

Project Leadership – Top 10 Cardinal Principles

Part II

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Continued from Part 1 published in Aug, 2016 -
<http://pmworldjournal.net/article/project-leadership-top-10-cardinal-principles/>

To re-cap, the first five cardinal principles have been discussed in Part 1 :

- E – Engage and Align the SHs + Each & Every SH is important**
- F – Focus on drivers for SHs, Where We want to go and not What we Fear**
- F - Foster healthy working relationship between SHs**
- E - Emotions & Feelings at interplay and govern project outcomes**
- C - Communicate – Convey intended messages - Clearly & Concisely**

Figure 1: Ist Five Cardinal Principles – Covered in Part 1 (August Issue)

In this part, the balance 5 cardinal principles are discussed below:

- T - Test your assumptions. Untested assumptions are Risks!!**
- I - Identify SHs, SHs Needs, Wants & Expectations + “Wish List”**
- V - Value SHs opinions + Look out for what is “valuable” to SHs**
- E - Empower team members – No micromanaging please!!**
- S – Social Sensitivity - Sensitiveness to culture & respecting cultural differences**

Figure 2: Five Cardinal Principles – Covered in this article - Part 2

These top ten cardinal principles form a word “EFFECTIVE” + S. In effect, these principles serve as a guiding tool for the PMs enabling emerge as Effective Project Leaders.

Abbreviations:		
EI – Emotional Intelligence	PM – Project Manager	
PL – Project Leader	SH – Stakeholder	TM – Team Member
*TMs - Team Members (Chief Design Engineers – Civil, Electrical, Mechanical, Logistics Controller, Project Engineers, Procurement Manager, Business Controller, Export Assistants); Site Staff (Site Manager, Site Engineers – Mechanical, Electrical, Civil), Quality Controller, HSE Engineer, Commissioning Engineers – PLC, Mechanical, Electrical, Control & Instrumentation.		
**SHs – *TMs, Owners, Sponsors, Owner’s Representatives, Owner’s Consultants (Design and Project Management), Suppliers, Contractors (Mechanical, Electrical, Civil), Transporters.		

6. Test your assumptions. Untested assumptions are Risks!!

Decision making requires choosing an alternative and in absence of availability of 100% information, the decisions are usually based on certain assumptions, to that extent decision

making involve an element of risk. Projects are no exception as various decisions made at varying stages involve certain assumption(s). PLs are mindful of the fact that almost every decision made is based on certain assumption(s) since complete information is usually not available. Moreover, putting decision on a back-burner until 100% information is available and/or holding on to decisions leads to complications. Dynamic environmental conditions and rapidly changing times add to the challenges.



Figure – 3 : Testing Assumption

Untested assumptions are like “time bombs” waiting to explode and they are the major source of risks that can eventually derail the project. PLs act proactively and make sure that these assumptions are collated, tested and validated so as to prevent and/or minimise their negative impact on the project.

One of the greatest advantage of testing assumptions is that it results in higher preparedness to expect the unexpected. It enhances our ability to respond to the unexpected and mitigate the negative consequences.

PLs understand that there is no guarantee that a Plan A which has worked successfully in earlier projects would lead to similar success in the current project. PLs invariably have a Plan B (backup Plan) should Plan A which has worked successfully in earlier projects, fail. Moreover, although we plan our activities meticulously but at times, much to our disliking, our projects are influenced and impacted by Murphy’s Law. The back up plans acts as our saviour and switching over to Plan B prevents building up of anxiety and flaring of temper.

One of the classic example emphasizing the need for testing the assumptions as narrated by one PM is given below –

“In one of the projects, erection of 110 M chimney was considered with derrick due to non-availability of crane with large boom length locally. However, during the erection, it was observed that beyond 70 M, the HT transmission lines in the vicinity made it impossible to go ahead with the stay wires holding the derrick and continue further with the manual erection. We had to mobilize a crane with 125 M boom length to erect the remaining part of the chimney. Sensing the urgency, the crane hiring company also raised the prices. Mobilization of the crane at short notice, resulted in cost escalation, apart from the delays, idling of manpower on site and associated delays. Had the team validated their assumption at the project conception stage, such firefighting situation could have been avoided” – Sr. Project Manager.

Non-availability of local manpower with required competence in the country of operation, local holidays, torrential rains/snowfall blocking the roads and hampering the progress are other common causes that disrupt the flow of activities resulting in cost and time overruns. These examples emphasize the need for proper evaluation and validation of the assumptions, proactively planning the activities and making the needed provisions for additional time and costs in the project budget.

