

# What Does Project Leadership Really Do?

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**ABSTRACT-** The objective of article is to explore the importance of project leadership which has become essential for managing projects in complex and challenging environment. The study aims highlight a question that “what does project leadership really do?” This paper also draw attention to significance of project leadership as there is a limited research in the area of project leadership even though calls have been made for more research. It is apprehended that there is a vital need of effective role which must be able to lead and manage simultaneously and project leadership is considered critical to overcome such challenges. The roles and functions of project leadership have been highlighted and it becomes important to understand the difference between leadership and management as well as difference between project leadership and project management to determine the effect on success or failure of projects. Future research has been suggested for effective project leadership.

**KEYWORDS:** Project leadership, leader, project manager, project management, leadership, management.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Project leadership is becoming important due to increase of project-based organizations in industrial importance as well as due to lack of studies within project management literature [1]. Obviously, it is not possible for everyone to be effective for both leading and managing [2]. Though some people have the ability to be a strong manager but cannot be an excellent leader, in contrast, some people have great leadership capabilities but find difficult to become a strong manager due to certain reasons [3]. The project leaders try to improve the development process in decision making as required by the art of project leadership [4].

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of project leader is significant to project success which has been shown by various studies in literature [5] but literature has largely ignored to consider the project manager's leadership as one of the key factor to the project success [6]. Leadership remains highly researched area and debatable human behavior in literature with continuous focus on necessity for project success [7]. Research has been conducted on behaviors of effective leaders while researchers have also been actively exploring impact of manager's leadership on organizational performance [5]. The study on “What Leaders Really Do?” published in 1990 intensified and broadens the insights of research carried out in 1977. The leaders stress for change while managers facilitate stability and organizational success that is only possible when both approaches are considered together [2].

Leadership performance in determining project outcome is significantly important in view of overwhelming literature [7]. Further research is necessitated to provide better understanding towards impact and style of leadership on diverse projects and their outcomes [6]. Some researchers argued in context of project management literature to move operational approach to strategic approach to facilitate successful delivery of organizational outcomes [8, 9] but projects are still likely to fail [10]. The standard approach of project management of “getting things done” looks working [10] but “Big Plans will always fail” to reach the beautiful goal [11].

The project managers are heroes of modern days by getting things done in organizations through their skills and actions [12, 13]. It was a standard question for project management scholars “what project managers actually do” raised by Gaddis [14] and subsequently by PMI [15], the likely response about the role of project managers is to plan and control as derived by Fayol [16]. The literature provided an ample evidence through this statement that “Any manager performs four basic functions or activities: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. The project manager is responsible for performing these activities throughout the duration of the project” [10, 12].

## 3. LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

Goleman [17] advocated that the qualities traditionally associated with leadership include intelligence, determination, toughness, and vision, but these are insufficient to be required for success, while effective leaders are truly distinguished by their higher degree of emotional intelligence which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills [17]. The leadership characteristic of setting direction

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for coping with change does not produce plans but it creates vision and strategies to cope with it [2]. There multiple prospects to exercise leadership are knowledge, skills, and attitudes which are in term of project scope and management of project cost, time, quality and communications that are all dependant on the ability of project manager to lead the human resources associated with the project [18].

Raelin [19] suggested that leadership practices of teams and organizations are based on four critical doctrines which are referred as "the four c's." Collective leadership – team don't depend on one individual and everyone in team can serve as a leader; Concurrent leadership – all team members can serve as leader at the same time but when someone is making contribution as a leader then nobody can stand-down even the supervisor/manager; Collaborative leadership - everybody is in control and can speak for the entire team, to accomplish the team work through mutual dialogue to identify what to be done and how to do it; Compassionate leadership – degree of commitment to preserve the dignity of every single team member by considering each individual's opinion whenever any action taken or decision is made.

#### 4. MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

Management is defined as "the ability to work through others" and most of today's management definitions are similar to Courtland Bouee who offered in his book Management: "it is a process of attaining organizational goals through effective and efficient planning, organizing, leading and controlling the organization's human, physical, financial and informational resources" [4]. Nevertheless, superb leaders vary from their personal styles; some leaders are analytical and subdued while others yell manifestos from mountaintop, majority require perceptive negotiator at the helm, whereas some turnarounds the need for more influential authority [11]. A manager is considered as problem solver who creates culture of rationality and control where energies are intended for targeted goals, organizational structure and resources [20]. Similar to other manager, the project manager must portray at once a man of thought, a man of action and as a front man [21].

