

*Positive Leadership in Project Management*¹

Assessing Project, Program, and Portfolio Leadership²

By Frank Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow

There is no question that Project Management has become a key factor in the achievement of strategic and tactical organizational objectives. Project management exists in every type of business regardless of size and industry and has become a core competency for highly successful organizations. Over the years project management has evolved and advanced, and many new tools and techniques have been developed. Project managers must continue to upskill if they wish to remain viable in this continually changing project and business environment. One particular set of skills that is clearly an absolute necessity in the project management world is leadership. Organizations require people with strong leadership skills to provide guidance and management in several specific roles. The discipline of project management is actually a trilogy of distinct areas of expertise: Project Management, Program Management, and Portfolio Management. Each of these require a similar set of leadership skills and managerial competencies to survive the pressures of the position and its responsibilities. These functions are not new and have been included in business management for decades, but they have become more complex and each function requires a continuous enhancement of managerial skills.

Although there is no actual, defined, and documented analysis to substantiate this, the unofficial progression of the project management career begins with managing projects. Newly appointed project managers are generally assigned to implement small to midsize projects and, as experience develops, more complex projects are assigned. Eventually, project managers who demonstrate a combination of superior leadership, organizing, and problem-solving skills along with the ability to manage multiple projects are assigned to manage Programs. Programs can be extremely challenging and require a combination of highly developed skills. Leadership, coordination, integration, systems and strategic thinking, business acumen, and interpersonal skills are a necessity for success as a program manager. Continuing the career path, a program manager may assume the responsibilities of a Portfolio Manager. This position includes responsibility for ensuring the alignment of projects and programs with strategic objectives, making decisions that impact the organization's financial performance, reputation, brand and managing the effectiveness of project and program managers.

¹This article is one in a series on Positive Leadership in Project Management 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.

² How to cite this paper: Saladis, F. (2020). Assessing Project, Program, and Portfolio Leadership: Positive Leadership in Project Management. *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue X, October.

The described progression does not apply to all organizations and there is no universal project management succession process but most organizations seem to follow a similar approach for managing the career advancement of project managers.

In any case, there is a need to define and communicate the competencies required for success in each of the project management responsibility levels. It is also necessary to develop a process to ensure that competencies are attained and maintained

The following table provides a basis for assessing the essential competencies of the career minded project manager. Each skill area is related to the responsibilities of a project, program, or portfolio manager. Performance review processes will be different by organization. The table is basically a list of suggested areas that could be assessed and is not intended to be complete and comprehensive. Keep in mind the need for emotional intelligence when assessing performance and maintain a positive leadership perspective when communicating about performance.

Review each skill area listed in the table and modify or add skills as needed. The table can be used to assess your own current ability in each area and create an action plan to address your specific needs. Objectively, and honestly consider how you (or your employees/ project managers) demonstrate each of these skills. Determine potential actions that may be taken to improve areas where there may be deficiencies or skill is not demonstrated and develop a plan or schedule to assess progress and professional development.

Skill Area	Clearly Demonstrated (provide basis for assessment)	Needs improvement	Not demonstrated	Action for Improvement
Process Improvement and Best Practices				
1. Follows defined procedures, submits suggestions for improvement				
2. Manages assigned teams with consistency and fairness 3. Pursues quality and strives for continuous improvement				
4. Focuses on organizational success through innovation and				

development of internal best practices				
Strategic Leadership				
1. Understands and clearly supports the strategic objectives and vision of the organization				
2. Strives to be innovative. Offers new ideas and alternatives to meet the organization’s strategic and / or business needs				
3. Understands the key issues affecting the organization (Financial, Client demands, Governance, Politics, Products, Brand recognition, Sustainability, Employee satisfaction, Transparency, public opinion)				
4. Comprehends the larger picture and the higher level corporate point of view				
5. Understands the importance of organization change and demonstrates leadership as a change agent				
6. Ability to prepare a well-organized business case				
7. Ability to assess financial aspects of project proposals: NPV, IRR, Payback Period, Cost –Benefit analysis				
8. Maintains awareness of the political environment of the organization				
Team Building				
1. Develops strong working relationships with peers and subordinates				

2. Effectively resolves conflicts in a collaborative, win-win approach				
3. Fully understands the organization’s escalation protocol and resolves issues at the appropriate level. Does not unnecessarily involve other leaders or executives in conflict resolution.				
4. Regularly acknowledges other leaders, associates, and employees for their contributions to the organization				

Motivates the Team and the Organization				
1. Clearly demonstrates commitment to the organization’s goals and vision				
2. Demonstrates leadership by example (takes action, sets an example)				
3. Actively listens to other leaders, team members, and associates to obtain new ideas				
4. Provides opportunities for growth among the team by sharing knowledge and identifying opportunities for continued professional development,				
5. Actively offers mentoring and coaching to team members to assist in the development of leadership skills				
Project and Program Management Skills				
1. Ability to assess project or program complexity				

2. Ability to determine and manage project interdependencies				
3. Ability to manage the development of reliable schedule and cost estimates				
4. Ability to organize project or program personnel (assignment of responsibilities)				
5. Ability to utilize the experience and knowledge of the project team to develop a well-organized project or program plan				
6. Ability to assess project and or program health through reviews and performance evaluations				
7. Ability to engage project/ program stakeholders – internal and external				
8. Ability to communicate with executives and key stakeholders				

Regardless of assignment as a project manager, program manager, or portfolio manager, the skills required for success are similar and each skill should be reassessed regularly to determine where additional training, mentoring, or coaching is required. Professional development is an integral part of the project management career process and as responsibility increases, the skills required to sustain success will become more diverse.

Prepare yourself to meet the needs and expectations of your organization’s managerial team and develop you own personal plan for continuous competency improvement.

About the Author



Frank P. Saladis

New York, USA



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.

Frank can be contacted at saladismp@msn.com