, communicated through an inspiring vision of what the project is meant to achieve and how it can make a significant positive impact. According to this fact, the main role of the leadership is establishing the attitude by developing a vision of the future, aligning people and providing logic for how the vision can be achieved, and directing the role of the executive managers of the project management to activate successfully (beginning with initiating process, planning process, monitoring and controlling process, closing process) through enabling the integration of the nine knowledge areas, as shown in figure (1).

Many organizations show little interest toward project management. According to the project management network, only 17.6% of organizations used project management processes through their organizations in 2002, compared with 22.5% in 2001 and 9.3% in 2000. The employees appointed to manage project may be the persons who suggested it, volunteers, an individual perceived as having the time to manage the project or the person with the most in-depth technical knowledge needed for project (2).

Managing a project may require technical knowledge, but, as well as managing a business, it also requires business knowledge. The project manager must be well organized and self-confident, and must have the right attitude. Technical knowledge is important, but so are business acumen, an understanding of the corporate culture and an ability to lead people to do what is expected of them. In other words the leadership skills is the art of understanding and executing the science of project management, so knowledge is important, but so is the ability to execute it.
No one would claim that every project that fails is the result of poor management, a poorly funded or ill-conceived project, will fail regardless of the skills of the project manager or project team. Projects that lack by-in from top management are doomed, as are projects that lack ties with company objectives or that have no clear return on investment.

Sometimes a shift in business priorities requires that certain projects be abandoned. But project mismanagement plays significant role in many projects failures. The high failure rate for projects has been well documented, although signs of improvement are encouraging. In 1995, the Standish group reported that 31% of all information technology (IT) projects were canceled before completion, that only 16% of projects were completed successfully, and that 88% of all projects were over budget, over schedule or both. Standish also reported an average cost overrun of 189% and an average time overrun of 222% of original estimates.

In its most recent report, in 2001, Standish found that time overruns have dropped to an average 36%, cost overruns have dropped to an average of 45%, and the percentage of IT projects that are completed successfully has changed to 28%.

**Reasons for project failure**

A review of 1,000 projects by the UK office of government commerce (OGC) found that technology was one of the likely reasons for a project to fail. Program fails for management reasons, not technical reasons. The OGC found the main reasons for failure to be (3):
- lack of leadership
- lack of knowledge at the top of the organization about what the technologists are trying to explain and lack of knowledge among technology its about what business users want.
- Poor risk management- not in terms of whether program code is accurate but rather in terms of understanding of complexity of business process and human change.
- Inability to break down programs into bit-size chunks. Programs or projects talking 12-18 months are too long, because things change. There is also problem that people might not tell the project that things have changed.

**Success factors**

so what is needed to make change programs successful?
- In complex programs the management must come from the very top, because such programs threaten the entire organization. So the following involved points must have the attention of the chief executive:
  1. Clear leadership from the top is especially important if some of the stakeholders must be kept engaged throughout, especially the customers or business users.
2. The need for hybrid managers who can build communication bridges between technologists and top management was articulated many years ago, and is still best advice. Hybrid managers are people who can cope with the business, aren’t afraid of the technology to the extent that they have been there, don that and have the personality to talk to a wide range of people be credible to talk to a wide range of people be credible to users and technologists, and get their cooperation. Finally, clarity of what it to be achieved is the output. Such vision clarifies what programs are not going to do, which is also an important issue. In addition, vision leads the team to start splitting the work into chunks, because stages towards the vision are identified.

The evolve of the requirements for leadership of IT projects

As the role of the chief information officer (CIO) has evolved, to involve the strategic nature of the (CIO) position, and align business and IT strategy as well as connect the IT strategy and business strategy. The requirements for the skills, education, and experience of the CIO also have evolved. A brief comparison of the CIO of 1985 as compared to today is shown below (4) table (1)

Table (1): comparison of the CIO in 1985 and today

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1985</th>
<th>today</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*hierarchic al kingpin</td>
<td>*visionary leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*dictator</td>
<td>*relationship manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*technology guru</td>
<td>*marketer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*mainframe bigot</td>
<td>*open systems-oriented</td>
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Luftman and Brier (4), in their work at the IBM advanced business institute, continue to survey business and IT executives on their views of a CIO qualifications, (4).

Their findings are presented in figure (2). It is important to note that two qualifications are viewed by 80 percent or more of the executives questioned as key to the CIO job from both the IT and business function (e.g., finance, marketing, R&D) perspective. The first is knowledge of applying IT to business, and the second is leadership. CEO views leadership as the primary qualification for ACIO.

