

Transformational leadership: A prescription for IT project
success

LPS 499: Interdisciplinary research seminar

Research Results

Mitchell L. Valentine

Capital University, Dayton

Table of Contents

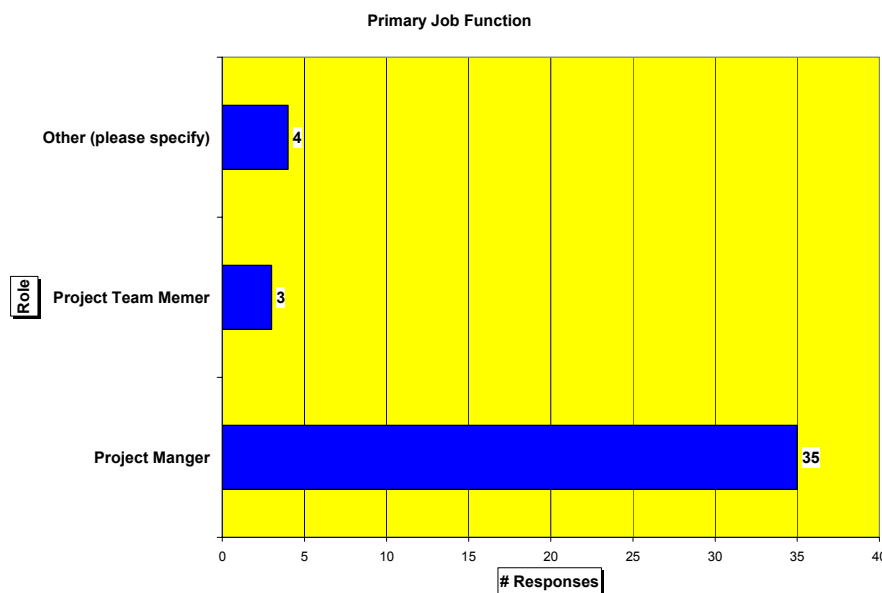
Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Demographic Data	3
Project Success Factors	8
Project Leadership	10
Conclusion	12
Limitations	12

Introduction

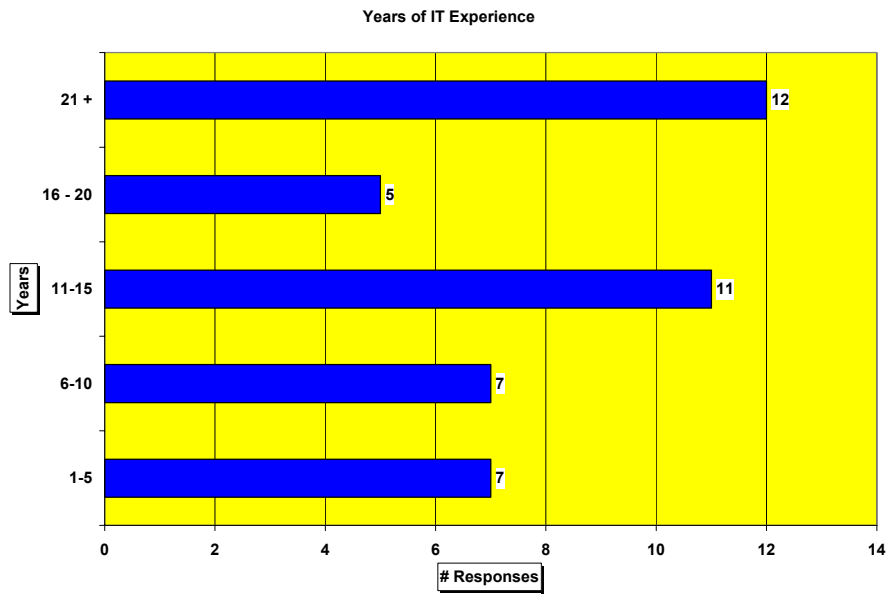
These survey results were compiled as part of an undergraduate senior research project to test the hypothesis that Transformational Leadership and the communication of a clear project vision increase the likelihood of successful Information Technology (IT) project outcomes. The target research population included project managers and project team members who were directly involved in the IT field. A total of 42 participants responded to the survey of which 35 (83%) were project managers, 3 (7%) were project team members, and 4 (10%) indicated that they were in roles other than project managers or team members (Figure 1). The four *Other* responses were from: a.) an IT Manager, b.) a Manager of Project Managers, c.) an Accounts Director / Delivery Manager and d.) Director of Technical Services. There were 50% greater male respondents than female respondents.

