



LEADERSHIP'S VALUE IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

This paper aims to deepen the knowledge of context, which are based on the fundamental concepts, both related to the project itself and to the discipline of Project Management; the technical / methodological / specialist knowledge, which are generally used for the management of a project and which have always constituted its fundamental core; and finally, behavioural knowledge, which concerns the so-called "soft skills", that a Project Manager must possess in order to manage a project successfully, taking into account also the aspects of personal and rational behaviour. Of course, in order to identify the success and failure drivers of a project, the paper will be focused on the importance of "Leadership" in the Project Management system, defined as the mastery and the systematic use of skills, to allow group of people achieve their goals. The paper will analyse the action of "conviction", as a result of the ability of the leader to communicate, interact, motivate, engage in a mission and manage their interpersonal relationships, taking into account the objectives to be followed, the people on which to exercise their influence and the context in which they are operating. Finally, personal, relational, strategic, creative and systemic thinking skills will be deepened, in order to identify an effective leadership system, able to expand the skills and capabilities of a Project Manager Leader, with the goal of increasing the possibilities of a project success.

Key words: *Project Management, Leadership, Soft Skill, Motivation, Strategic thinking.*

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Introduction

This paper aims to identify and provide a thorough and comprehensive study that integrate both the theme of Project Management and leadership, both theoretical and practical, in order to identify the success factors but also failure, which can help the end user, towards the correct application of this discipline and the appropriate use of the tools provided.

Starting from the most common and known definition of "Project Management" defined by the Project Management Institute (PMI) as "the application of knowledge, professional and personal skills, methods, techniques and tools aimed at carrying out a project, in order to meet the requirements". Being Project Management a discipline which refers to all company activities, it is generally carried out by a high qualified person, defined as Project Manager, able to carry out analysis and plans to properly reach all agreed company objectives. A fundamental characteristic of all projects is the progressive processing, since the development takes place in general through successive incremental "interactions". It's fundamental for the Project Manager to develop personal skills and competences in the discipline to allow: unambiguous identification (and accountability) of the different bodies and people involved in the project, an elaboration of the operational plan, a definition of the necessary resources; a constant and timely survey of the progress achieved during construction, an assessment of the deviations, in order to intervene in time with appropriate corrective actions (re-planning to finish), ensuring communication (internal and external), ensuring correct reporting to stakeholders of project results.

The ambition to become a Project Manager

In recent years, the growth of interest in the discipline of Project Management, the establishment of specific courses and, even more, the constant request of this professional figure by companies, has consecutively increased the ambition of young professionals to become a Project Manager. This figure is now considered a "must have" for companies, driven also by



information technology and the need to dedicate specific human resources to project management. However, becoming a Project Manager, has several implications that are certainly not only positive. Surely this role offers a degree of professional autonomy and a very high degree of personal satisfaction, but to successfully face all potential threats as one of the most relevant aspects to consider in this figure is its "Leadership". Being able to share successes or feel responsible for a failure are skills that imply a high degree of leadership. Each person has his very own leadership style and it is not even possible to outline the traits and characteristics of "the leader" and therefore the "perfect" project manager, as their personal skills and characteristics become part of their temperament and thinking styles.

Despite this, it is possible to synthesize four main styles of situational leadership according to two parameters, which have been identified by other scholars as Situational Leadership.

Table 1

Situational Leadership

HAS THE KNOW HOW	WANTS TO DO IT	APPROPRIATE LEADERSHIP STYLE
NO	NO	DIRECTIVE
NO	YES	CONSULTATIVE
YES	NO	PARTECIPATIVE
YES	YES	DELEGATING

Source: situational leadership framework

While considering the schematic nature of these styles, it is obviously not so simple to be able to choose the most appropriate style and apply it in the individual real cases. While interacting with the resources, it's necessary to take into account personal temperament, trying to adapt one's behavior and habits, depending on the needs of the team to be managed. It will be more difficult to apply the Situational Leadership for those Project Managers who, for example, have a personality that is not inclined to relationships or emotions, since they will not be able to show their attention and appreciation for the work of their collaborators, and vice versa. According to Will Schutz, "by analyzing the interactions between people, it is possible to identify three fundamental behavioral tendencies: inclusion, control, affection. For each one on them, it is possible both to express (from us towards others) and desire to receive (from others towards us) in different degrees and depending on our personality and situation". It is therefore essential that the Project Manager considers not only the skills and competences of their team, but also their relative attitudes, so as to be able to better manage both the resources that have a greatest desire for autonomy (through task delegation), and the resources that need more attention, trust and appreciation, to better engage every one of them towards the final goal.

