

# The Project Leader Way

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A Chinese proverb says 'An army of a thousand is easy to find, but, how difficult to find a general.' The same premise holds good in the case of identification of a general to lead the project, i.e., the Project Leader. Some disappointing statistics says that barely 20-26% of software projects actually succeed. Researches by various other sources suggest that statistics in other categories of project management is not much different from this figure. What then is required to make a project successful?

A survey on the project cost vis-à-vis project success suggests that projects of less than \$750K had a success rate of 55%, while projects of \$6 mn or more had a success rate of less than 8%. This is enough evidence to infer that greater the project cost, the size of the project and number of people involved, lesser the success rate of the project. This leaves a task on our part to answer the billion-dollar question:

What makes a successful Project Leader irrespective of the size and cost of the project?

To answer the question, let us make ourselves aware with the composition of a project i.e., what does a project comprise of?

Broadly there are three elements that decide the success of a project:

- Time Schedules/Deadlines.
- Resources/Project costs.
- Project Specifications/End result.

To make a meaningful beginning to a project, one should understand the relation between these elements. Completing a project in shorter time span would demand either reduction in the project specifications, or enhancement in resources. Hence, Project schedules and project resources are inversely proportional and the project schedules and the

specifications are directly proportional. But reduction in specifications in turn will have a direct impact on the quality of the end result; hence, it is not a feasible option. Thus, the Hobson's choice, that one (Project leader) is left with, is to put more of resources available. Various resources that any project in general would demand are land, labor, capital and management. Now, the crucial aspect to be considered here is how to utilize these resources optimally. A project to be completed successfully demands the right blend of hard and soft skills in the project leader. As far as managing the capital and land are concerned, they fall under the hard skills of the project leaders. But when it comes to the people/members of the project, it demands the expertise in soft skills i.e., leadership skills. At this stage, project leadership skills are more desirable to complete the project successfully. The leader must possess the ability to bring about the integrated organizational flexibility among the team to make the project a success.

## A Soft Leader Rafts the Team

A project leader should always take the project team along from the start to the finish of the project. However, to keep the team united and working, the project leader should demonstrate the following three skills:

## About the Author

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A Model Project Leader		
Systematic	Perfectionist	Social Conscience
Charismatic	Composed	Hardworking
Caring	Level headed	Sensible
Appreciative	Prioritizing ability	Visionary
Good planner	Inspiring	Confident
Time manager	Ethical	Team manager
Listening	Emotionally Resilient	

*Source: ICFAI Research Center*

### Communication

A project leader should have excellent communication skills along with sound technical skills to complete the project successfully. As the number of the members grows, the possibility of gaps in the communication process within the team increases. Therefore, the project leader should pay specific attention to the process. He should develop a system to encourage open communication in which every member has the freedom of expressing his opinion and views. The communication should be both ways; top to bottom and bottom to top. The project leader should develop a systematized reciprocal mobility within the members of the team. To make this happen, the leader must bear in mind the 5 Cs of communication. (See Figure 1).

Every project leader must specialize in the process of communication. The first task is to collect the information that is to be communicated. Here, the leader should avoid redundancy and obsolete factors that dampen crisp communication. After collecting the appropriate data, he needs to comprehend the same. He should understand the finesse of the issue/data in order to communicate the same to the members effectively. One should understand the fact

that the level at which the communicator (Leader) delivers his message may not be same at which the receivers (Members) receive it. He needs to have a clear idea of the message and the audience before communicating his message and categorize the same in accordance with the requirement and level of understanding of the team members. The message should communicate what it was intended for when it reaches the members. This results in a synchronized understanding of the state of affairs and thus a flawless performance.

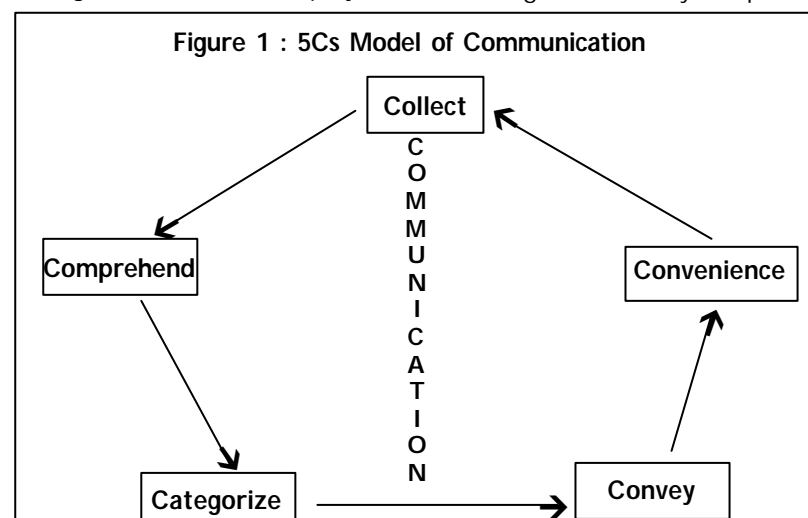
### Motivation

A project leader needs to motivate his team members continuously during the course of the project.