Demographic Data

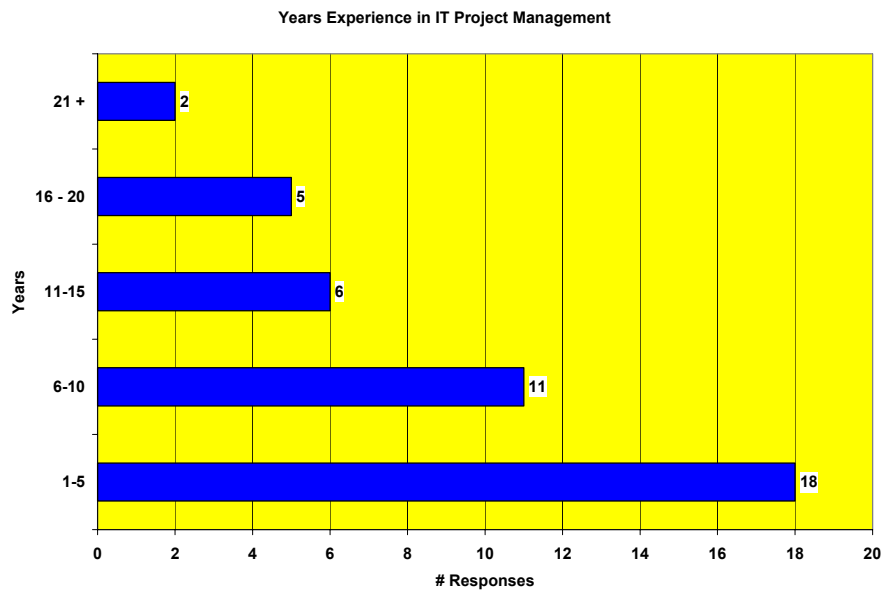
Primary Job Function



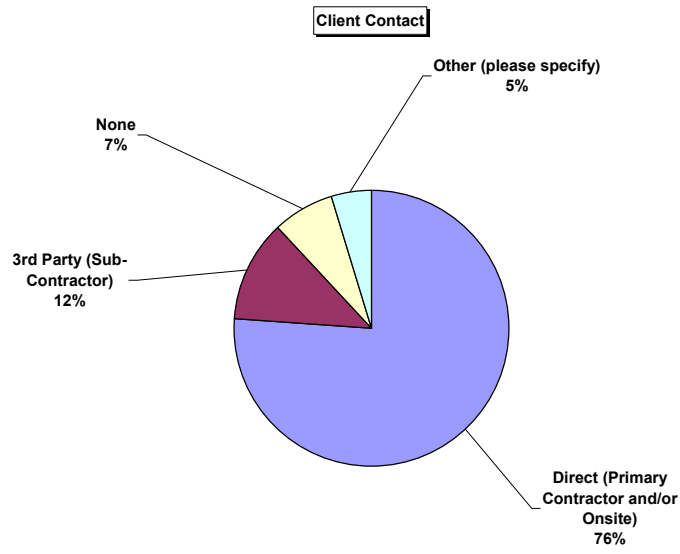
Years of Information Technology Experience