Therefore, to better understand how to apply the appropriate leadership to the context we are immersed in, we should refer to a study by Kouzes and Posner based on leadership actions, which outlines the common characteristics of a "good" leader - vision, involvement, perseverance - to have a clear vision of the goal to be achieved, how to involve the team in the project activities to reach the goal and persevering to achieve all objectives.

From their study, we can derive the following 5 golden rules that can guide a leader towards excellence:

- Continuously improve processes (look for new opportunities, experiment and accept risks);
- Inspire for a common vision (have a vision of the future, recruit new volunteers);



- Putting others in a position to contribute (fostering collaboration, strengthening team capacity);
- Trace the way (be an example, plan even the smallest wins);
- Encourage (recognize individual contribution, celebrate successes).

The efficient communication of a leader

Another fundamental aspect to consider when we talk about leadership is the language. Leaders tend to use the term "us" to properly involve their team towards a common goal, as it is clear that the "win" is only possible together. True leaders rarely use the expression "I", if not to blame some failings or errors of management or "defend" their resources from any external attacks, as they do not lay the blame on their employees, but protect them as a "good family father to his son who is wrong" would do. This way, the leader not only gets more confidence from the resources, now feeling part of a team, but will also deliver expected outcomes properly. However, just as a "good family father" would do, he should not become too flexible and permissive to generate excessive lightness from the resources: even here the right attitude is a perfect balance between the two behaviors, that is to be comprehensive and protective towards their resources in external situations, but also equally authoritative and able to recall their employees if incurring in any mistake.

Beyond language, a small but enormous aspect not to neglect is the tone that is used in the assignment of tasks and responsibilities, in expressing appreciation, in giving tasks and in making any call. The way in which a concept is expressed is often more important than the content of the message itself. Another fundamental aspect that a "good" leader must consider is his own paradigm and preconception about others: this should be avoided until objectively proven. Negative perception brings negative attitude and behaviors, while high expectations can deliver success through people empowerment and accountability.

Surely the application of all these actions and behaviors is not immediate in the real life, especially because it's complex to perfectly frame the profile of a person. This, determines the consecutive inadequacy of a correct approach, therefore empathy plays a substantial role, which often determines a "leader profile" from a "headline profile".

Thus as defined by Welsh, Migone and Eagle, "Perceiving an action - and understanding its meaning - is equivalent to simulating it internally. This allows the observer to use his own resources to penetrate the other's world through a modeling process that has the connotations of a non-conscious, automatic and paralinguistic mechanism of motor simulation. [...] When I see someone expressing a certain emotion with his own face and this perception leads me to understand the emotional meaning of that expression, I do not achieve this understanding necessarily or exclusively thanks to an argument by analogy. The emotion of the other is constituted by the observer and understood thanks to a simulation mechanism that produces in the observer a body state shared with the actor of that expression. It is precisely the sharing of the same body state between observer and observed to allow this direct form of understanding, which we could define as empathetic".

This is the ability to embody other people's feelings, on the basis of understanding their emotional signals, taking their subjective perspective and sharing their feelings (Bonino, 1994), which determines the consecutive distinction between a successful leader and an egocentric and authoritarian one. As previously analyzed, also in this case an excessive imbalance towards an empathetic profile: this will identify the coordinator as a good person, but not as a leader the team can count on. It is therefore essential to mix empathy with energy, i.e. the ability of the leader to penetrate within the various personalities, to shake and ignite the enthusiasm of the team creating a propensity to listen and follow their leader. There are many studies talking about the substantial differences between a leader and a boss. Among the various scholars who have analyzed these issues in detail, the "fundamentals" that best express these differences, have been identified by Ferrarelli and are shown in the following table:



Table 2

Boss VS Leader

BOSS	LEADER
An insecure boss plays on fear	The Leader transpires confidence and enthusiasm
A megalomaniac leader says "I"	The Leader says "WE"
An "old fashion" boss focuses only on mistakes and finds the culprit	The Leader helps collaborators find solutions to their mistakes
An insecure boss is afraid of "good ones"	The Leader doesn't boycott talent, rather he leads it
An "old style" boss does not celebrate as reaching the target "is part of the job"	The Leader knows that celebrating means creating cohesion and alliance
A haughty leader decides all by himself	The Leader promotes teamwork and involves everyone in the decision-making process
A stubborn leader focuses on "being right"	The leader on "doing the right thing"
A petty boss takes all merit and blames others if it goes wrong	The Leader knows that honesty and integrity are absolutely essential to success
An uncertain leader controls everything	The Leader gives trust to collaborators to take free initiative
A boss knows "HOW TO DO"	The Leader SHOW how to do it
A leader says "WHAT TO DO"	The Leader is more interested in asking and listening
A leader hides his insecurity with superiority and arrogance	The leader knows the thin line between being confident and being arrogant
A boss does not celebrate to avoid excessive enthusiasm	The Leader knows that the recognition pushes people to give their best
A weak leader never admits a mistake (it is a weakness)	The Leader admits his own missteps (it is "real strength")
A miserable boss treats employees just as workers	The leader takes care of his staff's problems and helps equilibrate work/life balance
A petty leader "uses" his collaborators	The Leader knows that his collaborators are the key to his success
An boss says "YOU GO"	The Leader says "WE GO"

Source: Authors' personal interpretation

To fully understand these substantial differences between the two profiles and be able to put these behaviors and ideologies into practice, it is certainly not simple. Trying to follow these tips and commit to achieve own personal affirmation with empathy, energy and passion, is surely the right path to follow in order to become a "proper" leader, able to achieve all set goals and establish collaboration and mutual respect with his team: the key factor for the success or failure of every single project.

Leadership: how to become credible and trustworthy manager

Have an emotional intelligence is essential for all those who want to become credible and trustworthy managers.

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence consists in the ability to remain motivated despite frustration, to control impulses and delay gratifications, maintaining lucidity by modulating moods (self-management), but it also implies the ability to effectively manage relationships with others (empathy).

The four basic skills of an emotionally intelligent manager are:

- Self-awareness: being in tune with own emotions and be aware of both strengths and weaknesses;
- Self-management: having self-control, transparency, adaptability, initiative, optimism and always want to improve these traits;
- Social awareness: being empathic, grasping key relationships, being prone to customer needs;



- Relationship management: inspire, influence, develop, foster change, manage conflicts and unite the team.

Daniel Goleman dealt with the theme of leadership styles, mixing this subject with “emotional intelligence”, and finding six other typical traits:

- Visionary: moves others towards the realization of a shared dream;
- Trainer: helps others to identify their qualities, weaknesses and to develop;
- Affiliatory: enhances people and feelings, placing emphasis on their emotional needs;
- Democratic: ask for suggestions from the team to decide the direction to be taken;
- Timer: firmly pushes people to high levels of performance to achieve the goal;
- Authoritarian: strictly controls others.

Each style has its strengths and weaknesses depending on the situation in which it is immersed: for example, a "trainer" style has little success in an unmotivated team with little initiative.

For everyone, however, the goal must be to increase emotional resonance with people, that is, to make them feel positively energized through the relationship created.

Credibility and trust

To gain trust and foster therefore well motivated resources, a leader must be credible: he must show that not only has the right, but especially the qualifications to guide and direct others to their objective.

Trust comes from the feeling of having a sort of resemblance with the leader, from the understand that he fully gets the needs of the whole team and is able to meet them, from the notice of his integrity and willingness of reaching not only the personal, but especially the common goals.

The characteristics of a “good leader”

When it comes to Project Management, the "less technical" aspects are often overlooked. And yet, these aspects are actually the key factors to develop a trait that is fundamental for a successful Project Manager: the leadership.