It is commonly assumed that everyone in management position is a leader and leaders are not concerned to manage but leadership is performed by the people even though not in management positions [22]. An important and widespread belief is to identify individual with "right stuff" to be leaders which is more art than science [17]. In contrast to leadership, management is a process which diminishes uncertainty and stabilizes the organization involving: planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, and controlling and problem

solving [23]. Though, management is a function comprises on implementing the direction and vision provided by the leaders, handling day-to-day problems, and coordinating and staffing the organization [24].

#### 5. EFFECTIVE PROJECT STRATEGY

It is important for the project leadership to develop an effective project strategy to increase likelihood of project success. A good project strategy is a specific technique for the project which create best competitive advantage for winning the market place and also involve project's unique direction, approach and a path planned with the aim to make it win [25]. Project strategy is considered at higher level than project plan which is a specific project's way to create competitive advantage that drives the project plan and make a difference ahead of the normal plan [26].

Project strategy is to consider the project position, perspective, and guidelines on how to do it and what to do, in order to achieve the best value from project outcome and highest competitive advantage [25]. Typically, projects start with project plan which normally includes the project objective/goals, project scope, project deliverables, project resources, project milestone, and project execution activities but conceptually a missing link exist between project plan and business strategy known as project strategy which is the first item that must be dealt by project leader at starting point of project undertaking [27].

#### 6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT EFFICACY

The project management will be totally different in coming years than last five decades as it is evolving rapidly [28]. It was envisaged by Gaddis [21] that the role of project management in coming years will be more exciting, challenging and critical while roles of project manager and project concept will also be much more than acidic test. Project management refers to project activities of planning and organizing through decision making process which enhance effectiveness and efficiency of project [29]. Leadership, in contrast, is a process of leading others for achievement of project objectives "motivating and guiding people to realize their potential and achieve tougher and challenging organizational goals" [29].

The traditional focus of project management needs to expand from an operational to strategic perspective to achieve the project success [30]. The project management is not only about achieving the projects budget and schedule objectives but also to create competitive advantage for organization [31]. Leading the project as strategic activities in the new framework is not a myth but to some extent it implies on future development and success of project management [32]. In fact, the project manager and project concept will be much more than the acidic test and will be significant examination of gratis project, business

administration, and progressive industrial management from today [21]. Projects are managed in two different ways; strategically managed projects and operationally management projects. The projects managed operationally focused on getting the job done while strategically management projects focus on achieving business outcomes [33].

Advance planning is considered important in projects and project manager's key responsibility is to avoid crisis and only the best efforts can reduce the crisis [21]. In traditional project management approach, projects performance depends upon operational performance, efficiency, and achieving time and budget goals [34]. There is one common observation that often project managers are not involved in entire planning process and particularly in implementation arrangement [10]. On contrary, the project management literature calls for involvement of project managers and key stakeholders right from the beginning of initiation phase that is an effort to enhance the likelihood of project success [10, 30, 32, 33, 35-38].

#### **7. LEADERSHIP VERSUS MANAGEMENT**

All project managers are not exercising leadership and there is a continuous controversy regarding difference between leadership and management [27]. Leadership entails in a realistic effort to direct affairs and fulfill their own task while managers ensure that people are performing efficiently at different level of responsibility and status [39]. For good governance, leaders uses influence, uses conflicts and acts decisively while manager uses authority, avoids conflict and act responsibly [27]. It is dispensable for a manager to be genius or hero but rather diligence, hard work, tough-mindedness, intellect, analytical ability, and possibly most important tolerance and good will [40].

The project manager's responsibility in projects is to deal with "real" management and the personnel working on the project [21]. Mostly effective leaders commonly have higher degree of emotional intelligence and there capabilities can be categorized as: technical skills like accounting or business planning; cognitive abilities like analytical reasoning; and competencies such as the ability to work effectively to lead change and work with others [11]. It has been established by most researchers that emotional intelligence is not only to differentiate effective leader but also associated to strong performance [11].

Leadership entourage team professional grooming as well as concurrently accomplishing project responsibilities [2]. Leadership and management are continuously used with different identified characteristics and responsibilities but existence of overlapping between both is vital [7]. It is important to note that project

management always entails effective leadership for successful accomplishment of project outcomes [7]. Leaders are born not developed, was long believed based on inherent trait in an archaic theory. An early stages empirical and theoretical research of leadership dominated by "great man" theory, referring back to 1869 with Galton's Hereditary Genius [41]. The "great man" theory was discarded in late 1940 due to insufficient evidences [41] which resulted surge for alternative theories of leadership [7]. Leadership is an essential component of project management which is directly influencing on project outcomes [28] but certain traits are enviable which embrace shining aspects of leadership trinkets [7].