7. Identify the Stakeholders + SHs Needs, Wants and Expectations:

The Project team acts as a medium for translating the SHs requirements into the project product, it is therefore imperative that the first and foremost step towards enhancing the success rate is to identify and understand the SHs; collate their needs, requirements and expectations. The PL creates higher awareness, aligns and engages the team towards meeting those requirements thereby ensuring that everyone is on the same boat.

“What gets measured gets improved”. Peter Drucker

“What gets measured gets done”. Tom Peters

Having identified the SHs needs, requirements and expectations, the next important step is to segregate these into – “Must Have”, “Good to have” and “Nice to have”. The exercise does not stop here, the “Must have” are further prioritised and actions are taken to meet these requirements. “Nice to have” requirements are usually the demands not forming part of the contract and are also referred to as “Wish list”. A valid question here is - To what extent does the PM act on fulfilling the items on the “Good to have” and “Wish list”? The PLs almost invariably analyse the items in terms of associated risks, value addition and cost-benefit analysis and explain to the SHs the impact on cost and time before accepting such items. More importantly, proper explanations help in diffusing the build-up of tensions.

A word of caution, the PMs need to be extra careful when agreeing to supply and/or incorporate additional features outside the contract. “Nice to have/Wish List” not only lead to scope creep but also impacts the project cost and time. Moreover, once the PM accepts the requirements, he/she then sets a precedence for the rest to follow. We often hear comments like *“Yes but you already accepted the other point”*; *“You can easily incorporate this, it costs peanuts!”*; *“The cost is miniscule compared to the project cost”*. We need to appreciate that however generous, the PMs cannot be “Santa Claus” to meet the SHs wish list. PMBOK stresses that PM should not resort to “Gold Plating” as it is always associated with additional risk, time and cost. A golden rule being - Anything not covered in original scope of work needs to be analysed for its impact on CQT and possible risks.

8. Value SHs opinions + Look out for what is “valuable” to SHs

Some of the PMs are low on connecting with SHs at emotional level and are tagged to possess *“I know All”, “I don’t care for others”, “My way is the only right way”* qualities. It is easy to pick up their body language as actions speak louder. Moreover, such PMs do not like to share things with others and thus end up being isolated. Behavioural scientists have stressed that the group dynamics is at interplay in any office environment and leads to formation of groups within the organisation. Grouping is usually governed by mutual interest, trust and respect for each other. Group dynamics is equally applicable in any project.



Figure : 4 – Namaste

Taking a cue from “Namaste” a popular way of greeting in India. “Namaste” is done by joining the hands together and bowing to the person whom we meet. It expresses - ***I bow to Thee, the Supreme Knowledge in you.***

Building on this further and adapting this time tested principle, we learn two important aspects:

- a) “I value your knowledge” and
- b) “We both - you & me can jointly learn and leverage each other’s knowledge and above all act with wisdom”.

Irrespective of our positions and experience, we can learn from our interactions provided we value others' opinion.

PLs are quick to pick up the signals and determine the importance of controlling influence and impact the SHs have on the end results. They are mindful of the fact that although the SHs may appear to be soft and docile but their words carry weight and their opinion can make or break the project. At the same time, we have also noticed that some of the PMs do not reckon this fact and tend to undermine SHs influence & power. By the time the PMs realize their mistake and initiate corrective action(s), it is often too late as the damage has already been done.

Despite having acted on the above lines, at times, we do come across SHs who are too demanding and difficult to manage. During these times, PLs do not panic but act courageously demonstrating their leadership and the behavioural skills in effectively handling such situations.

PLs are mindful of the fact that our antennas are sharp enough to pick up the signals for the expectations of our SHs. However, the expectations of our team members (TMs) are often lost as mixed signals and TMs are usually deprived of needed attention. PLs realize that each *TM has expectations to fuel their growth and fulfil their career aspirations. To meet their career aspirations and grow in the organisation, the TMs too have expectations from the project in terms of gaining knowledge and expertise. It is therefore imperative to understand the needs, requirements, desires and expectations of TMs and help them in meeting their expectations. Caring attitude clubbed with other leadership qualities enable PLs to maintain high team morale, sustain the key resources and keep a check on TM turnover. TM quitting at a crucial juncture is known to cripple the team working and derail the project.

“Great leaders help their people see how they can directly impact the company's objectives and their own personal goals”. - Chip Conley

“If you inspire people to do more, learn more, and become more, you are a leader.”
Anonymous

The quotes above bring out the importance of valuing the individuals, inspiring the TMs to push their limits to grow at an individual level and at the organisational level. More importantly, it is worth emphasising that we are all working in a dynamic environment. Like the project risks, our expectations are also evolving over a period. PLs keep a tab and monitor the expectations of their SHs and at the same time they also stay focussed on TMs growth related expectations from the current project so as to help them to grow.

