

Project Manager to Project Leader? and the Rocky Road Between...

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Introduction

Issue: Is it Leadership or Management that is most needed for conducting projects in the 1990s and beyond?

In recent years there has been a spate of publications on "Leadership" and "Team Building" by numerous authors such as Bennis, Drucker, Covey, Depree, Byham, McLean and Weitzel, Dilenschneider, Fisher, Batten and others. Much of this has been directed to the "Captains of North American Industry". However, in our opinion, leadership, management and team building, while all closely allied, are sufficiently different in the project environment that they require special study.

The old image of a powerful project personality with a burning vision of the future state rounding up the troops and charging off to Nirvana, is hardly consistent with modern management thinking. Consequently, some of the current concepts of leadership and attributes required of the leader of an enterprise need to be carefully rethought when applied in the project context. That is, if a project is to succeed and be viewed as successful. So the question is: What sort of leadership or management is the most relevant to project management in the decade of the 1990s and beyond?

Considering the extent of management literature published in recent years, it might be thought that this is no longer an issue. However, few writers actually define leadership and the context is generally not in the project environment. To understand the difference, it is necessary to examine both the requirements of a project team and the changes that occur through the project life cycle.

Evolution of Leadership

The concepts of how best to function while in charge of an organization or enterprise have steadily evolved over the last fifty years. According to Dilenschneider¹, the different decades may be characterized as shown in Table 1. From this it will be seen that there has been a progression from "administrative command" to "team leadership", a change driven by an enlightened work force and a need to be fiercely competitive.

Interestingly, while the authors noted earlier have written whole books around leadership, only Batten attempts to actually define leadership. Nevertheless, these authors do seem to agree that "vision" is a primary ingredient. After that it may be variously: passion, integrity, curiosity, daring (Bennis²); practical values, awareness, timing, objectivity, empowerment and motivation, articulation (Dilenschneider³); or (according to John Sculley⁴) ideas, direction, and inspiring people.

In the interests of maximizing competitive productivity, the presumption is that those who are being led are being motivated to follow rather than coerced to do so. Interestingly by way of contrast, the European view on leadership is simply that whoever is at the head of the pack is a leader, regardless of whether the pack is motivated to follow voluntarily.

1950-60	1970-80	1990-??
Administrators	Managers	Leaders
• By tradition • Chain of command • Stable • Introspective • Apprenticeship	• By exception • Ad-hoc • Turbulent • Market driven • Mentoring	• By vision • Instant • Sustaining • Customer driven • Team work

Table 1: The Evolution of Enterprise Leadership

Batten defines leadership as "Development of a clear and complete system of expectations in order to identify, evoke and use the strengths of all resources in the organization - the most important of which is people."⁵ Can't argue with that, but not very helpful in the project context. John Naisbit probably came closer to a definition of a project leader with his description "An ability to attract followers..., ...a clear destination, and ...a timetable."⁶

A Definition of Project Leadership

An understanding of the importance of "people" to the success of a project has developed rapidly over the last twenty five years.



Figure 1: Major Project Leadership Skills

The major thrusts are perhaps best portrayed graphically as shown in Figure 1.⁷ With these attributes in mind, we suggest the following definition as a simple, yet comprehensive, distillation of leadership thought in the context of a project.

Project leadership is an ability to get things done well through others.

It requires:

- A vision of the destination
- A compelling reason to get there
- A realistic timetable, and
- A capacity to attract a willing team

Leader vs. Manager

Is there a difference between a project leader and a project manager? PMI defines a project manager as one who is responsible for project management..., and project management as the art of directing and coordinating human and material resources...⁸ [Note: Since this paper was written, PMI has modified its definition of project management.] These definitions tend to focus on the administrative aspects of project work.

Managers focus on	Leadership focuses on
• Goals & objectives • Telling how and when • Shorter range • Organization & structure • Autocracy • Restraining • Maintaining • Conforming • Imitating • Administrating • Directing & Controlling • Procedures • Consistency • Risk-avoidance • Bottom line	• Vision • Selling what and why • Longer range • People • Democracy • Enabling • Developing • Challenging • Originating • Innovating • Inspiring trust • Policy • Flexibility • Risk-opportunity • Top line
Good managers do the things right	Good leadership does the right thing

Sources: Adapted from Warren Bennis *On Becoming a Leader*, Addison Wesley, 1989; J. W. McLean & William Weitzel *Leadership, Magic or Method?*, AMACOM, 1991; Stephen R. Covey *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Summit Books, 1991.

