

## **Positive Project Leadership – Enhancing Project Team Competency and Effectiveness**

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Based on my experience as a project manager and manager of project managers and the documented expectations of many project sponsors and executives, it is my belief that the project manager is placed in a leadership position regardless of type of project. The size and complexity of the project is not the issue and does not define leadership capability. It is the ability to adapt to the challenges of the project, and the value the project manager brings to the team and the organization. People can make a difference and provide leadership regardless of project size or actual position in an organizational hierarchy. The key element here is whether or not an individual is creating value or, as John C. Maxwell states, "practicing authentic leadership." Authentic leadership is about creating value within an organization through innovation, commitment, and passion for excellence. It means "making things happen", motivating people to succeed, and making a difference even if you aren't the designated leader of the team.

According to Michael Hyatt, former CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers, authentic leadership includes the following qualities:

- Insight
- Initiative
- Influence
- Impact
- Integrity

These qualities, when demonstrated, will clearly separate the effective leader from others who have been associated with the leader title. Additionally the emphasis on integrity is a key factor and is directly related to the domain in project management, referred to in a Role Delineation study by PMI®, as Professional and Social Responsibility. The professional project manager is expected to display characteristics of respect, ethics, and an understanding of diversity in the project environment. It is relatively safe to say that the issues that have created many of the world's economic problems can be attributed to a lack of authentic leadership.

Executives of most successful organizations will agree that strong and effective leadership is a major factor in the effort to achieve the desired levels of organizational performance. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or Organizational Success Factors (OSFs) are important but much of what a leader actually accomplishes cannot be measured accurately. Leadership is about vision, motivation, and an ability to allow each employee or team member to achieve their personal goals of self-value while contributing to organizational objectives, working with the team to succeed, and creating an environment of loyalty and respect.

It is difficult to measure leadership behaviors such as:

- Providing an environment where every person can excel
- Managing with respect
- Managing with integrity and honesty
- Effective Listening
- Creativity and innovation (establishing an environment where creativity and innovation may flourish)
- Sharing knowledge (thought leadership)
- Mentoring (challenging people to reach higher levels of performance and personal growth)
- Continuous personal improvement – always seeking knowledge and building on one's education, skills, and competency

These behaviors are somewhat intangible in terms of actual measurement but are extremely important in any business environment. A 360 degree type of evaluation process may help to capture feedback about these behaviors.

Most organizations would like to see these characteristics and behaviors displayed by their current leaders and by employees who will someday assume leadership positions. These behaviors are significant and have a major impact on what many refer to as "Human Capital." It is important for today's leaders to fully understand how human capital (the people of the organization) contributes to value creation in an organization. Value creation refers to the development of new products and programs and the development of an environment that provides opportunities for sustained and profitable growth by utilizing the talents and creativity of employees. It is also about improving organizational performance and capability and it starts with the people who actually perform the work. What is needed is an environment that is truly motivating to employees and one that will spark, nourish, and cultivate the generation and follow through of new ideas. That environment will become very attractive to new clients and will be very reassuring to existing clients whose future needs continue to evolve. Current and future clients will be able to easily differentiate an organization that emphasizes value creation from those that do not, simply by observing the leadership.

Value creation begins with leadership. This means vision, perseverance, and setting an example for the organizational employees and task performers to clearly see and emulate. Vision is certainly a key factor in value creation but effective leaders need more than a vision. They need to develop a passion for leading and serving and they will need a seemingly unending supply of energy. They also must display a "common sense" approach to getting things done or when dealing with issues, and they must maintain an element of calmness even during periods of extreme unrest or during a major crisis.

The focus on value creation will potentially result in several benefits for an organization:

- Greater market-share
- Expanded Brand Recognition
- Less investment risk through more thoughtful business analysis
- Increased revenue and reduced cost
- Increased customer satisfaction
- Shorter cycle time to market
- Higher quality
- Increases in new products
- Enhanced product development
- Greater employee morale
- Greater loyalty to the organization or brand
- Higher levels of employee and client retention

Essentially, value creation links directly back to effective leadership.

So, the question is: What makes an effective leader? General Colin Powell observed the following about leadership:

- “Good leadership involves responsibility for the welfare of the group, which means that some people will get angry at your actions and decisions. Getting everyone to like you is a sign of mediocrity.”

Another quote that provides some guidance regarding leadership effectiveness:

- “I don’t know what the key to success is, but the key to failure is to try and please everyone”

The point here is to understand that many important decisions must be made in order to move an organization forward but, not everyone will agree with a leader’s decision. This can be expected and is part of the realities of leadership. Trying to please everyone results, in many cases, in failure to please anyone. When a decision is made and meets with resistance from a specific individual or group, the leader must remain firm but, if at all possible, offer an explanation about the rationale behind the decision, and show genuine respect and concern regarding the opposing viewpoint. Respect and honesty is a formula that works in any environment.