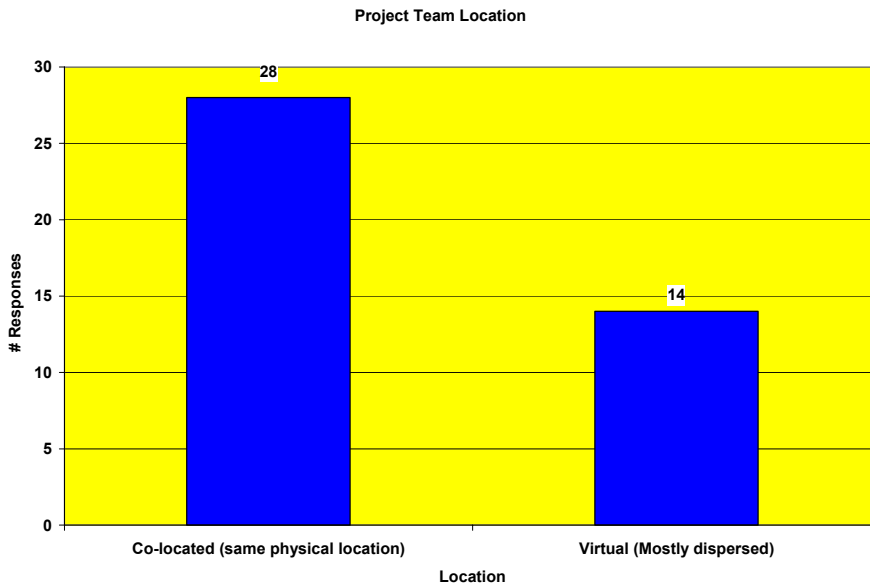
Years of Experience as an Information Technology Project Manager