Poor leadership is a failure factor associated with project manager during phases of formation, buildup, and closeout [27]. Project manager's leadership and personal characteristics are associated with success factors of project [26]. It is ascertain from previous studies that many project managers do not distinguish among themselves or their leadership factors as contributor to project success [6]. The project manager requires various approaches about traditional management functions of coordination, control, communication, and establishing performance standards as well as professional approaches and practices to progressively gaining importance and more extensive acceptance across all the industries [21]. In a nutshell, gigantic efforts have been made by large body of literature in order to categorize project success factors but ignored the project managers or their leadership styles/behaviors as project success factors [42].

The project manager must be treated as a professional, must have established performance standard of highest level, and must be accountable for valuable productivity at professional level [21]. The project manager association with management is to manage complexity including planning, budgeting, controlling, and organizing while leadership deals to manage change including visioning, directing, and motivating [43]. The relationship between leadership and management roles is under debate in research which are mostly alienated and polarized [17] and consensus exist among researchers that there is a complementary relationship between these two roles [18, 42-44].

Leaders focused on change and new approaches while managers advocate stability and status quo [45]. The managers are concerned to exercise authority, perform responsibilities, and anxious about how things get done whereas, leaders are concerned to understand beliefs of people and gaining their dedication [27]. The project manager must have privilege of a professional including independence of detailed supervision and autonomy from administrative routine but simultaneously no excuse of

responsibility to produce in accordance with challenging requirement of the profession [21]. A combination of effective leadership and management is required for organizational success [22]. Leadership functions are being extended to work groups and cross-department team in most modern organization based on team-based organizational structure which create greater opportunity for more input from work groups [46].

#### 8. DISPARITY AMONG LEADER AND PROJECT MANAGER ROLES

The responsibility of project leader by definition is to manage time-oriented and goal-directed aspect of project (Kaulio, 2008). Manager is bureaucratic, dutiful, rational, practical, and unimaginative dullard but leader is a visionary, experimental, restless, even "twice-born" dynamo [47]. Great leader just not prevail only at national level and these are not different from project leaders who aimed to nurture project visions into exciting and great outcomes and build project spirit based on energy, enthusiasm and excitement. Project spirit for project leadership is "an inspired state of mind focused on vision of expected achievement from project" [37].

The leaders manage changes while managers handle complexity [36]. Mostly managers focus on budgeting and planning, pursue with systemizing and staffing, and conclude with controlling and problem solving. These traditional functions of managers are long associated with bureaucratization. Leaders have different set of functions including setting up direction, aligning people to the vision, and motivating and inspiring people to fulfill the established directions [36].

Managers are mostly appointed bureaucratically with power throughout the middle of an organization but don't have "hired hands" (root of management word is "manus" which is from Latin word meaning "hand") but most impressive thing about the manager is not taking the reins although supporting others to take action according to the situation warrant [36]. Project leaders identifies the need of resources to comprehend the vision at the same time as working with team and develop and maintain oversight on implementation of initiatives necessary to acquire resources [18].

Leaders articulates a vision to create the future while managers execute the plans and improve the present (Lunenborg, 2011). Leaders empower their employees considering as a colleague through trust building whereas managers controls their employees treating as subordinates through direction and coordination [27]. Leaders develop and break off intensive one-to-one relationship while manager establish moderate and broadly dispersed attachments [47]. The successful project managers are also best leaders who make sure that all is done well and inspire

their teams with vision and sense right [37]. The communication skills of project leader and followers are vital to obtain and retain project commitment [6].

#### 9. SIGNIFICANCE OF PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Project leadership is the ability to lead in most powerful manner while leading the others in project work [45]. Project leadership impact on improving project management practices in order to reduce uncertainty and complexity associated with project pursuit [48]. A strong project leaders is required to deal with administrative or bureaucratic projects but it does not mean that strong leader is always a more successful leader [7]. Any strong leadership with weak management and vice versa is always not better for good results but actual challenge to use combination of strong management and strong leadership for balancing each other [23].

Project leadership is vital to determine the effect of leadership performance on success or failure of projects and it is imperative to comprehend the differences between project leadership and project management project [7]. The leadership traits are invariably associated with project leadership in contrast to project management, difference of which has been discussed throughout in the literature of project management [5]. To achieve project objectives in complex working environment, vibrant leadership induces the need of change, inspire for new ways of thinking and problem solving, and motivate for working together [7, 29, 40].

Project leadership is about leading others in project which is both different and additive to project management but there may some overlap. Project management focused on managing the project work whereas leading others is focused more towards individuals on their ways of working to perform best work on projects [45]. All project leaders must face any of the three issues related to variety of task, personnel and commitment situations which are more complex in projects than in on-going operations due projects exceptional demands of their temporary nature and unique outcomes [4]. To understand that project leaders must make timely decision is the science of project leadership due to its perspective – that decision must be made [4].

