

Project Management and Leadership: Equal Partners for Project Success

By Ruffin Veal III, PMP

Part I—The Four Project Management Processes of Leadership and Management

As project management professionals, we are all aware of the management aspects of our profession. These include the tasks, processes and sequences of steps that we all know by heart. However, client feedback and our own self evaluations or “lessons learned” often tell us that we should be addressing a frequently neglected but equally important demand of our profession. That demand is **leadership**.

Why this new emphasis on project managers as leaders? Why are management skills alone no longer enough?

Well, let’s look at project management in today’s world. I believe we can all agree that the profession of project management is increasing in complexity. We regularly are called upon to supervise projects that are global in nature, involving different cultures, nations and industries. These increasingly complex projects require budgets totaling millions of dollars. It seems that as the world continues to get smaller, projects will continue to get larger. This means that our inventory of skills needs to increase, as well.

One skill that has always been overshadowed by our emphasis on management is that of leadership. Oh sure, we all say that we practice both, and some of us would even say that we are good at both. But are we really as good as we

think we are? Let’s compare leadership with management and evaluate ourselves in the process.

Leadership vs. Management

What are the primary objectives of management, and how do they compare with those of leadership?

Simply put, management is charged with *producing and maintaining a degree of predictability and order*. Leadership, on the other hand, is charged with *producing change*.

Let’s examine what’s

necessary to accomplish these objectives.

A summary of our project management and leadership responsibilities can be condensed into what I call the four processes of management and leadership. They are:

- Creating an agenda
- Developing a team
- Executing the agenda
- Evaluating the outcome

First, we will address the individual responsibilities of management and leadership for each process. We will then consider the primary functions and activities of each responsibility.

“ Leaders are people oriented, whereas managers are task oriented. Leaders inspire, whereas managers organize. ” Royce L. Callaway (1999)

I. Creating an Agenda

Management Responsibilities: Planning and Budgeting

The management responsibilities involved in creating an agenda are **planning and budgeting**. These responsibilities involve establishing detailed steps and timetables for achieving needed results and then allocating the resources necessary to make that happen.

Management Functions and Activities

The goal of the agenda is to produce and maintain a degree of predictability and order that has the potential of consistently achieving key results expected by various stakeholders. Our primary function in creating an agenda is to help produce those predictable results on important dimensions (e.g., being on time and within budget) by planning for those results.

The activities involved require a deductive process. We develop a detailed map of how to achieve the results expected by stakeholders (clients, users, customers), along with timetables consisting of what, when, who and the costs involved.

Leadership Responsibilities: Establishing Direction

Our responsibility in creating an agenda is to **establish direction**—that is, to develop a vision of the future and strategies for producing the change needed to achieve that vision.

Leadership Functions and Activities

To fulfill this responsibility, at this point our function is to establish the *direction for change* needed to cope with our changing business environment.

This is an inductive process. The activities involved are aimed toward developing the vision for the organization.

2. Developing a Team

Management Responsibilities: Organizing and Staffing

In developing a team, we are responsible for establishing some structure for:

1. Accomplishing our plan
2. Staffing the project
3. Responsibility/authority
4. Policies/procedures
5. Monitoring the process

Management Functions and Activities

Our function in developing a team is to create an organization that can implement our plan and thus can produce predictable results on important dimensions.

Our activities are directed toward developing a process of organizational design involving judgment about “fit.”

We want to determine the best compatibility option for matching:

1. Our organizational/staffing structure to our plan
2. Parts of our plan to individual team members
3. Compensation of our plan to the people involved
4. Project tasks to individual skill sets

Leadership Responsibilities: Aligning People

As leaders, we communicate the project direction by words and deeds. We influence the team-building process of the project, and we ensure the teams’ understanding and acceptance of the project direction, vision and strategies.

Leadership Functions and Activities

Our function is to align our team behind a vision and set of strategies. This will help produce the change needed to address a changing business environment.

As clearly and as credibly as possible, we must help our team understand and believe this vision by communicating with the individuals needed to make that project direction a reality.

3. Executing the Agenda

Management Responsibilities: Controlling and Problem Solving

In executing the agenda, our responsibilities as project managers are **controlling and problem solving**. These involve monitoring results vs. our plan in some detail, identifying deviations and then planning and organizing to solve any problems resulting from those deviations.

Management Functions and Activities

Our function is to minimize deviation from the plan and thus produce predictable results on important decisions.

Activities involved in controlling and problem solving are concerned with monitoring results vs. the plan. This is done in some detail by means of control mechanisms (reports, meetings). Using these, we identify deviations from our plan and then re-plan and organize to resolve those deviations.

Leadership Responsibilities: Motivating and Inspiring

In executing the agenda, we are responsible for energizing the team to overcome major political, bureaucratic and resource barriers to change.

Leadership Functions and Activities

In order to energize team members, we need to satisfy the basic human need for achievement, recognition and living up to one’s ideals.