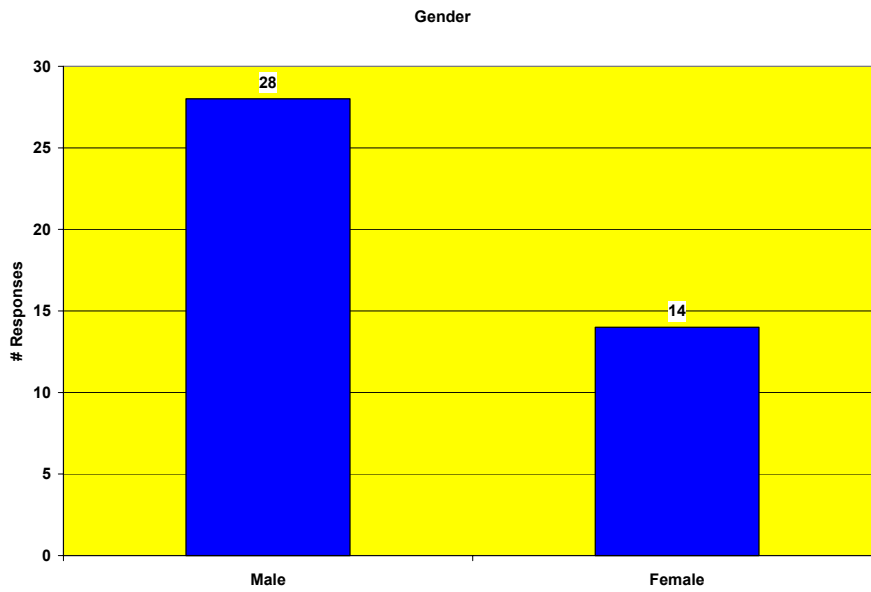
Contact With Client



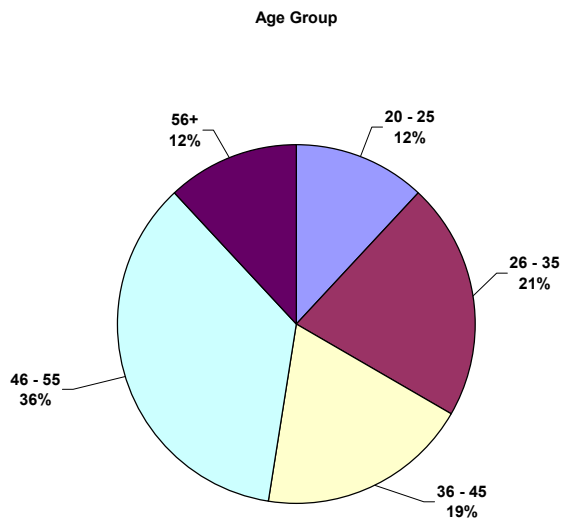
Project Team Location



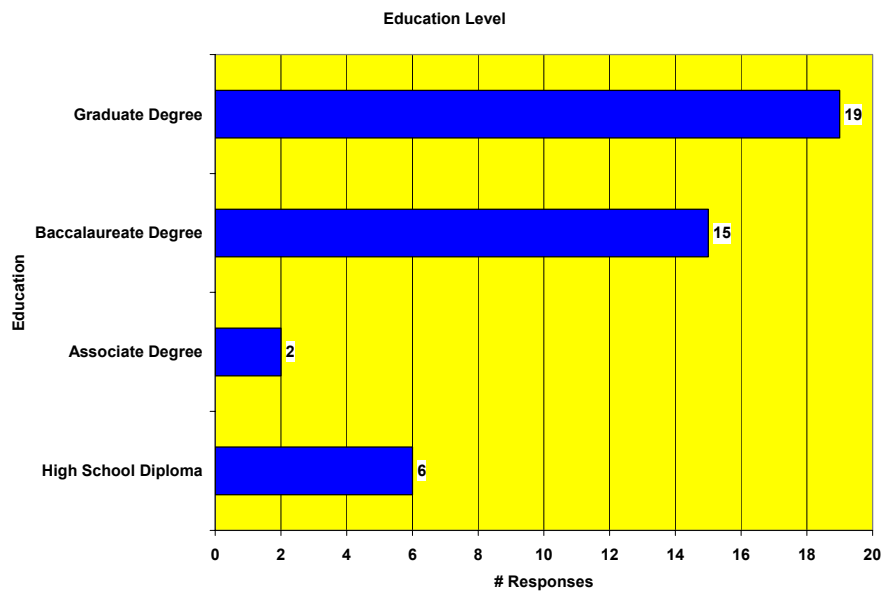
Gender



Age Group



Education Level



Project Success Factors

Project Success Factor Ranking

Survey respondents were asked to rank the seven factors (below), from 1 (Most Important to 7 (Least Important). Survey *Response Averages* were then calculated from the 34 respondents who answered this question. Because the value 1 was used to signify *Most Important*, the lower numbered *Response Averages* are of greater significance. The top three responses were: 1) *Clearly communicated project vision, goals and objectives* (Response Average: 2.71), 2) *Aligned with client strategic goals* (Response Average: 3.24), and 3) *Completed on-time, within budget and met stated quality objectives* (Response Average: 3.79).

Please rank how you feel the following factors affect IT project success from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). Once you have selected a Rating scale in a row please do not use that rating in a subsequent row. For example if you feel that "Aligned with client strategic goals" is the number 1 rating (most important) please do not use the number 1 rating in a subsequent row.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Response Average
Completed on-time within budget and met quality objectives	10	5	1	4	1	6	7	3.79
Aligned with client strategic goals	9	5	6	5	3	4	2	3.24
Effective project and stakeholder management	3	5	8	5	7	4	2	3.82
Effective use of processes and methodologies	0	4	4	4	7	8	7	4.94
Capable project team	2	5	9	6	6	5	1	3.82
Clearly communicated project vision goals and objectives	12	8	2	5	4	3	0	2.71
Executive sponsorship throughout the project lifecycle	4	8	2	3	5	2	10	4.26
Total Respondents								34
(skipped this question)								8

Project Success Factors

Survey participants were asked to respond to 15 statements regarding their feelings about how the statements, below, influenced successful IT project outcomes. The responses ranged from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Because the value 5 was used to signify *Strongly Agree*, the higher numbered *Response Averages* are more significant. The purpose was to determine if there were any inconsistencies in responses between the two questions.

