Necessity of Leadership Skills for Project Manager

Sayed Farrukh Ahmed[1]
Mohammad Ahshanullah[2]
Dewan Niamul Karim[3]

Abstract: *Leadership and leadership skills of a project manager are essential for successful implementation of a project. A project manager has to deliver quality outputs in time through efficient utilization of allocated resources for a project. A project manager has to resolve diverse complex implementation issues which need sound knowledge and proven skills. Some key skills include relationship and communication, adaptability to change initiative, negotiation and conflict resolution, building team spirit and morale, managing corporate culture and matrix management, credibility and cared responsibility, above all full commitment to achieve project objectives.*

1.0 Introduction

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others through personality action to accomplish an objective. By applying leadership attributes, such as values, knowledge and skills a leader directs the organisation effectively and efficiently (Maylor, 2003). Although the leadership position gives the leader authority to accomplish certain tasks, this power does not make one necessarily a leader. Leadership makes followers wanting to achieve high goals and give their best1. This paper focuses on leadership skills that a project manager ought to have to ensure that the project's objectives are achieved by always considering the responsibility towards the project, the organisation and the team.

2.0 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to highlight the leadership skills of project manager required for the implementation of a project successfully and to understand the necessity of leadership skills for the project manager.

3.0 Literature Review

Black (2000) has stressed that the best project managers are outstanding leaders. They have vision, they motivate, they bring people together, and, most of all, they accomplish great things. The leader should guide the

---

[1] Senior Lecturer, School of Business, United International University, Bangladesh

[2] Senior Lecturer, School of Business, United International University, Bangladesh

[3] Lecturer, Department of Management Studies, School of Business, Comilla University, Kotbari, Comilla

team members by identifying their roles and responsibilities for the project. In addition, he should inspire the team members to successfully complete the project tasks for the betterment of the project. On the other hand, Burke (2003) has pointed out that project managers must have integrity-honesty and trustworthiness. A key success factor is getting members of a team to trust each other and trust the project manager in order to work well with each other. When indecision or conflict arises, if the project manager is considered to have integrity, the others will accept his actions more easily.

Knutson (2001) has highlighted that a project manager must have leadership skill so that he can inspire others to create a vision and strive to achieve the goals, has the ability to provide valuable information related to the project status in a timely and effective manner and assisting in resolution of any project conflicts so that the project team members all feel part of the process and want to remain involved in the project. Leadership is crucial for a project manager who must motivate people who are on the project teams. A project manager must exercise his leadership subtly so that he stimulates eager and constructive support for the project and the project team without causing attitudes toward home departments to weaken. The leadership needs to foster strong positive loyalties both to the project and to the functional organization. (Maylor, 2003)

Toney (2002) has mentioned that to accomplish the project goals, it is necessary to assemble the right team and leader. The leader has to believe in the project and be ready to drive it forward. The project leader ensures that the concept/planning phase results in a project supported by a sound business case for the company. He leads the team in developing the project definition; getting the right team members involved, etc.

A project manager is responsible for achieving the project's overall objectives and leading the project team. People sense that a really good project is an opportunity to excel. Goals are clearly visible, freedom of action is greater, and superior performance will be applauded and rewarded. Under enlightened leadership, this environment can stimulate creative talents to achieve goals that had seemed hardly attainable. Projects must be managed to achieve this extraordinary success. (Mantel and Meredith, 2004).

4.0 Methodology

In this paper, the leadership skills of project manager in successful implementation of a project has been discussed and a framework has been developed that will allow researchers and managers to understand the necessity of leadership skills for project manager. This paper is mainly based on secondary information. Available literatures including relevant books and articles on project management have been studied. Also, relevant published and unpublished documents have been consulted. Moreover, eminent line consultant namely, Michael Topple, working as a project officer in Wimble Stadium, England, had been consulted in conducting the study.

## 5.0 Leadership Skills in the Project Environment

The skills required in terms of leadership in project environment are highly depending upon the circumstances and the situation. Furthermore, the project manager should be recognised as a leader not only by the team but also by everybody else who is involved in the whole process (including clients and/or the organisation). The project manager as a leader basically needs to fulfil the requirements such as determination of the firm's purpose or vision, exploitation or maintenance core competencies, development of human capital, sustainin an effective organizational culture, emphasize ethical practices, establish balanced organisational controls and provide mechanism to transfer knowledge across all parts in the project (Knutson, 2001).

A project manager is the organiser of the project who discusses with the organisation to establish progress and direction of the project and to assure that goals are achieved, problems are solved, risks are mitigated, and that the project is delivered on time and within the given budget. He keeps the spotlight on the vision, inspires the team, promotes teamwork and collaboration, champions the project, removes obstacles to progress and makes the call and burdens responsibility (Ghattas & McKee, 2004). The project manager has to become an adaptive leader - if he or she can relinquish the reliance on old-fashioned, inflexible management styles.