4. Evaluating the Outcome

As mentioned earlier, the goal of an agenda is to produce and maintain a degree of predictability and order to achieve key results consistently. Therefore we evaluate the success of our approach by comparing our results to our agenda.

Management Function and Activities

To evaluate the outcome of our management agenda, we need to determine how effectively we have handled any deviations from the project plan. In addition, we should analyze what affect these deviations have had on the overall outcome of the project with relation to cost, time and scope.

Leadership Function and Activities

Likewise the success of our leadership approach is determined

by comparing our results to our leadership agenda. Since the goal of our leadership agenda is to produce change, we need to determine how much dramatic, positive, long-lasting change has taken place within the organization, the project team, and even within ourselves as project managers. So, how do you rate yourself as a leader? Need more input? In Part II of this article, entitled “Leadership and the Project Management Professional,” I will provide some further insights and ideas on the subject of leadership. We’ll investigate the eight characteristics of successful leaders and also address the appropriate use of different leadership styles.

References

Callaway, R. L. (1999). *The realities of management: A view from the trenches*. Westport, Connecticut: Quorum Books.

Part II—Leadership and the Project Professional

Let’s have a quick review.

In Part I of this article, “The Four Project Management Processes of Leadership and Management,” I proposed that one of the primary objectives of leadership is *producing change*. We will now address the avenues available to us as leaders to fulfill this responsibility.

The Eight Primary Leadership Qualities

What qualities are possessed by great leaders? Studies have shown that great leaders are:

1. Intellectually stimulating
2. Energetic
3. Self-confident
4. Assertive
5. Dominant
6. Motivating
7. Honest
8. Charismatic

Intellectually Stimulating

Those who report to you expect you to be ahead of the game. They expect to be challenged by you in ways they may have never been before. Subordinates must see you as more experienced and as knowing more than they do about managing a successful project. Because of your position as project manager, you are seen as being at the top of the chain of command, and consequently your subordinates expect you to provide a certain amount of mentorship. They expect to be able to learn from you, not only professionally but emotionally and spiritually as well.

“ Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible. ”

General Colin Powell, Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff (Ret.) (2007)

Energetic

You must be physically fit. Your energy level must be high, especially during times of crisis. You must maintain an

optimistic, “can-do” attitude. Others tend to feed off the energy level of their leaders. Challenge your subordinates to keep up with you. You are responsible for setting the pace and tone for the project. Do it with vigor!

Self-Confident

“Never let ‘em see you sweat.” Human beings can pick up on a lack of self-confidence in others as instinctively as sharks can detect blood in the water. If you don’t have self-confidence, you will be devoured. Self-confidence is enhanced by knowledge and preparation. Follow the Boy Scout motto here and always “Be Prepared.”

Assertive

A position of leadership is no place for the faint of heart. Being assertive does not mean being overly aggressive. However, it does require you to establish and maintain a proactive attitude. In other words, don’t wait for problems to come to you. By the time problems have finally “come to you,” others have usually become aware of them, also, and this can sow seeds of doubt about your ability to stay on top of things. You should therefore actively engage in an ongoing evaluation of each area of the project for potential problems and risks---and then act quickly to address any that you find.

Dominant

Beware! Some team members *will* challenge your authority as project manager. This usually occurs within a functional or weak-matrix organizational structure. The challenges can be subtle: a comment here, a remark there. Sometimes a person on your team will be so bold as to undermine your decisions and plans publicly. You must not allow this type of behavior to continue. It will only diminish your credibility and erode the respect of your subordinates and stakeholders.

When this situation occurs, a closed-door session is in order. You should approach the session from a position and attitude of strength. This is no time to be condescending. You, and not your challenger, are still in charge of the project. The purpose of this meeting is twofold. First, you want to determine the nature of the challenge. Is it personal or professional? Second, whatever the cause, you want to leave the session with the absolute understanding that you are in charge. If that understanding cannot be reached then you should move to the next level of conflict resolution.

If the challenger is a superior and a resolution cannot be reached, it may be in your best interest to remove yourself as project manager. This may seem drastic, but you cannot be successful without the public support of senior management. If the challenger is a subordinate and a resolution cannot be

reached, then discipline of that individual is the responsibility of the functional manager. The bottom line is that you are the one who is in charge of the project. You are the one who will be held accountable for its success or failure.

Motivating

In order to motivate, you need to know enough about your subordinates to be able to push the right buttons. This will require a little additional work on your part. You can start by trying to learn what their personal and professional interests are. Scan their work area. Are there pictures of family? Sports pennants? Posters? Plants? Magazines? An employee’s work station can give you some good clues about his or her interests, to help you initiate a conversation and establish a rapport.

In addition, you need to determine what human needs you should address with each individual. According to Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs,” a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943), human needs are defined as (1) physiological, (2) safety, (3) a sense of love/belonging, (4) esteem and (5) self-actualization. We as managers and leaders need to try to determine where each individual on the team is psychologically in terms of this “hierarchy of needs” and to focus our communication and relationship efforts on that this area. This can be done by simply engaging in one-on-one conversations. These conversations need not be formal or regularly scheduled. They should however, be a part of your leadership strategy.