The top three response statements were: a.) *A clearly articulated project vision is an important factor in successful project outcomes* (Response Average: 4.59), b.) *The project*

manager must be able to effectively negotiate with diverse stakeholders to remove barriers to project success (Response Average: 4.56), and c.) The project manager must manage and communicate customer expectations (Response Average: 4.41). These responses support the leadership traits required of a transformational leader. The transformational leader must be able to articulate a clear vision and direction and align the stakeholders to commit to, and achieve, the vision (end-state). The transformational leader must also be a strong relationship manager to enable negotiations among the various stakeholder groups and client management, thus removing barriers to IT project success.

Please provide your feedback regarding how you feel the following statements impact the opportunity for successful IT project outcomes	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response Average
A clearly articulated project vision is an important factor in successful project outcomes	1	0	0	10	23	4.59
End-user involvement must be established early and maintained through completion of the project	0	1	4	13	16	4.29
Projects must adhere to rigorous processes and methods	1	8	13	7	5	3.21
Regular communication of project vision goals and objectives to project stakeholders is an important factor in successful project outcomes	0	1	4	16	13	4.21
Project sponsor must be engaged early and continue through completion of the project	0	3	2	13	16	4.24
Identifying and managing key stakeholder needs is an important contributor to project success	0	2	0	16	16	4.35
The project manager is fully accountable for the success / failure of the project	2	4	3	15	10	3.79
Project sponsor involvement in key project decisions is an important factor towards project success	0	3	7	14	10	3.91
Communication of project vision is an important factor towards project success	1	0	3	17	13	4.21
Project resources must be capable of performing their assigned roles	1	0	2	18	13	4.24
An empowered team is critical to project success	0	0	7	14	13	4.18
The project manager must be able to effectively negotiate with diverse stakeholders to remove barriers to project success	0	0	1	13	20	4.56
The project must fulfill a strategic client need	0	3	11	8	12	3.85
The project must be completed on-time within budget and meet stated quality objectives	0	2	6	12	14	4.12
The project manager must manage and communicate customer expectations	0	0	3	14	17	4.41
Total Respondents						34
(skipped this question)						8

Project Leadership

Project Leadership Style Ranking

Survey respondents were asked to rank six leadership styles, below, from 1 (Most Important) to 7 (Least Important). Survey *Response Averages* were then calculated from the 29 participants who answered this question. Because the value 1 was used to signify *Most Important*, the lower numbered *Response Averages* are of greater significance. Of the 29 responses, 16 of the 29 participants (55%) selected the *Transformational Leadership* style within the top two response categories. However, across the total responses to the six leadership styles, the transformational leadership style had the third most significant response average, overall. The top three overall leadership styles were: a.) *Participative* (*Response Average: 2.34*), b.) *Situational* (*Response Average: 2.52*), and c.) *Transformational* (*Response Average: 2.62*). However, an important point to consider is that there are many similarities between the *Transformational* and *Participative* leadership styles. Additionally, project leaders also need to flex between leadership styles during the life of a project.

Please rank your preference of leadership styles from 1 (most preferred) to 6 (least preferred). Once you have selected a Rating scale in a row please do not use that rating in a subsequent row. For example if you feel that the "Participative" leadership style is your number 1 rating (most preferred) please do not use the number 1 rating in a subsequent row.	1	2	3	4	5	6	Response Average
Autocratic. Leader uses dominant tactics and pressure on team members to accomplish tasks	2	3	0	0	10	14	4.9
Laissez-Faire. Leader applies minimal control over team; team sets their own direction with little input from leader	3	2	1	2	12	9	4.55
Participative. Leader involves others in the process including subordinates peers superiors and stakeholders.	9	5	11	4	0	0	2.34
Situational. Leader modifies leadership style based on the given situation.	9	6	7	5	1	1	2.52
Transactional. Leader establishes clearly defined expectations and requirements to subordinates; establishes commensurate reward system for meeting expectations.	2	5	6	12	3	1	3.41
Transformational. Leader articulates a common vision involves all stakeholders and rallies the team to achieve the vision through action	7	9	6	4	1	2	2.62
Total Respondents							29
(skipped this question)							13

