

## **Leadership and Its Role in the Success of Project Management**

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*Within the last decade, research has been conducted to explore the leadership profiles of project managers, as well as to examine the body of evidence presented in order to discern statistical significance between the leadership of project managers and success in their projects. Findings have indicated that various traits falling under the umbrella of leadership are associated with successful project managers. Relevant research also has shown that there is a strong correlation between the leadership skills of project managers and the success of their projects. Both findings have been cross-referenced with individual leadership styles of project managers.*

### **LEADERSHIP AND ITS ROLE IN THE SUCCESS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

The effectiveness of a project manager is based on a whole host of specific circumstances of a situation and the attributes of a team; thus, of course, a universal method is impossible to define (Larson & Gray, 2014). However, in *Project management: The managerial process* (2014), Larson & Gray describe a set of eight core traits that they believe can lead toward success in project management: (1) being a systems thinker, (2) having personal integrity, (3) being proactive, (4) having a high emotional intelligence (EQ), (5) having a general business perspective, (6) using effective time management, (7) being a skillful politician, and (8) being an optimist. Larson & Gray (2014) also emphasize the importance of an effective project manager's ability to "walk the talk." The leadership styles, behavior, and attitudes evidenced by project managers are very critical because their daily actions influence the behavior and success of their team members.

### **LEADERSHIP PROFILES OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECT MANAGERS**

A determination of the individual qualities or traits consistent with the leadership profiles of successful managers can be assessed based upon the results of a wide body of research. These leadership profiles can also be categorized via specific project types, and used to predict further research in the area.

## **LEADERSHIP PROFILES**

In the last decade, various articles have sought to examine the leadership profiles of successful project managers. In Anantamula (2010) multiple research methods were used including (1) a literature review, (2) an Interpretative Structural Modeling (ISM) data collection tool used to model a project manager's management and individual leadership role, and (3) a questionnaire that highlights relationships among factors independent of the model created through the ISM. The literature review conducted in this data was found to have a common list of significant people-related project performance factors used in project managers' leadership, including creating clarity in communication, defining roles and responsibilities, communicating expectations, employing consistent practices, establishing trust, facilitating support, and managing outcomes (Anantamula, 2010).

Taken as a whole, these combined methods of research found that a project manager's ability to define roles and responsibilities was the most important leadership quality employed by successful project managers (Anantamula, 2010). Research showed that project managers can play an important leadership role through their ability to motivate team members. By motivating the team, they create a cooperative environment conducive to success, which, in turn, inspires trust. Trust encourages team collaboration and innovation (Anantamula, 2010).

Trivellas & Drimoussis (2013) also chose to examine this research area, focusing on the behavioral and managerial competency profiles of project managers and their success. Their initial literature review identified fifteen behavioral competencies which are important in the practice of project management, listed as: leadership, engagement, self-control or self-management assertiveness, relaxation, openness, creativity, results orientation, efficiency, consultation, negotiations, conflict and crisis, reliability, values appreciation, and ethics. These researchers built the framework for their study from the Competing Values Model (CVM) used to theorize the concept of organizational effectiveness (Trivellas & Drimoussis, 2013). Trivellas & Drimoussis (2013) also measured behavioral competencies using a questionnaire based on the International Competence Baseline - International Project Management Association (ICB-IPMA); worked to conceptualize managerial competencies and leadership styles/roles (e.g. adaptive, task, etc.) using the Management Skills Assessment Instrument (MSAI) (e.g. teamwork, managing the future, competitiveness, etc.). They employed a research tool based on Goleman's four dimensions of emotional intelligence (EQ) reflecting personal competencies (self-awareness, self-management) and social competencies (social awareness, relationship management).

Trivellas & Drimoussis' (2013) research found that successful project managers had a broad range of strengths showing high levels of behavioral, managerial, and emotional abilities. In particular, the behavioral competencies related to efficiency, values appreciation, and openness. The managerial competencies of teamwork, customer service, system control, and the emotional competency of social awareness, as well as having a task leadership style, best highlighted the most successful project managers (Trivellas & Drimoussis, 2013).