The higher the degree of uncertainty encountered on a project - whether in terms of changes in project scope, technological stalemates, breakdowns in coordination between people, and so forth - the more leadership is required. For example: strong leadership is required for a

software development project in which parameters are always changing to meet developments in the industry, which is forcing a project manager to be highly flexible and to react appropriate to any given changes. He has to be aware of his responsibility in terms of costs, duration of the project, allocating and handling of the resources etc. - all the time. Obviously, He is the linkage between the project, the project's team and the organization. He or she receives input from each of these categories that has to be handled and transformed. This can be shown in the following figure:

Figure 1: Interconnections
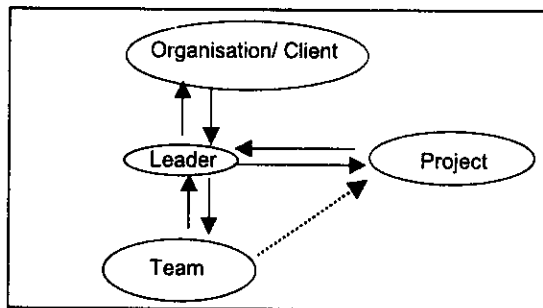
6.0 Leadership Skills of Project Mmanager

Apart from general skills like personality, experience, formal (informal) education and training, there are further leadership skills that a project manager has to possess to resolve diverse complex implementation issues. Some important skills have been discussed below:

6.1 Building relationships and communication: The project manager must have the ability to communicate in three channels such as facts, emotions and symbols to build better relationships and strengthen teamwork (Boyd & Crossland, 2002). He must have the skills that ensure that project objectives, challenges or problems, scope changes, and regular project status have been appropriately communicated or transmitted and correctly received. The ability to interact will determine how smoothly the project progresses as it determine the degree of acceptance regarding the position as leader. Positive relationships with the individuals will help the project manager to achieve consensus between the team and the organization when needed, and understand and resolved sources of conflict during the project.

6.2 Adaptability to change initiative: Sometimes projects are subject to significant changes. This might include various factors like scope changes, a change in duration and/or costs etc. Thus, the project manager should have the skill of steering the organization, the team and the project itself through any change in the process (Marchewka, 2006). In this situation, he needs to be prepared as the motivator that generates enthusiasm for the project and continually obtains buy-in, support, commitment and participation from the various stakeholders.

6.3 Resolving the conflict: The project manager has to work carefully to resolve the conflicts which may arise in situations where opinions widely differ about what can be done and what not, within a given time budget. He must be prepared to deal with situations where interests conflict, relying on his/her instincts to know when it is time to capitulate or to continue negotiating in order to reach an agreement that meets everybody's needs and that doesn't have a negative impact on the project.

6.4 Leading the project team: The project manager should have the skills to lead a group. In order to develop a high-performing team, He has to motivate individual team members and the team as a whole, i.e. he or she has to build team spirit. Appropriate techniques have to be used to enhance individual and team motivation. For example, scheduling regular and ad hoc feedback sessions for individual team members, rewarding of good performance, giving public recognition for team contributions, and creating team spirit. The project manager has to keep in mind that every team member is an individual. Thus, the leadership style should be flexible and adaptive in order to address all the individuals. The project manager has to make a conscious attempt to integrate all members of his projects team through open communication and social activities.

6.5 Managing corporate culture: Embracing culture is about understanding the context in which the project will be executed. It means that the project manager has to understand the value system of the organization and act accordingly. (Vera and Crossan, 2004)

6.6 Credibility and responsibility: The project manager should be credible at his work and should demonstrate cared responsibility towards the organization, the team and the project .Thus, he can fulfill all of his tasks within the given time and so on.

6.7 Individual motivation: The project manager has to keep the employees highly motivated even in bad times when, for instance, the

whole project is hopeless behind schedule and any bonus is depending on an on-time delivery. He has to enforce the motivation of his team to still give their best. (Popper & Zakkai, 1994)

6.8 Commitment to achieve project objectives: The project manager should be committed to achieve project objective. In dealing with the project, he may face critical situations. He has to lead the project to resolve the complexities with his proven skills and go forward to achieve the project objectives.

7.0 Challenge

The project manager may face challenges in utilizing the skills in an appropriate way when necessary. This is illustrated in a small example in figure 2 in the later page:

