

Positive Leadership in Project Management¹

Creative Change Leadership

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Creative Change Leadership, a relatively new approach to the challenges of today's businesses, has become necessary to deal with what the members of the business community refer to as the VUCA World – Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity. The term, or acronym "VUCA" has become part of the vocabulary of many project management practitioners, especially those who are focused on AGILE methods and techniques, and it has evolved from a corporate "buzzword" to a leadership mindset and a new way of thinking.

"VUCA is more than a buzzword! It is a way of thinking and approaching solutions to the problems of our digital and dynamic world."

Waltraud Glaeser - VUCA Expert

According to VUCAworld.org, the term has been further defined as:

V – Vision

U – Understanding

C- Clarity

A – Adaptability and Agility.

These four words make up the very foundation of strong leadership and the need to be adaptive and instill a culture of agility within an organization is essential for organizational success.

Gaia Grant, author of the article "The Creative Change Leader: Dealing with the complexities of the future," states that Creative Change Leadership is a relatively new approach that has been studied by Dr Gerard Puccio - International Centre of Studies in Creativity at the State University of New York. This type of leadership is described by Dr.

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.

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Puccio and a team of colleagues as “the ability to deliberately engage one’s imagination to define and guide a group towards a novel goal—a direction that is new for the group.

“Deliberately engage one’s imagination.” The challenge here is for the leader to not only engage his or her imagination, but to create an environment where everyone in the organization is engaging and using their imagination and creativity to add value and contribute to the continued success of the organization.

Engaging the imagination is not as easy as it sounds. Most people in business are deeply involved in daily issues, managing changes, and dealing with unplanned events and problems and they just don’t have the time to be creative and imaginative. Many decisions are made without much thought and the quickest solution to a problem is often selected. The missed opportunities resulting from the “jumping to solutions” technique are immeasurable.

Roger von Oech, author of a book entitled “A Whack on the Side of the Head” suggests that “An idea is a dangerous thing if it’s the only one you have” and “Look for the second right answer.” <https://creativethink.com/>

Creative Change Leadership requires leaders and teams to dig a little deeper to find the best possible solution to a problem or to create the next best product or service. It’s necessary to provide team members with some time for ideas to incubate, to study a situation, and allow their minds to generate lots of possibilities. This can be a very enjoyable and productive experience.

A technique that helps to generate ideas is to create a sense of present mindedness. The simple definition here is to create a period of time for a team, during which stress is reduced, people are relaxed, and there is an openness to offer suggestions. When people are in a relaxed state, their ability to generate new ideas, and recall information from their memory is very enhanced. The result is the generation of new ideas or enhancements to existing products or processes.

There is no question that today’s business environment requires organizations to “innovate quickly to keep up with the rate of growth in technology, digitization, and product development. Therefore, today’s leaders must create a “Change Ready Organization.” Everyone should be involved in developing new ideas. The steady generation of new ideas keeps the organization flexible and adaptable.

It is important for organizational leaders to be aware that many, if not most, newly generated ideas will not move forward to the stage of actual development but, the constant inflow of new ideas and the combination of some of these ideas will produce some truly amazing breakthroughs. The key is to create a culture of imaginative and innovative thinking.

The process of “ideation”, a form of innovative thinking, is how many organizations develop new programs, products, and solutions to problems. Ideation refers to the entire creative process, beginning with idea generation, which is mainly done through

brainstorming. Ideas go through a type of filtering process during which the ideas are assessed for feasibility, cost, time to implement, relationship to the actual problem, risks, and overall business value.

Companies such as Apple are known for their innovative thinking. They encourage creative thinking and innovation by allowing employees to spend time working on personal ideas or projects that result in the development of new products or services.

Creative Change Leaders understand the value of ideation and establish an environment for creative thinkers to feel safe about submitting ideas. This environment also sharpens the ability of employees to assess the business environment and to detect trends and changes in customer interests and expectations.

The work of Change Leadership: There are two main factors of Change Leadership:

1. Manage the stress and distress of the people going through the change. People generally resist change and are often deeply affected by it emotionally. Leaders must engage in emotional intelligence before, during, and after a change initiative. This will help with the conditioning and evolution to a change ready workforce.
2. Mobilizing people in the organization to do authentic and adaptive work. The leader must also motivate the workforce or team to perform continuous value-adding work and to adjust direction as the business environment changes.

W. Edwards Deming, a famous Quality “Guru” once said “It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory.” Someone modified that quote to a more abrupt and straight forward version “Change or die.” Today’s organizations, including government and non-profits must become much more change ready, agile, and adaptive. There really is no choice.

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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