- Never neglect details. Sometime the assigned work will create a sense of mediocrity over time. When everyone’s mind is dulled or distracted, details suffer. The leader must be doubly vigilant in these situations.

I relate the observations of Colin Powell to another well-known author – Tom Peters. Peters emphasizes the need to “Search for WOW” in everything we do. From my perspective, this means creating an environment of such enthusiasm that the team truly believes they are working on an assignment or a project that is absolutely

beneficial to the organization, the team, the client and the individual. That feeling of WOW starts with the leader. If the leader is not demonstrating enthusiasm, excitement, and commitment, how can anyone else be expected to truly buy-in and connect with the project or the assignment?

- Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds!

What organization would establish a slogan or motto that says “We’re really not too bad” or “We are not quite as good as everyone else but we are OK” or “Someday we will actually get it right.” Or how about: “We have more under-achievers than anyone!” Organizations need top people or people who can be educated, trained and mentored to perform at levels that will meet client demands and achieve organizational goals. Strong, effective leaders surround themselves with good people who are innovative, willing to learn new skills, and willing to test their limits now and then. This is the environment that will attract the best and encourage top performers to stay.

- Powell’s rules for picking people: Look for intelligence and judgment, and most critically, a capacity to anticipate, to see around corners. Also, look for loyalty, integrity, a high energy drive, a balanced ego, and the drive to get things done.

This point relates to the importance of risk anticipation and risk management. Leaders and their teams should practice the art of “looking around corners” and creating possible scenarios that, if they occurred, could result in serious problems for the project or the enterprise.

All of previously stated observations basically sum up the major factors that leaders should consider when selecting people for their teams. It should be understood that the current leader was likely selected for having these very same attributes.

In the project environment, managing a project is a challenging job and it takes a person with a very wide range of skills, especially leadership skills, to become an effective project manager. The project manager position also requires high levels of energy to sustain that effectiveness while managing and leading a project team. Most project managers will agree that the title “project manager” is actually a dual role – Leader and Manager. These major roles include several “sub-roles” that will emerge during the life cycle of the project. As Vijay Verma explains in his book “Human Resource Skills for Project Managers, PMI<sup>®</sup>”, project managers have several unique roles:

As a leader

- Set direction and vision
- Inspire teamwork
- Align employees
- Motivate and support
- Listen more
- Demonstrate compassion

- Drive innovation and creativity
- Acknowledge successes and victories
- Display fairness and an ethical approach to all issues

As a manager

- Plan and budget
- Organize work groups
- Staff the project
- Ensure the project is in control
- Emphasize timeliness and quality
- Provide coaching
- Provide performance feedback
- Ensure that work is accomplished

For project managers to achieve greater levels of effectiveness and to advance within their organizations, they must continuously fine tune their leadership skills. By doing this they will also be fine tuning the skills and competencies of their project teams.

Leader is defined by J.D Batten, Tough Minded Leadership - AMACOM, as the development of a clear and complete system of expectations in order to identify, evoke, and use the strengths of all resources in the organization, the most important of which is people. In the project environment the project manager relies on his or her team to perform the work, report status as well as problems and work together to achieve the project objectives. If we consider the people on the team as the most important resource, it makes sense to focus on their needs as well as the needs of other stakeholders to ensure project success.

Project leadership in project management can then be defined as the ability to get things done efficiently, to achieve stakeholder expectations, and to deliver the project's product with high quality, through the team.

Here is a very simple way to look at leadership. This is Project Leadership in a Nutshell – adapted from “Human Resource Skills for The Project Manager,” Vijay Verma.

**L = Listen** to your project team and stakeholders

**E = Encourage** the heart of the team members (motivate them through action and empowerment. Create the WOW environment)

**A = Act** (demonstrate your abilities, inspire the team, walk the talk, set an example)

**D = Deliver** (provide what you said you would provide and follow through on promises. Don't make promises you can't keep and make sure you meet your commitments.)

Project leaders should continuously look for ways to improve their leadership abilities. The Professional and Social Responsibility domain of project management as defined by the Project Management Institute® Role Delineation Studies emphasizes sharing of lessons learned, consciousness of ethical behavior, and appreciation for cultural differences as part of the overall role manager. This applies to leadership also. Leaders should look back at their decisions, analyze what has been accomplished, identify where improvements can be made and act on those lessons.

A good practice is to ask yourself a few questions after a decision – “Did it really accomplish what I had intended? How do I know that? Who was affected by that decision? How could I have handled it differently? Am I personally satisfied with the outcome? Why or why not. Take some time to analyze the results. Think about the decision and the rationale that made it the “right decision.” Think about how the decision was communicated. Was it clearly explained? If a decision results in a negative reaction, discontent, conflict, and lower morale, you may want to ask yourself “How could I have done that better? What didn’t I do? Where did the breakdown occur?”

