

Project Management and Toastmasters: Understanding their synergy in developing knowledge and skills¹

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Introduction

After working for nearly two decades in project management training and consulting I was looking for a change of scenario where I could network with people with a general background. This is when I ran into Toastmasters and after visiting one club as a guest, promptly joined it. Since then it has been a very enjoyable and fruitful experience with them. I was also pleasantly surprised to find that the twin disciplines of communication and leadership espoused strongly by the Toastmaster community are in fact important areas of knowledge and practice in project management. So, the question arose, is there any synergy between Project Management and the Toastmaster way? What are the areas of commonality and differences? And how can the two benefit from each other?

Toastmasters and Project Management - Communication & Leadership

[Toastmasters International](#) considers itself to be the first-choice provider of dynamic, high-value, *experiential* communication and leadership skills development. Members improve their speaking and leadership skills by attending one of the club meetings. Leaders head families, coach teams, run businesses and mentor others. These leaders must not only accomplish, they must also communicate. By regularly giving speeches, gaining feedback, leading teams and guiding others to achieve their goals in a supportive atmosphere the Toastmasters platform provide a supportive and positive learning experience. This empowers members to develop communication and leadership skills, resulting in greater self-confidence and personal growth.

Some of the well-known standards and competency frameworks in Project Management include

The PMBOK® Guide 6th edn or the Project Management Body of Knowledge of the [Project Management Institute](#) or PMI. It lists ten knowledge areas of which Communication is one of them. Leadership is a part of Interpersonal and team skills which is one of the techniques for managing a team.

PMCDF 3rd Edn or the Project Management Competency Development Framework of PMI has identified the major skills required for Project Managers in the form of a talent triangle with Technical Project Management, Leadership and Strategic Business Management at the three apex points. The Leadership skills include among others dealing with people, being visionary,

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collaborative, optimistic and managing relationships. Most of the project manager's time is spent in communicating and in the triangle it is considered part of this node.

ICB 4.0 or Individual Competency Baseline of the [International Project Management Association](http://www.ipma.org) or IPMA considers Communication and Leadership as part of People competencies. It includes elements like personal communication, relationships and engagement, leadership, teamwork, resourcefulness and negotiation. IPMA standards describe competence in terms of Knowledge and skills. These together would reflect abilities. Competence is the application of knowledge, skills and abilities to produce desired project results. In the Project Excellence Baseline or Model assessments are done to ascertain the level of competency achieved. Leadership is considered one of the criteria in People & Purpose area and Communication is evaluated as part of Project Management processes & resources area. In the Organizational Competency Baseline, which considers assessments from an organizational perspective, Leadership as an element and part of Governance, and Communication is part of People's competency.

Toastmasters skills in Project Management - some observations

Many of the skills practised in the Toastmaster community find their place as knowledge and skills required in project management standards of PMI. Some examples are

Communication

4Cs of written and spoken communication ¹

- Correct grammar and spelling
- Concise expression and elimination of excess words
- Clear purpose and expression directed to the needs of the reader and
- Coherent & logical flow of words, ideas and controlling them.

The above are supported by communication skills ¹

- Listening actively
- Persuading a person, a team or organization to perform an action
- Coaching to improve performance and achieve desired results
- Negotiating to achieve mutually agreements between parties or reduce approval or decision delays.
- Motivating
- Clarity of purpose in key messages, information sharing and feedback.
- Non-verbal communication

- Presentations
- Managing meetings

Some communication techniques used by Toastmasters find mention in the ICB 4.0 of IPMA². These would be under People competencies of Communication and Relationship and Engagement.

- Using structures and information depending on audience and situation.
- Using visualization and body language.
- Using story telling as a technique where appropriate.
- Creating an open and respectful atmosphere, enable people to express their views without being rebuffed punished or ridiculed. Taking individual contributions seriously.
- Does not interrupt or start talking when others are talking
- Employ humour and sense of perspective when appropriate; decrease tension by using humour.
- Demonstrates interest in meeting new people. Uses humour as an ice breaker. Keeps others informed. Makes other feel heard, relates to problems of others and offers help. Responds to communication within reasonable time. Relies on a given word.
- Uses techniques of questioning and moderation in a discussion.