## **LEADERSHIP PROFILES AND PROJECT TYPE**

In research by Muller & Turner (2007), different leadership profiles were examined in order to determine if what characterized a successful project manager might be dependent on the project type. Their work also used a model of intellectual, emotional, and managerial competence (respectively, IQ, EQ, and MQ) to identify the leadership styles of successful project managers (Muller & Turner, 2007). Muller & Turner (2007) interviewed managers and supervisors in order to identify factors used by individuals in these positions to choose effective project managers for different project types. They also conducted a web-based questionnaire to determine the leadership style used by project managers who were deemed successful in different project areas. Muller & Turner (2007) supported the theory that different leadership styles were in fact appropriate for different project areas. The most successful managers were determined to have high emotional competence (EQ), although managerial competence was sometimes important. Conscientiousness, sensitivity, and communication were other significant

factors that led to successful results (Muller & Turner, 2007). Depending on the project types, successful project managers were found to have the following leadership qualities:

- emotional resilience and communication in projects of medium complexity, and sensitivity in projects of high complexity,
- motivation in repositioning projects, and self-awareness and communication in renewal projects,
- sensitivity and communication in fixed price contracts, and influence and communication in re-measurement contracts,
- conscientiousness and communication throughout the life-cycle of a project, while the ability to manage resources was more important in the design state, and motivation and sensitivity were more important in the commissioning stage,
- motivation and managing resources in home-based, multi-cultural projects,
- conscientiousness in engineering projects (Muller & Turner, 2007).

## **FUTURE PROSPECTS**

An interesting article of research to build upon these concepts is that of Lloyd-Walker and Walker (2010), researchers who chose to review this area of study with the mindset of the changing twenty-first century and the future of project management. Their research was conducted via a pilot study that explored ways of identifying and developing key talent, and through the early results of a larger study conducted via interviews of experienced project leaders and managers who supervised project leaders (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011). Both of these studies showed a link between what was determined as characteristics of authentic leadership (i.e., leadership that led to results beyond the traditional adherence to quality, timeliness, and budget, but also to retained knowledge, ethical behavior, and organizational sustainability) and successful project managers (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011).

Lloyd-Walker and Walker (2011) thus proposed a capability maturity model (CMM, widely used in IT; social capital; and knowledge management) defining authentic leadership as value driven, authentic, aware, resilient, relationship centered, fair and unbiased, realistic and confident, positive and optimistic, and consistent. The model also relied on a VAT platform which should be achieved through this type of leadership, consisting of shared values, affective commitment, and trust (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011).

## **LEADERSHIP AS A FACTOR IN THE SUCCESS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

Linking the association between leadership characteristics and successful project managers offers invaluable information. Next, the issue must be further explored by studying whether owning these particular leadership qualities automatically makes a project manager successful.

## **LEADERSHIP AND PROJECT SUCCESS**

In 2008, Geoghegan & Dulewicz examined the relationship between project managers' leadership competencies and the ability of these competencies to determine project success. This research utilized both the leadership dimensions questionnaire (LDQ) and the project success questionnaire (PSQ) (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008). The leadership dimensions questionnaire served as the basis of the investigation due to its ability to denote a respondent's leadership competencies based on fifteen dimensions (i.e. seven emotional competency [EQ] dimensions, five managerial competency [MQ] dimensions, and three intellectual competency [IQ] dimensions; this method having been used in various military forces and proven as a reliable instrument in past research) (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008). The project success questionnaire was additionally employed to gather data on project success. This tool determines project success via technical correctness, performing as intended, ability to interface effectively with the client, schedule, budget, client satisfaction, and the project's impact on organizational effectiveness (i.e., directly benefits intended users) (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008).

Geoghegan & Dulewicz's (2008) work thusly observed the strongest correlations between leadership characteristics and project success with the following characteristics:

- In determining project success in usability, managing resources (MQ), empowering (MQ), developing (MQ), and motivation (EQ) were highly significant, and critical analysis (IQ), influencing (EQ), self-awareness (EQ), and sensitivity were also significant.
- In determining project success through project delivery, managing resources (MQ) and empowering (MQ) were found to be significant.

