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Effective Project Leadership in a VUCA World
Positive Leadership in PM
by Frank Saladis

Positive Leadership in Project Management [1]

Effective Project Leadership – Enhancing Project Team Competency and Effectiveness in a VUCA World [2]

By Frank Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow

Leadership capability is a core competency of the project manager and project managers, along with everyone in a leadership position, must continue to upskill to remain marketable and keep pace with the changing business environment. The workplace, as we all know, is not the same as it was two years ago and it continues to change. The skills employers are looking for in new project managers, other new hires, and current employees as well, are changing or in some way being revised every year.

According to a Brandminds blog, the top ten skills employers are seeking for future jobs (now through 2025) are:

1. Performance development
2. Peer-to-peer and team coaching
3. S-learning curve management
4. Communication, Empathy and emotional support
5. Employee growth culture
6. Engagement and retaining
7. Retraining and career coaching
8. Diversity and inclusion support
9. Skills gap anticipation
10. Agility

Top 10 essential leadership skills for managers for 2023 - BRAND MINDS

Notice that the skills listed are very much focused on the "soft side" of leadership, the interpersonal capabilities. These skills and personal qualities, when demonstrated, will clearly make a difference in the overall performance of teams and individuals during any project implementation, especially with the people who are now entering the workforce.

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[1]This 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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Studies indicate that Millennials and Generation Z make up the largest groups in today workforce. According to many sources, these groups have very different expectations regarding the workplace environment, management support and the specific job they have been hired to perform. The priorities and expectations of these groups require organizational leaders to adapt their style to effectively engage these new employees while continuing to address the needs of the previous generations who remain part of the workforce. These expectations include:

- Alignment of values – a connection between the values of the organization and the values of the individual
- Skills development and professional growth
- Flexible work hours
- Opportunity to express ideas and offer creative and innovative ways to enhance and improve the organization.
- Perform meaningful work that is personally satisfying.

The changing and expanding expectations of the workforce can be significantly challenging, even for the "seasoned" leader.

All of these changes are associated with one of the latest acronyms that is currently bouncing around the business environment: VUCA

- Volatility
- Uncertainty
- Complexity
- Ambiguity

So now we need the "VUCA Leader". Another leadership style that will meet the needs of the rapidly changing business environment.

VUCA leadership is the ability to shift and respond to changes in the business environment with corresponding actions that are focused, quick, and agile. The reality is, people who are considered to be strong, successful leaders are, in effect, VUCA Leaders.

The elements of the VUCA environment are not new to leaders who have been effective in their roles and have the ability to create change, adapt to change, and motivate their teams to except change.

The qualities of the VUCA Leader:

- ✓ Self-awareness – The VUCA leader obtains feedback from his or her team and adjusts based on that feedback.
- ✓ Ability to engage – Mobilize an elite, diverse, and motivated team by seeking suggestions, encouraging participation in problem solving and creating an environment of innovation and creativity

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- ✓ Promotes professional development – Helping team members to move forward in their careers.
- ✓ Change ready – Accepting change, creating beneficial change, assisting the team and the organization to adapt as change occurs.
- ✓ Manage Conflict – The VUCA Leader know that volatility and uncertainty will result in disagreement and conflicting approaches to issues. Ability to find solutions through listening, facilitation, and empathy is essential.
- ✓ Value Creation - Value creation is a core element of leadership. This means communicating a vision, demonstrating passion of the vision, perseverance at all times, and setting an example for the team or organization's employees.

The focus on value creation will provide the VUCA Leader with the ability to manage, to a great extent, the four elements of the VUCA environment and 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

In the uncertain times we are experiencing, it is important for today's leaders to focus on the development of their leadership skills. Continuous professional development is necessary to succeed in a VUCA world. Take the time to perform a self-assessment to determine how ready you are to lead through uncertainty and identify the gaps that may hold you back. Then determine what is needed to close those gaps and increase your VUCA leadership capabilities. Consider your ability to think critically, to anticipate and "see around corners", to sustain a high level of energy, and to keep your ego in check.

Leadership SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis technique, commonly used in the strategic planning process, is also an effective model for mapping out a strategy for personal development. Organizational Leaders use the model to develop a framework from which to determine their long-term objectives. Project managers and team leaders can use the model to analyze their leadership and managerial abilities and create a plan for developing new skills or for enhancing existing skills. It also assists in identifying areas that could cause significant team performance problems.

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Leadership SWOT Analysis Template

Strengths	Opportunities
What skills do I possess that help me accomplish my goals? Examples: • Communication • Presentation skills • Planning • Organizing • Listening • Facilitating • Problem Solving • Innovation and Entrepreneurship • Relationship building • Influencing skills • Managing Change • Conflict management	What opportunities exist at the project level and at the personal level? Examples: • Additional revenue and sales at project completion • New and more challenging project assignment • Sharing of knowledge with others in the organization • Promotion of team members • Promotion to higher level position • Increased customer satisfaction • Greater levels of personal satisfaction and self –worth • Coaching of team members • New ideas for products

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Weaknesses	Threats
What weaknesses have I noticed or have been defined through feedback? Examples: • Failure to follow through on promises • Technical knowledge is limited • Slow response to team requests • Lack of visibility • Failure to provide feedback on a timely basis • Lack of availability to the team • Micromanaging the team • Failure to set clear expectations • Failure to fulfill promises and commitments • No Self assessment	What threats exist that should be removed? Examples: • Project failure due to poor leadership • Loss of job assignment • Loss of key project team members • Project cancellation • Loss of personal credibility and integrity • Personal issues • Aggressive peers • Difficult clients • Non-supportive sponsor or project executive • Reacting to issues instead of anticipating • Always in a catch-up mode

A leadership SWOT analysis will assist the project manager in identifying where additional training, support, or mentorship may be necessary. The key is to exploit strengths, resolve and strengthen weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and remove or minimize threats that may stop your momentum.

Take the first step in becoming a VUCA Leader by conducting your personal SWOT analysis. Define the action items needed to increase your "VUCA" skills and execute those action items with a mission and focus on your continued success. Who knows, maybe, in the near future, there will be an actual VUCA Leader Certification! Anything can happen in a world of uncertainty!

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About the Author

Frank P. Saladis

New York, USA

Frank P. Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow is the Owner/Founder of Blue Marble Enterprizes 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 saladispmp@msn.com