The CIO as the leader of IT projects in the firm must be well-rounded individual, technically astute, people-oriented, with excellent business skill. Current statistics indicate that the majority of CIOs and IT executives continue to come primarily from IT background. Approximately two-thirds of CIOs have IT backgrounds from a professional education and experience perspective as shown in figure (3) and figure (4). The korn/ferry results have been expanded to indicate other business function back grounds CIO may have if thy are not career IT professionals. (4).
Leadership versus management

Management and leadership are not the same, because leadership is:

1. Concerns primarily with establishing direction, developing a vision of the future—often the distant of future—and strategies for producing the changes need to achieve the vision.

2. Aligning people: communicating direction in words and deeds to all those whose cooperation may be needed, so as to influence the creation of teams and coalitions that understand the vision and strategies and accept their validity.

3. Motivating and inspiring energizing people to overcome major political, bureaucratic, and resource barriers to change by satisfying basic, but often unfulfilled, human needs.

Where as management is about:

1. Planning and budgeting: establishing detailed steps and time tables for achieving needed results, then allocating resources necessary to make it happen.

2. Organizing and staffing: establishing some structure for accomplishing plan requirements, staffing that structure with individuals, delegating responsibility and authority for carrying out the plan, providing policies and procedures to help guide people, and creating methods or systems to monitor or implementation.

3. Controlling and problem solving: monitoring results, identifying deviations from plan, then planning and organizing and organizing to solve their problems.

In other words, leadership produces change, often to a dramatic degree, and has the potential to produce extremely useful change (new products that customers want, new approaches to labor relations that help make affirm more competitive). While management produces a degree of predictability and order and has the potential to consistently produce the short-term results expected by various stake-holders (for customer, always being on time: for stakeholders, being on budget).
The Project Management Model

Regardless of technological development, it is still true – and will always be true – that “humans lie at the heart of any organization and its systems,” as Kendall and Rollins note (1). It takes a combination of business systems, providing strategy, structure and control, and human systems, providing clarity, competence and commitment, to create business success. Figure (5)

As such, it is important to choose the right people to manage projects. As much care should be given to the appointment of a project manager for a mission critical project as is given during the hiring process for a key position within the company. And yet, most organizations have no process for choosing project managers. They also have little idea what skills and personality traits are needed by project managers to help them succeed.

The characteristics of a successful project manager are consistent, regardless of industry sector, corporate culture or other factors. The model (see figure 6) divides project management skills into three major Categories – “technical,” “personal,” and “leadership.”

These three Categories combine the art and science of project management. The technical skills focus on the science of project management. The other two thirds of the model – “personal,” and “leadership” – focus on the art, adding “management” to project management.

Even those organizations that follow best practices for project management and have highly developed PMOs often fail because they ignore the art of project management. Think of project management as an iceberg. Above the water are the technical skills that are needed. They are easy to measure and demonstrate. The art of project management is more difficult to recognize and measure. You have to find out how people work with other people to complete projects and build a model around their skills.

To accomplish this, we’ve broken down the three skills Categories into Clusters that further describe the specific behaviors required for successful project management (see figure 7).
The Clusters are divided into Units, which are then broken into Elements.

Figure (7): the specific behaviors required for successful project management

As you assess potential project management leaders, you will not find anyone who perfectly meets all of the criteria outlined in the model. Such an individual may not exist. However, the model can help you identify likely candidates that embody many of the skills needed for project management competency, after which you can provide the training necessary to make them effective leaders. The model can also help you identify development gaps in your current project managers.

**Technical Skills**

We’ve divided technical competency into the nine widely accepted skills identified by the Project Management Institute that make up the Project Management Body of Knowledge:

- Integration Management
- Scope Management
- Time Management
- Cost Management
- Quality Management

> Communications Management
> Risk Management
> Procurement Management

The project manager must understand: how to manage procurement and human resources, so that the resources needed to implement a project are available; risks, ranging from technical to political challenges that can ground a project; cost, time and quality, so that the project can be completed on time and on budget, while maintaining or exceeding the necessary quality; communications, so that progress is reported accurately and knowledge is shared with all stakeholders; scope management and integration management, so that the project is understood in its proper context and is aligned with business goals.

