

***Positive Leadership in Project Management*¹**

Enhancing Project Team Competency and Effectiveness through Authentic Leadership – Part One²

By Frank Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow

It is generally assumed by many in the field of project management that a project manager is placed in a leadership position when assigned to a project. I think it's a fairly valid assumption, although there are many people, who are assigned to manage a project that may not agree 100% with that assumption. Regardless of one's view about the leadership role, a project manager must actually "manage the project" and with that role there is some inherent leadership responsibility. The size and complexity of the project is not the issue. Whether it's a small team or a large team, someone will be held accountable for the coordination of the work necessary to complete the project successfully. The assigned person can provide leadership value 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, "providing authentic leadership." Authentic leadership is about creating value within an organization. It means making things happen, motivating people to succeed, making a difference, even if you are not actually leading a team. The role of project manager is certainly associated with creating value and, in most cases, involves guiding and directing team members who are assigned to the project. With that in mind, let's focus on the need for a project manager to provide "authentic leadership, regardless of authority level.

According to Michael Hyatt, 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 a "leadership" title. I think many will agree that there are people in

¹This series of articles on Positive Leadership in Project Management is by Frank Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow, popular speaker and author of books on leadership in project management published by Wiley and IIL in the United States. Frank is widely known as the originator of the International Project Management Day, the annual celebrations and educational events conducted each November by PMI members, chapters and organizations around the world. Learn more in his profile at the end of this article.

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positions of leadership, but do not actually offer what we can truly refer to as “authentic leadership.” Additionally, emphasis on integrity is key and directly related to the continuing focus within the project management community on Professionalism, Social Responsibility and Ethical behavior.

Executives of most successful organizations will agree that strong and effective leadership is a major factor in the work effort and activities necessary to achieve the desired levels of established Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or Organizational Success Factors (OSFs). It is important to note that much of what a leader actually accomplishes cannot be measured using standard metrics such as on time, within budget, reduced defects, etc. Most of the metrics used by organizations focus on output, not on outcome. As an example, a manager saves the company \$10,000. That is the output of some activity. The question is, what was the outcome? What changed as a result of the \$10,000 savings? How did the company actually benefit? What was the \$10,000 used for and how did that use create value? Simply saving money, although a good thing, does not create value. The challenge is that value is not easy to define. It is associated with generating something that is useful, reliable, user friendly, improves safety, or in some way benefits the organization. We have to look past the typical financial measure and include “value metrics” when assessing performance.

Leadership is associated with value creation. It 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.

Many organizations measure leadership success through financial and productivity metrics. 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
- Fostering creativity and innovation
- Sharing knowledge and thought leadership
- Mentoring
- Encouraging personal improvement

Most organizations would like to see these characteristics displayed by their current leaders and in employees that will someday assume leadership positions. These behaviors are generally associated with the subject known as “Human Capital”. It is important for today’s leaders to fully understand how human capital contributes to value creation in an organization. Value creation refers to the development of programs within an organization and an environment that provides opportunities for sustained and profitable growth by utilizing the talents and creativity of employees. It’s all about improving capability and it starts with the people who perform the work. What is needed is an environment that is truly attractive to employees and one that will spark, nourish, and cultivate new ideas. That environment will also become very attractive to new clients and will provide a strong sense of loyalty among existing clients who will be able to easily differentiate an organization that emphasizes value creation from those that do not.

Value creation begins with leadership. This means vision, perseverance, and setting an example for the organizational employees or performers to clearly observe and desire to emulate. Vision is certainly a key factor in value creation but effective leaders need more than a vision. They need to demonstrate passion and tap into a seemingly unending supply of energy. They also need to display a common sense approach to issues and maintain 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
- Less investment risk
- Increased revenue and reduced cost
- Increased customer satisfaction
- Shorter cycle time to market
- Higher quality
- Increased new product development
- Greater employee morale
- Greater loyalty to the organization or brand
- Higher levels of retention

Essentially value creation links directly back to effective leadership.

So what is an effective leader? General Colin Powell observed the following about leadership:

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

The key here is to understand that decisions must be made in order to move forward but, not everyone will agree with a leader's decision. That goes with the territory. Trying to please everyone results, in many cases, 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 and show genuine concern for the opposing viewpoint. Respect and honesty is a formula that works in any environment.

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. To me 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, and the client. 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 endeavor?

- 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 trained and mentored to perform at levels that will meet client demands and achieve strategic goals. Strong, effective leaders surround themselves with good people who are innovative, willing to learn new skills and willing to test the limits now and then. This is the environment that will attract the best and encourage them 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 level of energy, a balanced ego, and the drive to get things done.”

This quote basically sums up the major factors that leaders should consider when selecting people for their teams. It should be understood that the leader was originally 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. A balance of both roles is necessary and when demonstrated, will attract strong team members who have the desire to create value, enhance the team’s performance, and develop their own leadership skills.

Part 2 of this article will be provided in the next edition.

About the Author



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Frank P. Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow is the Owner/Founder of Blue Marble Enterprises Inc. and Project Imaginers. Frank is an accomplished leader and contributor in the discipline of project management. He is the author of 12 published books, the past editor of the All PM Newsletter and the author of over 160 project management articles. Frank provides training and consulting internationally and has educated and entertained countless audiences with a special blend of project management knowledge and tasteful humor. He is also an experienced and well-known project management instructor and consultant and a member of the PMI® Seminars World team of trainers. Mr. Saladis' 35 year career includes 28.5 years with AT&T, 3 years with Cisco Systems, and more than 25 years as a professional trainer, facilitator, mentor and keynote speaker.

Frank is the Originator/Founder of International Project Management Day which launched in 2004 and has been growing in recognition yearly. The goal of International Project Management Day is the worldwide recognition of the many project managers and project teams in every industry including nonprofit organizations and health care who contribute their time, energy, creativity, innovation, and countless hours to deliver products, services, facilities, and provide emergency and disaster recovery services in every city and community around the world.

Frank was PMI's 2006 Person of the Year. Frank is a Project Management Professional, a graduate from the PMI Leadership Institute Master's class, and has contributed significantly to the organization's growth and knowledge base for more than 20 years. His leadership activity within PMI included the position of President of the New York City PMI chapter from 1991-2001, President of the Assembly of Chapter Presidents, and Chair of the Education and Training Specific Interest Group. He received the high honor of the "PMI Fellow Award" in October 2013 and received the very prestigious "PMI Distinguished Contribution Award" in October 2015.

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