The role of a project manager has become so important in today's organizations that dealing with strategy is not just sufficient at the senior level and there is no more need of time to realize while leaving the project manager only for operational activities in the projects [37]. Project leaders need to apply sound project management practices while leading the projects but project management is not a substitute for leading others [45]. Project leaders have a significant and dynamic role in

simplifying complex projects and within performing organization [49]. There is a need of new leader, or leaders at expense of managers which is need of people who can be both [47].

#### 10. ROLE OF PROJECT LEADERSHIP

A move have been made from task perspective to a leadership perspective within project context in recent project management literature review [39]. The ability of project leader is essential for successful management of projects [50]. The duties of project leader's include gathering and distributing information, leading, planning, coordinating, moderating, and controlling the project team [20]. The role of project leader can be illustrated through combination of internal and external roles as well as leadership and managerial roles [17]. The first dimension of project manager is leadership and management roles [43] while second dimension is based on internal and external roles [17]. Planning and execution both are just considered to an end due to new responsibilities of project leaders in which most important is to identify and articulate clear project strategy with emphasize to revisit and deal with business assumptions at higher level by defining the outcomes and business expectation [37].

Project leadership function is to learn about the opinions and suggestions of project team towards identification and solution of problems by providing best learning environment during project work [45]. A project leader has the responsibility of advocating the project referred as "unofficial advocacy" in such a manner so that every concerned individual want to keep and make necessary project commitment [4]. Mostly organizations are ignoring focus of literature which portray that people cannot lead and manage, therefore, it is essential for organizations to understand primary difference between roles of leader and manager, and strive to develop leader-manager by grooming their peoples with both vital skills for top level positions [23].

The role of project leadership is becoming important due to increase of project-based organizations in industrial importance as well as due to lack of studies within project management literature [17]. Obviously, it is not possible for everyone to be effective for both leading and managing [23]. Though some people have the ability to be a strong manager but cannot be an excellent leader, in contrast, some people have great leadership capabilities but find difficult to become a strong manager due to certain reasons [23]. The project leaders try to improve development process in decision making as required by the art of project leadership [4].

Project leaders creates a trustful project environment that increase the team member's motivation

[7] and also enhance likelihood of project success with an effective role as a project leader. Project leadership "shines his/her flashlight" among team members and is a symbol of helping the team by considering best possible solution for a problem through asking questions and comments from project team [45].

Shenhar [34] argued that the project management will be totally different in coming years than last five decade as it is evolving rapidly. Project leaders must be able to facilitate subordinates for making sense of changes and provide guidance and support for ambiguous changes [51]. The organizations initiate projects for business success and 'getting the job done' is not sufficient [37], but there is a need to find out new ways of vibrant and competitive business environment to make the projects more competitive and powerful tools [52].

Effective project leaders are capable to articulate an inspiring project vision and build an appropriate project spirit or spark aligned with project strategy which create energy, excitement, and commitment among the project team to perform efficiently to ensure project success [37]. Project leadership assert own wisdom to make difficult decisions by using leadership techniques and give directions to the project team according to the situations [45]. The project leadership must address project spirit properly and must know how to define and cultivate vision for energizing and bringing out the best people [37].

Kloppenborg, Shriberg and Venkatraman [4] documented that three common types of responsibilities should performed by project leaders. First, project leaders need to continuously make decisions according to changing situations and aware of project details. Second, project leaders must identify project priorities and continue to insist that these priorities must be adhered. Finally, project leaders must see and communicate with key stakeholders to integrate the project into grander scheme of things which benefited to both within the performing organization as well as customer organization.

Project leadership responsibilities include to shine the flashlight periodically and ensure timely support by closely listening and watching the team members [45]. It is seen from successful projects that project leaders wear 'bigger hats' to deal with both leadership and management roles who see their roles being responsible for providing directions and vision, for planning and execution, and for doing right things as doing it right [37].

#### 11. CONCLUSION

It reveals that project leadership is a combination of leadership and management roles for effective and efficient management of projects. Therefore the question

raised as "what does project leadership really do?" seems an important area for extensive future research by academicians as well industry professionals through literature and empirical studies at industry, sector and country level both in developed and developing countries. Further research should be conducted on the role of project leadership towards project success through different moderating constructs at different industry, sector and country level. The career outcome and career progression of professionals having project management degrees through empirical studies is also fertile area for future research. It is substantiated that project leadership must possess essential leadership and managerial knowledge, skills, competencies and characteristics which ensure successful projects completion by taking right decisions at right time and involving right people at right places.

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