The nine knowledge areas are used to carry out 39 processes that make up the PMBOK®. Each process uses information from the previous process, and, with the help of various tools and techniques, enhances it before beginning the next process. These processes are divided into five phases: initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing. Review these phases, and you will recognize that they require not only technical skills, but business skills, embodying both art and science. Planning, for example, requires technical expertise to understand and implement the processes involved, but it also requires an understanding of business strategies. Tying the project to the overall business strategy and understanding its impact on the company’s bottom line, for example, should be part of the planning phase.

Kendall and Rollins, authors of *Advanced Project Portfolio Management and the PMO*, recommend adding Senior Management Oversight, PMO Management and Portfolio.(1)
Leadership Skills

Just as the technical skills outlined in project management model overlap with business skills, the business skills outlined by the model require a degree of technical competency. To be an effective communicator, for example, the project leader must understand technical language and jargon, but must also have the business skills to translate such language to business strategies and objectives for non-technical management.

Business and leadership skills are needed by project managers to link their projects to the relationships, resources and infrastructure of the organization. These skills, as identified in the competency model, include:

- A big picture focus
- Business acumen
- Organizational savvy
- Productive work environment

These Clusters are defined by their corresponding Elements as follows: A “big picture” focus requires leading through vision, strategic positioning and a systematic perspective. “Leading through vision” and “strategic positioning” are the ultimate business attributes. They measure the success of a project manager, just as they measure the success of a chief executive officer. Project managers can’t live in a silo. It is not enough for the project manager to focus on a specific project. An effective leader must also be able to align the project with the needs of the enterprise. A “systematic perspective,” the “science” part of this Cluster, integrates strategic planning with business processes.

“Business acumen” divides into the Elements of industry awareness and business operations knowledge. Industry awareness is self-descriptive and relates to an individual’s knowledge of the company’s position relative to its competitors. By comparing technology, marketing efforts, financial strength and management strength, the project leader should have a grasp of his organization’s competitive advantages – and disadvantages.

Business operations knowledge complements industry awareness, and is as internally focused as industry awareness is externally focused. It requires intimate knowledge of the company’s culture, its organization, and its business processes and practices. In addition to understanding the business, the project manager needs to know how to change it.

Organizational savvy requires an understanding of the company’s politics and how to use them to advantage to advance the project. It also requires an ability to build coalitions and networks, which can create interdepartmental project support. While company resources can fund only a limited number of projects, it is important for project managers to remember that their co-workers are not their competitors. Project managers must be able to sell ideas, not only to their project team, but also throughout the organization.

To accomplish this, they must understand how to motivate stakeholders.

To create a productive work environment, the project manager must be able to rapidly develop an effective project team and establish a collaborative culture within the team.

Speed is critical. Completing projects on time is the number one factor in determining project success, because it improves time-to-market, which can create a competitive advantage and increase market share.

Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics include:

- Achievement and action
- Helping and human services
- Impact and influence
- Managerial
- Cognitive
- Personal effectiveness
An achievement-oriented person is typically someone who is always ready to take action, rather than procrastinating until just before a project’s deadline. Such people seek the information they need to take action, rather than waiting for the information to come to them. They show initiative, but maintain a concern for order, quality and accuracy. Helping and human services characteristics include a customer-service orientation and strong interpersonal understanding. The individual shows compassion, and would feel comfortable mentoring or coaching others. His or her people skills extend beyond the project team to the customer. Project deadlines are met not only to satisfy managers, but also to satisfy customers.

The ideal project manager is a role model for others, demonstrating a positive influence on other employees and making an impact on their productivity and performance. Organizational awareness and the ability to build relationships are also part of this Cluster. The project leader must know who to go to for project resources and how to obtain those resources, which might otherwise be used for other projects. Managerial skills range from an ability to be assertive and use positional power effectively, to cooperation and teamwork. Team leadership, directness and an ability to develop others are other characteristics identified for this Cluster. Cognitive skills combine analytical and conceptual thinking, requiring a balance of right-brain and left-brain skills. It is, again, art and science in balance.

Finally, personal effectiveness includes self-control, self-confidence, flexibility and organizational commitment. The effective project manager is loyal to the organization, the project team and the project goals. Effective project managers lead by doing.

CONCLUSION

The results of the proposed model will only improve when organizations begin taking care in defining the competencies of their project leaders. As leadership skills are the art of understanding and executing the science of project management. So the model can help organizations to identify likely candidates that embody many of the skills needed for project management competency, after which we can provide the necessary training to make them effective leaders. The model can also help us to identify development gaps in our current project managers. Finally, all mentioned above is to improve project management success rate.

REFERENCES