Not all decisions should be deeply scrutinized but it is a good practice to understand just how people react to decisions, especially those that will have a significant impact on your stakeholders.

The reality is that improving the effectiveness and competency of the project team starts with the project manager (the project leader). Every project manager should consider developing a personal leadership development plan. A self-assessment using a SWOT analysis type approach may provide a good basis for developing an ongoing improvement program. Assessing personal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats can help establish priorities, especially if the project manager aspires to achieve higher levels of responsibility and advance within an organization.

## **Leadership SWOT Analysis**

The SWOT Analysis technique, commonly used in strategic planning and in identifying and managing risk, is also an effective model for mapping out a strategy for personal development. Organizational leaders use the model to develop a framework from which to determine their long and short term objectives. Project managers and team leaders can use the model to analyze their leadership and managerial abilities and create a plan for developing new skills or for enhancing existing skills. It also assists in identifying areas that could cause significant team performance problems.

## Leadership SWOT Analysis Template

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>What skills do I possess that help me accomplish my goals?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Presentation</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Organizing</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Facilitating</li> <li>• Problem Solving</li> <li>• Innovation and Entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> <li>• Influencing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>What opportunities exist at the project level, the enterprise level, and at the personal level?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional revenue and sales at project completion</li> <li>• New and more challenging project assignment</li> <li>• Sharing of knowledge with others in the organization</li> <li>• Promotion of team members</li> <li>• Promotion to higher level position</li> <li>• Increased customer satisfaction</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <p>What weaknesses have I noticed or have been defined through feedback?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to follow through on promises</li> <li>• Technical knowledge is limited</li> <li>• Slow response to team requests</li> <li>• Lack of visibility</li> <li>• Failure to provide feedback on a timely basis</li> <li>• Lack of availability to the team</li> <li>• Micromanaging the team</li> <li>• Failure to set clear expectations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <p>What threats exist that should be removed?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project failure due to poor leadership</li> <li>• Loss of job assignment</li> <li>• Loss of key project team members</li> <li>• Project cancellation</li> <li>• Loss of personal credibility and integrity</li> <li>• Competition from peers</li> <li>• Office politics</li> </ul>

A leadership SWOT analysis will assist the project manager in identifying where additional training, support, or mentorship is required. A similar approach can be taken for the project team. The key is to exploit strengths, resolve and strengthen weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and remove or minimize threats. The action items developed to address these areas, when properly executed, will result in higher levels of performance and efficiency and the leadership and the team level.

### Closing Thoughts

People who study leadership and attempt to define it may not fully agree on one universal definition but we all know that strong, effective leadership is essential in every organization. People will respond to leaders who can set direction, gather the right resources, and get things done by working with the talents of their team members. Those leaders who set aside their egos and their personal goals in favor

of the greater needs of the organization will generally receive the respect and loyalty of their team and colleagues. Those factors are worth far more than the momentary glory associated with an “ego feeding” episode. Keep your leadership approach “positive.” It’s not about being popular; it’s about being fair, respectful, and focused on team success.

## About the Author



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**Frank P. Saladis**, PMP, PMI Fellow is a Consultant and Instructor / Facilitator within the project management profession and has over 35 years of experience in the IT, Telecom Installation and IT Project Management training environment. He is a senior consultant and trainer for the International Institute For Learning Inc. and has been involved in the development of several project management learning programs. Mr. Saladis has held the position of Project Manager for AT&T Business Communications Systems, National Project Manager for AT&T Solutions Information Technology Services and was a member of Cisco Systems Professional Services Project Management Advocacy Organization. His responsibilities included the development of Project Management Offices (PMO) and the development of internal training programs addressing project management skills and techniques.

He is a Project Management Professional and has been a featured presenter at the Project Management Institute ® Annual Symposiums, Project World, PMI World Congress, CMMA, and many PMI Chapter professional development programs. He is a past president of the PMI New York City Chapter and a Past-President of the PMI ® Assembly of Chapter Presidents. Mr. Saladis is a Co-Publisher of the internationally distributed newsletter for allPM.com, a project management information portal, and a contributor to the allPM.com project management website.

Mr. Saladis is the originator of International Project Management Day and has written numerous leadership and project management related articles. Mr. Saladis is also the author of the Project Management Workbook and PMP ® / CAPM ® Exam Study Guide that supplements Dr. Harold Kerzner's textbook – Project Management, A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling and Controlling?, 9th Edition published by John Wiley & Sons and the author of Positive Leadership in Project Management, published by IIL Publishing. He is a member of the International Executive Guild and the NRCC Business Advisory Council. He has also held the position of Vice President of Education for the Global Communications Technology Specific Interest Group of PMI ® and holds a Masters Certificate in Commercial Project Management from the George Washington University. Mr. Saladis received the prestigious Lynn Stuckenbrook Person of the Year Award from the Project management Institute in 2006 for his contributions to the organization and to the practice of project management.