Leadership

In the PMBOK Guide 6th edn¹, as part of Knowledge Area Resource Management a leader is responsible for developing team skills and competencies while retaining and improving motivation and team satisfaction. Two processes within this knowledge area which are focussed on this aspect are Develop and Manage teams.

Some leadership principles and techniques find mention in the ICB 4.0² of IPMA as part of People Competencies.

- Leadership - Coaching, decision making, listening skills, creating team spirit, provides direction for people and teams, coaches and mentors teams to improve their capabilities
- Teamwork - select and build team, motivates individuals, negotiates common team rules and norms, promotes cooperation and networking between teams, empower teams by delegating tasks and responsibilities, recognises errors to facilitate learning from mistakes
- Conflict and Crisis - Moderation techniques, Negotiation, persuasiveness, rhetorical, analytical skills.
- Resourcefulness - Facilitating discussions and group working sessions.

- Negotiation - Techniques and Persuasion.

Project Management knowledge and skills within Toastmasters - some observations

Toastmasters in its new Pathways educational program has focussed on either on communication, leadership or both and many of the content support project management principles. This is beneficial to the project management practitioner because it gives them an avenue to apply the knowledge and practice skills as stated in the standards. Here are some specific references to project management for the ten paths in the pathways program. The underlining emphasis on Communication and Leadership continues in all the paths.

- ◆ Motivational Strategies - Motivation, team building
- ◆ Presentation Mastery - Speech writing & delivery, communication through speaking
- ◆ Leadership Development - managing time, implementation, leading a team
- ◆ Innovative Planning - managing a project, connecting with audience
- ◆ Visionary Communication - Information sharing, Planning communication
- ◆ Strategic Relationships - Understanding diversity, Public relations
- ◆ Dynamic Leadership – Conflicts, Change Management
- ◆ Persuasive Influence - Negotiation, Interpersonal communication
- ◆ Effective Coaching - Building consensus, developing others
- ◆ Team Collaboration - Listening skills, Collaborating within a team

The synergy between Toastmasters and Project Management

As seen above there are many instances where Toastmasters practices are favoured in project management and vice-versa and there is a strong synergy between them.

Project management standards describe the knowledge and skills that one would require to be a successful in projects. But these skills have to be practised in order to not only perform but also to hone them as a part of continuous improvement. Compared to hard skills, for e.g. scheduling, soft skills for e.g. communication and leadership are more difficult and take a longer time to acquire.

Project management standards and guides provide one with 'what' and 'how' of the knowledge and skills. These needs to be practised constantly and they can be done on the job and/or with organizations like Toastmasters which provides a mutually supportive peer-based environment to test and learn skills.

Communication

The Toastmasters platform is available for practising the knowledge and skills after a project manager acquires them from the standards and guides and/or by getting certified through these

bodies. The process is sequential, and both these disciplines are complimentary and synergistic. It is akin to 'cross training' which is a term often used in sports and athletics where one sport e.g. cycling supports another e.g. running. This applies to personal communication as well as that used for projects and organizations. It is valid for communication in the written form, through speech, visual media and non-verbal mode.



Exhibit 1 - Communication - Relating Project Management with Toastmasters

Leadership

Toastmasters looks at leadership in terms of positions and practices within the community. The practices in leadership are attained by taking up roles and various positions of a club executive committee. These opportunities are also available at a division, district and international level. Further, contests for speakers at various levels and their management for also provide an avenue for organization, resource management and leadership. Being a voluntary organization, leadership lessons and learning are similar to that of other professional organizations e.g. PMI and IPMA. They do not extend to actual projects or organizations though they would be valid and useful in them as well.