Table 2: Differences in Style

Indeed, the authors noted above see a distinction between the style of leaders and managers according to their primary focus. The respective positions of leaders and managers on a number of issues are shown listed in Table 2.^{9,10,11} It is a truism that leadership focuses on doing “the right things” while managers focus on doing “the things right”.

Collectively, project leadership and project “managership” may be referred to as project "stewardship". To be a steward is to hold something in trust for another. Thus, project stewardship may be defined as a willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the project organization while placing service towards the goals of the project above self-interest. It entails holding accountability for your people without exacting harsh compliance from them. In the planning phases, “managership”, as described, has its limitations. Leadership overcomes these limitations. In the producing phases, leadership per se also has its limitations, and “managership” is more appropriate.

Leadership and the Project Life Cycle

It is clear that leadership is important to the success of a project because leadership is essentially about motivating people. It is also clear that what may be characterized as “managership” is equally important because this is about getting things done. Can the two be reconciled? For this it is necessary to turn to a fundamental principle underpinning the concept of project management.

Project management is a structured but flexible process for producing a new end result. Its success depends on the application of a two step sequence: First plan - then produce. This is the genesis of every successful project life cycle.

For example, in the "planning" phases of the project, the project leader conducts the project team and other main stakeholders through formal and informal decision making in order to achieve agreed goals and objectives. This process involves a high degree of interaction and formulation of organizational strategies. It takes time and is challenging. The development of the resulting technical requirements may require a number of iterations and re-runs. This is especially true at the outset, in order to flush out the "customer's needs". Therefore, "visioning", "intelligence gathering" and developing "a compelling reason" and “appropriate strategies”, are the all-important issues. These issues also form the essential basis for effective team development.

In this, project management is near-unique. For while a CEO or other enterprise leader may develop his "team" once (or so) in his/her tenure, the project leader must be conscious of the "Project Team Development Cycle" for *every* project and throughout the project life cycle. Thus, planning is about optimizing the effectiveness of the project and its results, i.e. “doing the right things”.

On the other hand, the real work of task execution gets done in the "producing" phases. In these phases, the paramount requirement is an ability to satisfy the customer(s) by conducting the efforts of the project team towards the required product(s) under typical project constraints. This is achieved by consistently "getting the message out", which is also the essential basis for project control. Thus, producing, or management of production, is about optimizing the project process, i.e. “doing the things right”.

To get a project started off right, the project manager must display leadership. However, the style of leadership does need to change as the project progresses through its life cycle. Indeed, there comes a point in time when "managership" may be more important than "leadership". It will be observed that "information" (intelligence gathering) in the planning phases, and "communications" (getting the message out) in the producing phases, i.e. intercommunication, is an essential skill for both the project leader and the project manager. Table 3 shows the progression back from leadership to managership in

greater detail, and Figure 2 shows the relationship to the typical major tasks of the project life cycle and corresponding organizational strategies.

Phase	Major Attributes/Emphasis	Leadership Style/Blend
Feasibility Study (Pre-formulation)	• Sense of vision • “Big Picture” (conceptual) • Analysis	• Visionary • Creates future • Empowerment • Expansive
Conceptual (Formulation)	• Listening • Analysis • Alignment	• Analytical • Listener • Change master • Convergence
Development	• Participative/Acceptance and commitment • Cooperative	• Team builder • Power and influence • Integrator
Execution	• Re-alignment	• Decision maker • Balances work and fun • Trustworthiness • Team and synergy
Finishing	• Transfer of product and information	• Administrator • Closure

Table 3: Leadership and the Project Life Cycle

Leadership and Team Building

An effective project team leader is a “social architect” who understands the interaction of organizational and behavioral variables, can foster a climate of active participation and can minimize dysfunctional conflict. To be effective, the team leader must identify major issues associated with three dimensions. These are team related with emphasis on behavioral aspects such as team structure, trust and respect, or barriers to team development and so on; project task and resource related such as goals and objectives, planning and scope management; and organizational. The latter includes organizational development and involving senior management to ensure visibility, resource availability and overall support for the project through out its life cycle. These conditions are accomplished through effective intercommunication which is pivotal in the project management process.