Figure 2: Required skills of leadership - An example
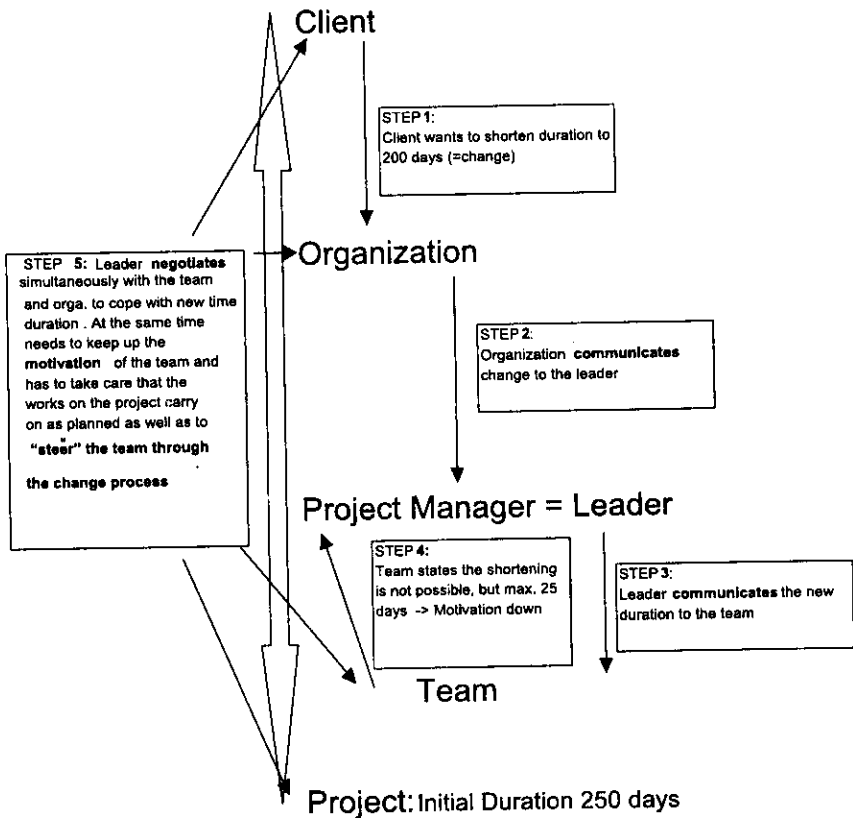
Obviously the project manager is facing several challenges at the same time, i.e. he or she needs various skills at once. Although the example is fictitious, situations like this do

happen all the time in project management. Furthermore, an effective project manager has to develop existing skills and strengthen his weaknesses.

8.0 Problems of Leading Project in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, from the beginning of project, the major problem is the documentation problem as the regulatory authority is not well-efficient to provide all the required documents at the right time. Lack of coordination between the project team and the higher authority is another problem which leads to delay decision making. Moreover, at the inception of the project, the project team requires some loan from bank. But, banks take long time and require huge documentation which has contributed to the delay of the project for several weeks. Another challenge for the project manager is to find out the right quality of project raw materials, as required. The machineries used in the projects can not be used for optimum capacity because of frequent repairs required during the project time. It takes long time to get environmental clearance certificate from the respective authority. The project team members may reluctant to actively participate in the work because of financial dissatisfaction, etc.

9.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

According to us, there are no perfect definitions which are the required leadership skills, as this is significantly depending upon the situation and the given circumstances. The event or the situation is an important factor in utilizing the skills appropriately. Thus, the project manager to lead the project and the team in a positive and distinctive way, at the highest level possible, by always considering that leadership should be considered as a process rather than as an end state.

References

Belbin, R. M. (2004). Management Teams, Butterworth-Heinemann.

Black, R. (2000). The Complete Idiots Guide to Project Management with Microsoft

Project 2000, Pearson Professional Education.

Bono, J.E. and Judge, T.A. (2003). Self-concordance at work: towards understanding

Motivational effects of transformational leaders, Academy of Management Journal.

Boyd, C. and Crossland, R. (2002). The Leader's Voice, Prentice- Hall.

Burke, R. (2003). Project Management, 4th Edition, John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Ghattas, R.G. and McKee, S.L. (2004). Practical Project Management, 5th Edition,

Pearson Education, Inc.

Gray, C.F. and Larson, E.W. (2006). Project Management: The Managerial Process,

3rd Edition, McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Knutson, J. (2001). Project Management for business professionals: a comprehensive

guide, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Lockyer, K. and Gordon, J. (2005). Project Management and Project Network

Techniques, 7th Edition, Financial Times Prentice Hall.

Mantel, S.J. and Meredith, J. R. (2004). Core Concepts: Project Management in

Practice, 2nd Edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Marchewka, J. T. (2006). Information Technology Project Management, 2nd

Edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Maylor, H. (2003). Project Management, 3rd Edition, Prentice Hall.

Meredith, J. R. (2005). Project Management, 6th Edition, McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Pawar, B. and Eastman, K. (1997). The Nature and Implications of contextual

influences on transformational Leadership: A conceptual examination, Volume 22, Oklahoma State University.

Popper, M. and Zakkai, E. (1994). Transactional, Charismatic and Transformational

Leadership: Conditions Conducive to their Predominance, Leadership &

Organization Development Journal, Vol. 15 No. 6, pp.468-80.

Rooke, D. and. Torbert, W.R. (2005). Seven Transformations of Leadership, Harvard

Business Review, Vol.5 No.2, pp.91-94.

Stanley, P. (2000). Project Management for Dummies, McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Stone, A., Russel, R., and Patterson, K., (2004). Transformational versus servant

Leadership, The Leadership & Organization Development Journal, Vol. 25 No. 4,

pp.17-43.

Toney, F. (2002). The Superior Project Manager: Global Competency Standards and

Best Practices, Marcel Dekker/Center for Business Practices.

Vera, D. and Crossan, M. (2004). Strategic Leadership and Organizational Learning,

Academy of Management Review, Vol.23 No. 3, pp.23-56.