Honest

Nowhere is the saying “Honesty is the best policy” more applicable than in a position of leadership. People expect leaders to have qualities that they themselves can aspire to. They therefore demand the highest standards of their leaders, and honesty tops the list. There was a time when a person’s word or promise was enough to establish a contract or a business relationship. It is popularly believed that honesty used to be held in higher esteem and was practiced more widely than it is today. We as leaders need to understand that honesty is just as important today as in the past, and that it is still held in high esteem. In addition, we need to remember that when our honesty is questioned, doubts about our integrity and the loss of others’ respect for us is not far behind. Once this happens, our days as leaders are numbered.

Charismatic

We all know people who can make things happen just by being involved. When their names are mentioned, everyone else jumps on the bandwagon. Such individuals have a way

of making us feel good about ourselves. What these people have is charisma. We may not be able to explain exactly what charisma is, but we know it when we see it, and we know who has it. Throughout history, some of the greatest leaders have had charisma. As leaders, project managers can exhibit charisma, too. Is this quality a special gift, or can it be developed?

I believe that this is an area that every human being has some potential of developing. I view charisma as the ability to influence the thinking and attitudes of others. To do this we must simply project an image by embodying certain characteristics. These characteristics include the seven previously discussed leadership qualities. Add to those a true commitment to these qualities, and you will have charisma.

Leadership Styles

The three most prevalent leadership styles are (1) autocratic, (2) consultative and (3) group.

Autocratic

At some point in our careers we've all encountered this leadership style. This type of leader says, "Do it my way because I'm the project manager and I said so." Although this leadership style may not be popular in today's warm and fuzzy, politically correct climate, there is a time and place for it in project management. The autocratic leadership style is most appropriate at the beginning of a project. This is especially true in environments where professional project management guidelines are unknown or have not been followed.

Such work environments tend to be undisciplined—with a history of projects that were cancelled due to cost overruns and client dissatisfaction or that were completed late, over budget and/or not meeting customer expectations. If you have been hired into this sort of environment, no doubt you have been brought on board to instill some project management discipline. You are in charge: don't hesitate to exert your influence and authority.

Consultative

This is a more moderate leadership style. The consultative leader shares problems and gets client, subordinate and senior management input. However, it is important to remember that the leader retains the decision-making role.

It may not be in our best interest to use this as our dominant leadership style. This more moderate approach should be used in conjunction with a more autocratic style, and should only be used after the project has progressed and you have already set the pace and tone of the operation. (I

recommend that one's overall leadership style be about 75 percent to 80 percent autocratic and 20 percent to 25 percent consultative.)

Group

You have probably guessed that I don't recommend this "group" leadership style for regular use in project management. However, there is occasionally a time and a place for it. For example, "group" leadership is what is followed when the office holiday season party is planned. The leader shares problems, obtains input and seeks a consensus. The leader then accepts the group's decision. An instance where the project manager might consider this leadership style is when dealing with issues of scope conflict resolution between stakeholders. However, even in this scenario the project manager must have a suggestion or two for resolution of the conflict. In this case, base your suggestion(s) on the primary customer's best interests. Focus on the constraints of time, scope, cost, risk, quality and customer satisfaction. Be sure to prepare a solid case for your suggestion(s). Remember, although you may be seeking a group consensus, you don't want to abdicate your position of authority and influence.

Conclusion

For project professionals, the art of leadership is every bit as important as the science of management. We must practice both disciplines in order to achieve the level of professionalism demanded by our clients and their increasingly complex business environments. The key word here is "practice." We must be aware of the when, where and how aspects of effective leadership techniques and use them appropriately. We can do this by making leadership a conscious part of our everyday professional activities. Remember, **perfect** practice makes perfect.

References

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- Powell, C. (2007, June 11). Colin Powell on leadership. Retrieved June 17, 2008, from Manage This!—Management and Productivity Forum: <http://manage-this.com/colin-powell-on-leadership/>

About the Author

Ruffin Veal III has been an information technology professional for more than 30 years. He held positions at increasing levels of responsibility over that time in such private sector industries as manufacturing, retailing, banking and medical, among others. He has also been employed

both full-time and as a consultant with such public sector employers as the State of Minnesota and Ramsey County, Minnesota.

“During that 30 year period I have been what I call an ‘in the trenches’ professional,” says Veal. “That is, one who has relied on resolving problems encountered by all IS/IT professionals with practical ‘nonperfect world’ means. There are a lot of theories out there, but I’ve found that nothing beats knowledge based on experience. Most advice given by consultants and speakers is either too costly, too time

consuming or just downright impractical. The presentations are great but the listener has little to take back to the office and implement in a quick, cost-effective manner. The listener has an even smaller chance of seeing any short-term return on investment. Emphasis on real-world information technology solutions is what you will see in my presentations.”

Ruffin Veal III is an author, speaker and president of Ruffin Veal & Associates, Inc., an information technology consulting firm specializing in organizational leadership and management, project management and client relations.