But what of the other essential ingredient, the team, the followers? Ideally, the more the team can be motivated and empowered to “take the bull by the horns”, the more productive they become and the less direction and control is required. This has led to the concept of Self Directed Work Teams (SDWTs).

According to Batten¹², there are five things that members of a successful team need from their leader:

- Expectation (Tell me what you expect of me)
- Opportunity (Give me an opportunity to perform)
- Feedback (Let me know how I am doing)
- Guidance (Give me guidance when and where I need it)
- Reward (Reward me according to my contribution)

Given these prerequisites, both the members of a project team, the followers, and their leader can be expected to progress and develop interactively. The leader focuses successively on telling, selling, gelling and producing project activities, in which the ideal is for the team to become an SDWT.

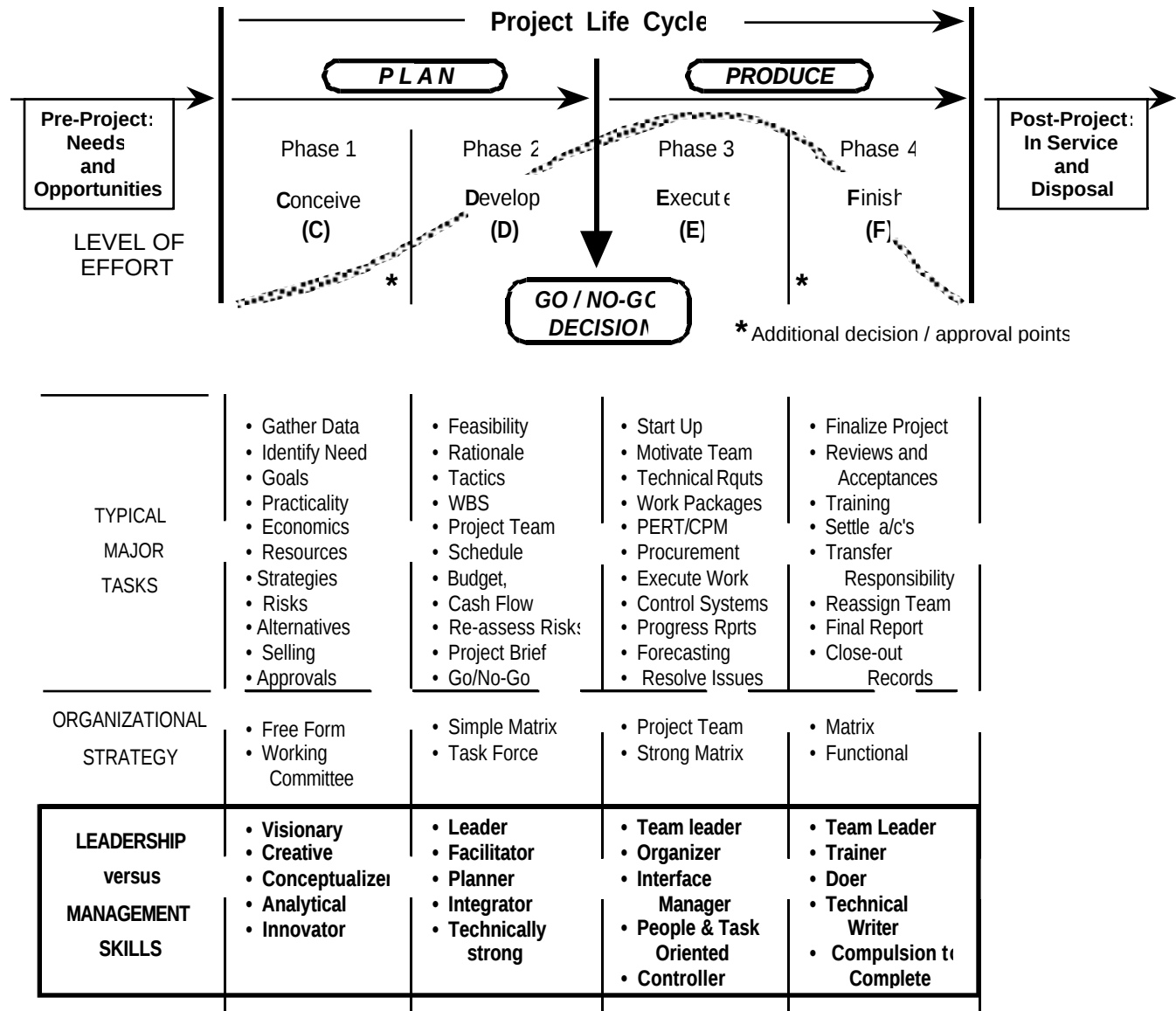


Figure 2: The Evolution of Tasks and People through the Project Life Cycle

However, this only occurs as a result of careful team development and typically advances interactively through four distinct phases of team leadership and “followership” evolution. The four phases of team development have been characterized as “forming, storming, norming and performing”.

In the first, members of the team will be quiet, polite, guarded but business-like. In the second, there tends to be conflict over control, individuals confront one another and, as a result, either become entrenched or opt out. In the third, a semblance of organization emerges with the establishment and acceptance of procedures, team skills and focus on issues. In the final phase, the team settles down to open and productive effort with trust, flexibility, and a mature closeness which enables self-direction.

However, this only takes place if the leader modifies his or her level of directive versus supportive behavior in response to this progressive evolution of team followership.

Figure 3^{13,14} shows the leader's successive efforts in telling, selling, gelling and producing and the leader's accompanying level of supportive versus directive leadership behavior consistent with followership development in each of the four phases.