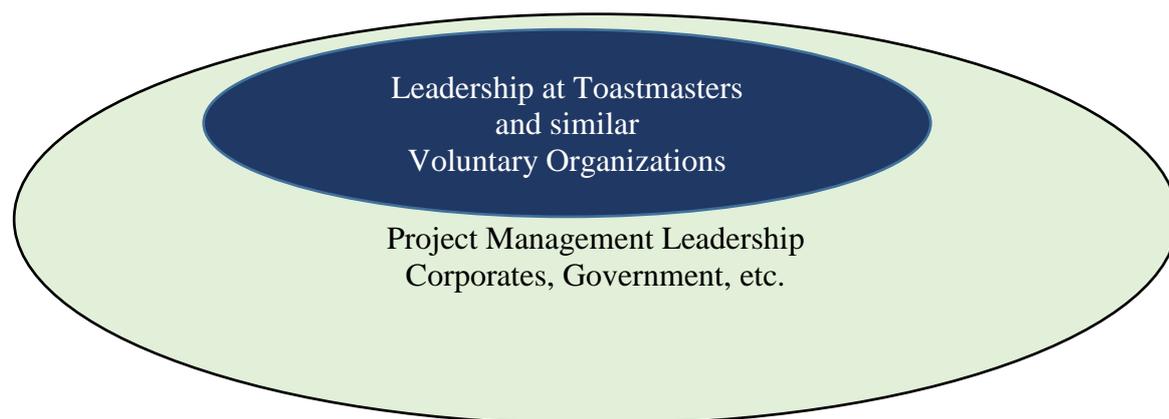


Exhibit 2 - Leadership - Relating Project Management with Toastmasters

The practices at Toastmasters could be considered as one of total knowledge and practices in leadership focussed at voluntary organizations more so those that are membership based. In

contrast to others in the corporate or government which demand a different level of leadership challenges.

In a sense, application of communication skills from Toastmasters is different from that of Leadership. In the former, one can utilise Toastmasters to practice the knowledge and skills acquired practically for all situations. In case of the latter, the skills acquired are rather specific and would apply largely to member based voluntary organizations and not so much to others.

PMI and Toastmasters

Many clubs have been started with the PMI Community. Most often these are open to all, with some of them focussing on project management related topics and issues. Examples of such clubs allied to PMI Chapters include those at UK, New York City, Dallas, Toronto, Melbourne, Portugal among others.

PMI takes assistance from Toastmasters to coach speakers and this was done at the PMI Global Congress held in Los Angeles in 2018.

Conclusion

The synergy between the disciplines of project management and practices at Toastmasters makes it useful for both of them to learn and practice from one another. Every attempt should be made for doing this by involving in each other's activities and acquiring knowledge and competency .

References

- The Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge 6th Edn. www.pmi.org
- The Individual Competency Baseline 4.0 International Project Management Association www.ipma.world
- Toastmasters International www.toastmasters.org

¹ The PMBOK® Guide 6th edn

² Individual Competence Baseline 4.0

About the Author



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Raju Rao, PMP, SCPM, is a social entrepreneur and a project management evangelist. He is the Founder of the Forum for Food Recovery and Xtraplus Solutions, a PM consulting and training company based in Chennai, India. Mr Rao has a B.Tech degree in Chemical Engineering from the National Institute of Technology, Trichy, India; an Advanced PM certificate from Stanford University; and a certificate from IIM Calcutta. He has more than 40 years' experience in engineering, process and project management and has been an active member of PMI for several years. He has held leadership positions in standards development, developing systems for awards governance, been a jury and has reviewed and mentored speakers for global congresses. Raju has been a President of South India section of ACE International.

Mr Rao has been a visiting and adjunct faculty for engineering and business schools in India.

Raju is a member of Toastmasters International and has mentored speakers on behalf of PMI for the North American Global Congress held in 2018.

He has presented numerous papers in global congresses and is the co-author of two books - *Project Management Circa 2025* published by PMI and *Organizational Project Management* published by Management Concepts, USA. He has been an International Correspondent for PM World Journal. He is also involved in writing fiction and has recently authored a novelette 'Triumph at Last'.

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