9. E - Empower team members – No micromanaging please!!

“As we look into the future, leaders will be those that empower others”. Bill Gates

In one of the power projects, although the test protocols for plant acceptance were agreed at the conception stage, but during the commissioning stage, the owners' consultants insisted on changes and stressed that unless the test protocols were changed, they would not witness the tests and accept the power plant. To resolve a deadlock, the test protocols were once again reviewed and revised by the Commissioning Manager at site paving the way for conducting the Plant Acceptance Tests and the power plant could be successfully handed over to the satisfaction of Owners. This again emphasises two aspects –

- i) The need for PLs to be flexible, adaptable and more importantly empowering the TMs to visualize the road blocks, find a workable solution and take decisions in the best interest of project. *PL is a dreamer, a thinker and a doer!!*
- ii) The need for TMs to respond by taking ownership, acting dispassionately and working diligently to clear the road blocks and in implementing the decisions taken. *TMs are the doers!!!*

PLs rely on the fact that every individual needs time and space and he/she is mature enough to make his/her own decision. Empowerment is a key enabler for delegation. Delegation provides them with an opportunity to take a view at a big picture focussing on the critical few instead of having a myopic view and focussing their attention on the nuts and bolts. Giving a free hand does not mean that the PM keeps his hands off the project. He/She needs to jointly review the project status with the TMs and set the rolling plans in action by taking timely actions. Daniel Pink in his book *Drive*³ has stressed that Autonomy does not mean that you absolve the individuals of their Accountability.

It is not uncommon to come across discontentment and disheartened TMs with comments like “*I have no choice*”, “*The PM is driving us nuts*”. In-depth probing pin points to the fact that lack of freedom is the one of the main reasons for TMs working half-heartedly. The TMs feel that the PM believes in “*Management by Instruction*” and typifies “*School going kids’ syndrome*” - always instructing his TMs and imposing his decisions. Obviously, such PMs are very low on delegation and end up having very little time for themselves, resulting in higher stress levels for them as well as for the team.

“Meetings are by definition a concession to a deficient organization. For one either meets or one works. One cannot do both at the same time.” –Peter Drucker

Some of the PMs obsessed with details, believe that having frequent review meetings is the only way for effectively monitoring and staying in control of the project. Such PMs run a high risk of getting trapped in micromanagement. Usually, their meetings involve detailed discussions relating to Level 4 project activities; follow ups; extended hours on reviewing what-if scenarios. Moreover, the meetings lead by such PMs usually end up without arriving at any major decisions and/or logical conclusions.

A word of caution - micromanaging leads to missing wood for trees as one tends to get lost in details. The TMs perform confidently when they know that they can draw support from their PM and that he is available for them. However, they do not like their PM constantly looking over their shoulders. PLs facilitate team working by helping the TMs to identify and remove the road blocks. As remarked by one PL, “*Together, we all achieve excellence and higher empowerment only improves the success rate*”.

10. Social Sensitivity - Sensitiveness to culture & respecting cultural differences

Today, “*Think globally & Act locally*” has been the mantra for almost all the organisations operating at a global level and executing projects across the globe. Working with the cross cultural TMs and with the remote teams has become norm of the day. Although unintentional, sometimes our comments inadvertently cause resentment and hurt the feelings of an individual. Often generalised statements like – “*Oh they always do that*” or “*This working environment is no good*” and “*We cannot operate here with such things*” are known to be the root cause of hard feelings and strained working relationships.

“Cultural sensitivity means being aware that cultural differences and similarities exist and have an effect on values, learning, and behaviour.”

- Stafford, Bowman, Ekking, Hanna & Lopoies-DeFede

PLs are known to spend time to study the cultural background and local norms of the country prior to commencement of the project execution. As such they dovetail their working styles and work mindfully to avoid any resentment or ill feelings.

PLs consistently delivering good results work with higher emphasis on Social Awareness and Relationship Management. They appreciate the fact that harmonious working relationships with the SHs is the key enabler for achieving project objectives. Working with higher emotional intelligence to effectively manage cross cultural issues has helped PLs to act with concern and respect the TMs, resulting in better understanding and alignment of the TMs. Ultimately this leads to higher trust level and cordial relationships. In essence, these have culminated into a team working as a cohesive unit and emerging as winners.

With the changing environment, it will not be exaggeration to state that today, **“When in Rome, be a Roman”** encompasses the need for higher awareness, understanding, aligning ourselves with the local norms and above all adapting the working style in line with the local acceptable norms.

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” — Maya Angelou

Conclusion

PM's role is akin to the conductor of an orchestra. PL acts like a master orchestra conductor, sets the pace and transforms the requirements spelt out in the contract to that actually delivered. He sets the tempo and ensures that the TMs know how their role fits in the overall scheme of things, how the TMs individually and collectively contribute in adding value and making things happen in a synchronised manner.