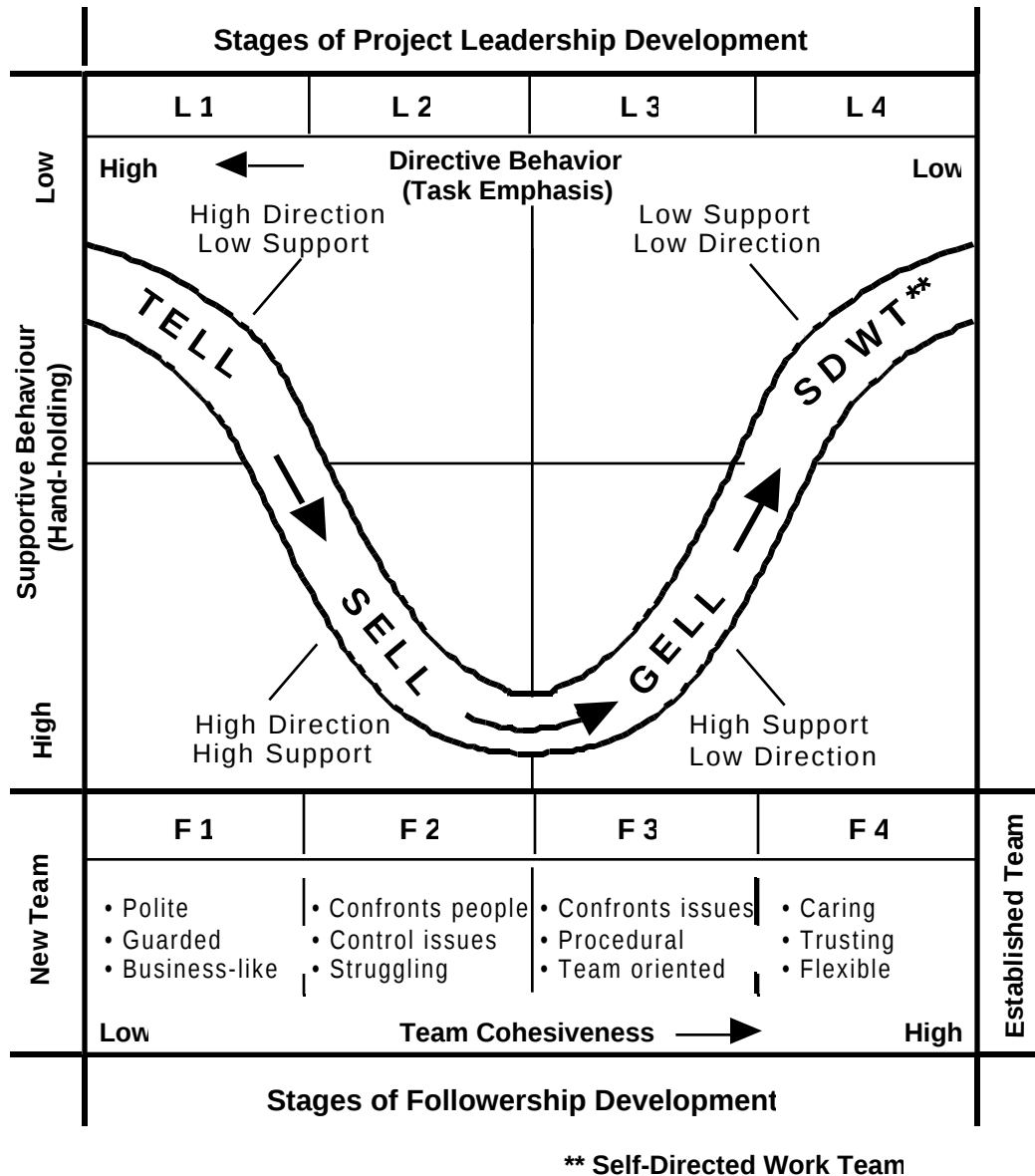


Figure 3: Stages of Leadership and “Followership” Development

Impact on Decision Making

According to Dilenschneider¹⁵, the power of consent is gaining significance and is a rapidly emerging force of importance to leaders, just as consensus is waning. Consent can be driven by genuine humanitarian motives, but can also be driven by self-interest, or both, especially when consent hinges on the self-interest side of humanitarian or humanistic concerns. However, viewed from the perspective of members of a project team living in a world of self-interest, they are more efficient than ever in deciding what is in their own self-interest. They will say: First give me a good reason to buy into such-and-such a decision.

Therefore, in the interests of effectiveness or efficiency, consensus will remain a vital tool for dealing with visionary and strategic issues, requiring more effort spent in gathering intelligence. However, an increasing number of performance issues will be determined by consent-style opinion voting within the team.

The corollary with the progression from leadership to “managership” in the progression from project planning to project production can be clearly seen. Consistent with this change in style, "consensus" is more effective and preferred in the planning phases, in order to win broad commitment, but "consent" is more efficient in the producing phases because of its more favorable impact on the project constraints of cost and time. Table 4 shows a comparison between consensus and consent.

Conclusions¹⁶

The “planning” phases of a project involve the crystallizing of project goals, the development of the concepts and technical requirements and planning for implementation. These activities typically require a number of iterations and re-runs to flush out the “customer’s needs” and optimize project effectiveness. A definition of project leadership is proposed in the paper.

Consensus	Consent