Subsequently, the importance of managerial competencies and emotional competencies in determining project success was ascertained, while it was also curiously found that intellectual competencies were least important as a characteristic of leadership in determining success (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008).

## **LEADERSHIP STYLE AND PROJECT SUCCESS**

An additional area to examine under this topical umbrella is that of a project manager's specific leadership style as a determinant of project success. Jiang (2014) observed this idea through an evaluation of research conducted regarding project style, project success factors and their link with leadership styles, and the influence of leadership styles on project success in order to determine a correlation between leadership style and project success. Jiang's (2014) work examined a historical summary of leadership theories along with the relevant leadership styles they defined: trait (leadership style not defined), behavior or styles (i.e. laissez-fair, democratic, autocratic, bureaucratic), contingency (i.e. directive, supportive, participative, achievement-oriented), visionary or charismatic (i.e. transactional, transformational, laissez-faire), emotional intelligence (i.e. visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, commanding), and competency (i.e. engaging, involving, goal-oriented) (Jiang, 2014). The study also examined emotional competencies (EQ), managerial competencies (MQ), and intellectual competencies (IQ), as well as project success factors (e.g. project mission, schedule and plans, personnel, communication, troubleshooting, etc.), and the results of recent research examining leadership style and project success (Jiang, 2014).

Jiang's (2014) analysis established support for the existence of a relationship between a project manager's leadership style and its influence, or even control over, project success factors (Jiang, 2014). In Jiang's research (2014), a basic model was created showing how a project manager's leadership influences teamwork, which then influences project success; however, it is important to remember that project type also plays a determinant role between teamwork and project success. For example, if a project manager is new to a project type this may influence teamwork negatively and thus reduce project success, but if the project manager is able to choose the correct leadership style, he/she may be able to weaken the negative effect through careful management and other competencies (Jiang, 2014). Thus, although much of the research does not focus on a project manager's leadership as a factor in the success of a project, Jiang (2014) found that it is indeed an influence on various relevant factors including teamwork and client communication. Jiang (2014) also distinguished a project manager's leadership style as a determinant in project success into two mechanisms, "direct: appropriate leadership can benefit project success with corresponding competencies [and] indirect: appropriate leadership improves teamwork, which can help achieve successful project" (Jiang, 2014, p. 54-55).

## **CONCLUSION**

In Larson & Gray's (2014) work, a succinct list of eight core traits linked to successful project managers was identified, as well support for the non-existence of a universal method of project management capable of leading to success in all cases. Larson & Gray's (2014) work emphasized the importance of a project manager's leadership ability. Strong effective leadership creates a cooperative

team environment in which employees are encouraged to participate, grow, learn, and work together to reach the ultimate goal of organizational success.

## **LEADERSHIP PROFILES**

Research by Anantatmula (2010), Trivellas and Drimoussis (2013), and Muller and Turner (2007) determined that qualities present in the leadership profiles of successful project managers primarily focused on sets of intellectual competencies (IQ), emotional competencies (EQ), and managerial competencies (MQ). Although traits of leadership profiles of successful project managers as a whole and those of successful project managers relevant to project type provide slightly different conclusions, the conclusive body of evidence from these studies seems to regard factors that can be processed under those of emotional competencies as the most important leadership traits found in successful project managers, and factors of managerial competencies are also important, even when broken down by project type (Anantatmula, 2010; Trivellas & Drimoussis, 2013; Muller & Turner, 2007) .

## **LEADERSHIP AS A FACTOR OF PROJECT SUCCESS**

Geoghegan and Dulewicz (2008) and Jiang (2014)'s research showed a primary focus on behavioral, emotional, and managerial competencies, as well. In this collection of work evidence was found that not only are leadership traits correlated with successful project managers but leadership traits are a contributing factor towards success in projects, of course leading to successful project managers (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008; Jiang, 2014). These studies found managerial and emotional competencies (as factors of leadership) to have important causative effects in determining the success of a project; although it is important to note that this success can be negatively affected if the wrong leadership style is chosen and/or if the project manager is inexperienced with the project type (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008; Jiang, 2014).

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