Information Technology Leadership Success Factors

Survey participants were then asked to respond to 17 leadership statements regarding their feelings about how the statements influenced IT project success (Figure 12). The responses ranged from 1 (*Very Unimportant*) to 5 (*Very Important*). Because the value 5 was used to signify *Very Important*, the higher numbered *Response Averages* are more significant. The top three survey responses, were: a.) *My leader communicated a shared vision (Response Average: 4.28)*, b.) *My leader had an understanding of the "Big Picture" and shared this view with the team (Response Average: 4.24)* and c.) *My leader assumed accountability for project outcomes (good or bad) (Response Average: 4.24)*

Consider a project that you feel was completed successfully and consider your role (project manager or project team member) as you complete this section. Please rank the importance of the following criteria in achieving project success from 1 (Very Unimportant) to 5 (Very Important)	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important	Response Average
My leader provided me with intellectually challenging opportunities	1	4	9	8	7	3.55
My leader challenged me to find innovative solutions to problems	1	4	2	13	9	3.86
My leader positively motivated me to do what it takes to insure successful project outcomes	1	1	6	10	11	4
My leader communicated a shared vision	1	1	1	12	14	4.28
My leader motivated me to help the team achieve the vision	1	2	2	13	11	4.07
My leader addressed the needs of all project stakeholders	1	2	6	14	6	3.76
My leader had an understanding of the "Big Picture" and shared this view with the team	1	3	1	7	17	4.24
My leader assumed accountability for project outcomes (good or bad)	1	0	3	12	13	4.24
My leader articulated a clear direction	1	0	2	16	10	4.17
My leader inspired me to do what it takes to insure team success	1	3	7	9	9	3.76
My leader encouraged more experienced team members to coach and mentor less experienced team members	1	1	6	15	6	3.83
My leader shared credit for successful project outcomes with the team	1	2	3	6	17	4.24
My leader encouraged stakeholder involvement	1	0	4	15	9	4.07
My leader engaged the project sponsor in key decisions	1	1	6	10	11	4
My leader communicated to all levels of the project - up down and across	1	2	5	4	17	4.17
My leader was an effective negotiator	1	1	4	12	11	4.07
My leader advocated the use of standard processes and methods	2	6	7	7	7	3.38
Total Respondents						29
(skipped this question)						13

Conclusion

This paper, and the supporting research, attempted to answer the research question, are the transformational leadership style and the communication of a shared project vision, significant factors that may enhance the opportunity for successful IT project outcomes?

Survey respondents indicated that:

- *A clearly articulated project vision is an important factor in successful project outcomes.*
- *The project manager must be able to effectively negotiate with diverse stakeholders to remove barriers to project success.*
- *The project manager must manage and communicate customer expectations.*

are factors that, if well managed, may increase the likelihood of successful IT project outcomes.

Survey respondents also identified the following as key leadership traits:

- *Communicated a shared vision.*
- *Understanding of the "Big Picture" and shared this view with the team.*
- *Assumed accountability for project outcomes (good or bad).*

Survey responses supported my hypothesis that transformational leadership and the communication of project vision are significant factors that increase the likelihood of IT project success.

Limitations

This research attempted to identify if transformational leadership and the communication of project vision may improve the likelihood of successful IT project outcomes; however, it did not draw correlations between transformational leadership and project vision, to IT project success.

This is an area for further research.

Additionally, this research focused on a project from its inception to delivery. It did not focus on the ongoing operation of the project through final decommissioning. Future research may be extended to include the operational and closedown aspects of IT projects.

Furthermore, research that assesses the impact of transformational leadership and the communication of project vision on the organizational management aspects of projects should be considered, especially given the recent globalization of IT project staffs and the desire to obtain the highest quality staff at the lowest cost.

Moreover, this research survey sampled a very small population of the IT project workforce. Future research may benefit from modifying the survey questionnaire and sampling a much larger population of the IT project workforce.

Finally, the size, scope and duration of IT projects may have an impact on the extent by which transformational project leadership and vision may impact the likelihood IT project success. Future research should also consider these important project characteristics.