• Best for nurturing a business enterprise • Is interactive, dynamic • Requires near-universal agreement • Is inherently slow • Also has more subtle impacts • Must accommodate fringe elements • Permits “voyage of discovery” and attitude cultivation • Satisfies mutual and self-interests	• Best for projects, especially when people want answers • Uses established relationships • Targets individual specialist opinions • Can convert or respond to a crisis quickly • Has clearly defined impacts • Allows overriding of unreasonable adversaries • Requires reliable information gathering and “homework” • Focuses on project objectives

Table 4: Consensus versus Consent

The real work of task execution gets done in the implementation or “producing” phases of the project. In these phases, the focus is on efficiency in satisfying the customer(s) needs under classic project

constraints. This is achieved through effective communications, the essential basis for project control. Thus, the key to success here is through efficient “managership” of the project.

Project leadership and project “managership” are both essential to project management success, and which is appropriate when is clearly tied to the project life cycle.. A suitable collective term for describing the conduct of a project throughout its life cycle appears to be “project stewardship”.

The style of “stewardship” must be responsive to the corresponding development of the project team as it moves towards an SDWT. Correlation in four progressive phases are described as well as a concomitant shift in decision making style from consensus to consent.

Thus, modern project leadership and project “managership” are both essential for managing projects in the 1990s and beyond. To be successful, project managers will do well to understand the nature of each and fit their style and decision-making according to the phase in the project life cycle.

References

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