A leader knows how to properly manage relationships with people outside the team, removing any communication obstacle, and knows how to create opportunities for each member, acting as a role model even in the hardest challenges.

"Leadership is the art of making others want to do what the Leader is convinced should be done."

To avoid misbehaviors, it is essential to have and transmit to others a clear vision and the exact mission of the team. The leadership style strictly depends on the personality of the leader, so there are hypothetically infinite styles.

Moreover, the behavior of each individual is linked to his satisfaction, needs and interests so the Project Manager has to distribute tasks in harmony with the temperament of each member of the team, to get the most from each of them.

In the same way each team member has a certain degree of autonomy when it comes to decision making: well-matched resources with different “thinking styles” but able to make the team flexible, turns to be essential to create collaboration and avoid stoppers that could mine the whole project.

Last, but not least, another important aspect for a leader is the Decision Making. A really effective decision is made up by only two aspects: its validity both in qualitative terms (i.e. technological) and quantitative terms (i.e. for its cost), and its degree of acceptance by those who will be affected by the decision (i.e. its effect on the morale of the team).



Leadership: how to become a successful project manager

For a leading project manager, it is essential to know how to communicate and how to apply effective communication: the content of the message and the relationship between PM and interlocutor.

The relation can actually be "complementary" (relationship of subordination or great familiarity) or "symmetric" (equal). The second type is more unstable by definition, unbalanced towards one or the other depending on the moment.

The problem arises when the PM addresses an interlocutor with who does not match the style applied or when there is a misunderstanding: another important consideration to make is that information and meaning are not the same thing. This because the true meaning of a communication is given by the recipient while responsibility to properly deliver it is on who transmits: only understanding the point of view of others can make it effective.

It is possible to predict the interlocutor degree of acceptance by understanding how he processes the information. Depending on the preferred sensory channel, three modes are possible: visual, auditory, emotional. Therefore it is useful to get in tune with the other, paying attention also to the body language, the tone of the voice, the symbolic language and to the intercultural differences.

The rules to follow are simple: communicate, check if the goal has been achieved and, if not, change the approach until the desired effect is achieved.

Interpersonal influence

Leadership is undeniably a process that tends, even if in the most neutral sense of the term, to influence others: the greater the ability to persuade, the greater will be the results. In order to be able to influence others it is fundamental to know how to exploit the mechanisms of the six basic psychological categories of behavior:

- Consistency: when someone makes a decision, he tends to keep it even when conditions change;
- Reciprocity: when someone expects from a relation benefits that are proportional to the commitment given;
- Social emulation: adhering to the models of behavior and belief established by the group;
- Conformism: suffering the influence coming from the group in order to comply with its expectations;
- Appreciation: the natural tendency to do pleasant things and stay with a person we like;
- Hoarding: acquiring an asset or taking an action convinced that we will have no further opportunity to do so.

Each request will be more likely to be supported if reasonable motivation is provided. Possessing the ability to influence others means having "power" over them.

French, Raven and Rubin identify six possible modes of action to influence others, which involve the use of as many "powers":

- Rewarding: to have prizes and promotions to give;
- Coercive: to be able to inflict penalties or punishments;
- Legitimated: being in a high hierarchical position;
- Referential: to be emulated by the team;
- Experiential: being expert on the activity inherent to the project;
- Informational: holds vital information.

Conclusion

Someone perceived as a "good" person, not always is a good worker. In the same way a good boss may not be considered a "leader". While it can be fine for an "average" employee that manage other people, it becomes essential and fundamental for a Project Manager.

He has to deal with many resources, often from different teams, to properly deliver a project: leadership is the art of making others want to do what the leader is convinced should be done to reach the goal.



How to be sure to be a leader PM?

As Ferrarelli and Goleman have said, there are many tactics and implications to consider when choosing the communication style and the approach to use within the teams involved in a project.

Finding the right one is possible only making an attempt with different styles, due to the diverse inclinations of the human nature.

Above all, it is important to keep in mind a simple line of thought: communicate, check and adapt your style until the final aim is achieved.

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