Primarily, PMs being hard core Engineers tend to focus more on the technical aspects and at times forget that it's people who are the real resources. Recognizing this fact, PLs have successfully integrated the project management processes and methodologies with the leadership skills. Working with higher EI, engagement & empowerment has helped them to leverage the skills and collaborate with the SHs and TMs, thereby harnessing full potential of their workforce and achieving success which is more meaningful, satisfying and sustainable.

Empowering people and understanding that our emotions and feelings are at interplay and govern the project outcome have paved the way for achieving success on a sustainable basis. Creation of high level of trust helps us to connect at emotional level, the communication transcends beyond sharing of facts & figures and includes sharing of feelings and emotions. Shared feelings and emotions leads to formation of deep rooted working and social bonds with SHs.

Success is culmination of application of processes and methodologies which provide needed guidelines and framework. However, it is important to reckon the fact that SHs are the have multiple and diverse expectations. Also, when we speak of meeting the expectations, we tend to accord higher priority to the expectations of other external SHs and the expectations

of the TMs usually get relegated to bottom. The TMs are the key resources and the real DOERS!! Hence, the importance for keeping a tab and monitoring the expectations of SHs incl. TMs. More importantly, we need to appreciate that like the project risks, the SHs expectations also vary and evolve during the project cycle.

Various articles, books and periodicals have emphasized the underlying principles for attainment of project success. Adopting these top 10 cardinal principles and imbibing them in their day-to-day working would further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the PMs. It is hoped that these set of principles would serve as a tool for PLs to lead the team, create the working environment which is purpose driven and enable the TMs to act with higher awareness mindful of their roles & responsibilities.

“The distinguishing features of the project team lead by a good PL are - The project team is in control of the project, the TMs take ownership and responsibility for their actions; have higher mutual respect and understanding for each other. The energy levels and excitement witnessed in such teams is high and the team achieve results which might be perceived as miracles by others” – Vice President, Project Management.

Project Leadership – Top 10 Cardinal Principles

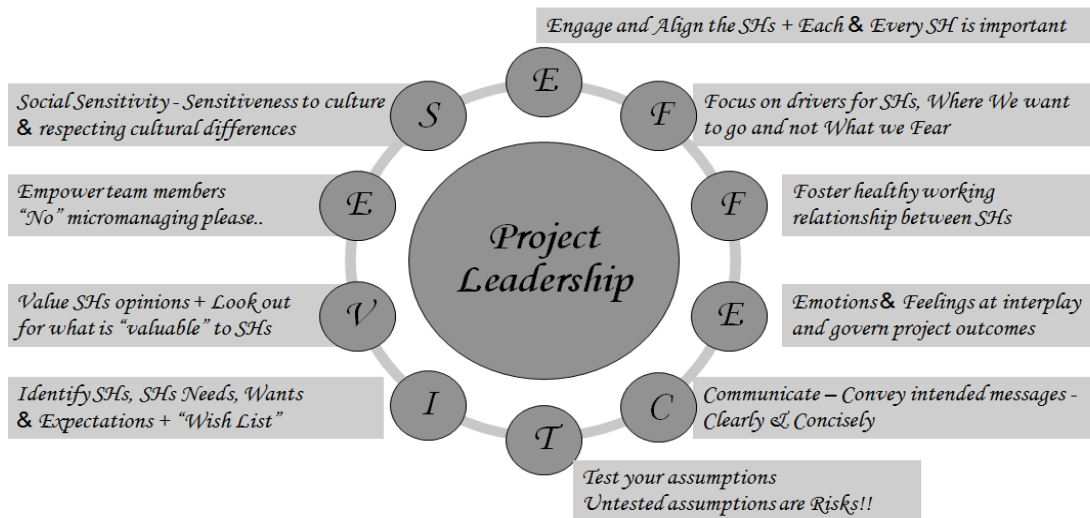


Figure 5: Project Leadership - Top 10 Cardinal Principles

Methodology

The feedback received from the PMs and SHs have been collated. The overlapping areas have been clubbed into broader categories so as to narrow down the key success factors and focus the attention on vital few. Inferences have been made on the basis of direct observation, evaluation and analysis of the feedback reports. Individual areas of importance have been arrived based on the weightage assigned to each of the above principles to arrive at top 10.

Examples of the key issues and challenges faced by the SHs have been highlighted under various principles for better understanding. Also, we all would have experienced similar

situations during our project execution, it is hoped that co-relating with these instances would only reaffirm our ways of working by adopting these principles. The above principles would enrich us and serve as a guiding light to face the challenges with lot more determination.

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