Motivation can be of two types viz., monetary and non-monetary. Each one being equally important, the soft skill of the leader demands him to be good at the non-monetary motivation like appreciation, a pat on the back etc. Appreciation plays a crucial role in a project. The project leader should appreciate the members whenever they perform well. It helps in enhancing self-esteem for both giver and receiver. It may act as instructive for the receiver if it is specific and descriptive. A pat on the back creates a human connection between giver and receiver. It makes him feel good, though perhaps a little awkward at first. It encourages collaborative relationships among project members.

### Execution

"We had adequate and timely meetings, we did benchmarking with the best in the industry, we had the assistance of the best consultants, ours was the brightest team, we have provided the team with enough organizational flexibility, our resources were plenty, still our project failed". This is the saga of the many companies



### Leader vs. Manager

Managers and leaders are two different types of people. Managers' goals arise out of necessities rather than desires; they excel at diffusing conflicts between individuals or departments, placating all sides while ensuring that an organization's day to day business gets done. Managers tend to adopt an impersonal, if not passive, attitude towards goals. Frederick G Donner, Chairman, and Chief Executive officer of General Motors from 1958 to 1967 expressed this kind of attitude towards goals in defining GM's position on product development: "To meet the challenge of the marketplace, we must recognize changes in customer needs and desires far enough ahead to have the right products in the right places, at the right time and in the right quantity." Nowhere in his statement is there a notion that consumer tastes and preferences arise in part as a result of what manufacturers do. A managerial culture emphasizes rationality and control. Whether his energies are directed toward goals, resources, organization structures, or people, a manager is a problem solver. The manager asks: "What problems have to be solved, and what are the best ways to achieve results so that people will continue to contribute to this organization?"

Leaders on the other hand, adopt personal active attitudes towards goals. They look for potential opportunities and rewards that lie around the corner, inspiring subordinates and firing up the creative process with their own energy. Polaroid camera can be a best-cited example to highlight such approach of the leaders. Few would have thought in their wildest dreams, that there can be a camera that can also develop the film. That was the Polaroid camera, which unlike the products of General Motors, came into being out of the leaders thought, and not out of the customers' desire. In addition to this, leaders and managers differ in few more aspects like conceptions at work, relationship with others and senses of self.

By Abraham Zaleznik

Sources: Excerpts from *Managers and Leaders; Are They Different?*

including the biggies - AT&T, British Airways, Kodak etc. People have a tendency to play tactics in business to win the game, and they take execution also in the same sense. That is the blunder they commit and they miss their schedules and make a mess of the project. Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan in their book, *Execution-The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, say that execution is a discipline and integral to a strategy. They say that the tactics are central to execution but execution is not strategy. The key person who is responsible for the

execution is the leader of the project. He must firmly understand that the plan is not going to matter in anyway unless it is implemented or executed.

They have narrated a trident mantra to ensure that the execution of the strategy/plan is aptly done which is as follows:

- The people process.
- The strategy process.
- The operation process.

The people process is more important than either the strategy or the operations process. After all,

it is the people of an organization who evaluate how projects need to be approached, what are their strategies etc. and translate the strategies into operational realities. In other words, if one doesn't get the people process right, one can never accomplish a project successfully.

The second is the strategy process that makes a link between people and operations. The project leader should bear in mind that an effective project execution plan requires that all parties involved understand how to move from A to Z, what the critical tasks are and where the potential roadblocks lie. Many don't pay as much attention to the 'hows' of executing the strategy as they pay to the strategic planning. The project leader must understand that both are equally important. AT&T, the victim of such a mistake, had to pay a heavy price in the year 1997. The company was all set for a growth and expansion plan which was based on the set of four strong building blocks viz., buying cable companies and gaining direct access to the customer, providing bundled service, executing the moves fast enough and relying on regulatory implementation of the 1996 Telecommunication Act. Everything appeared to be moving as planned. The gain in the market was clearly apparent. But it took no time for the telecom giant to end up in shambles. The respectable share price of \$44 tumbled down to mere \$18. Where did it go wrong? Though the company had a strong set of strategies, the assumptions on which the strategies were built were equally weak. The company was not prepared with the 'hows'. The assumptions on

### Situational Leadership

Success in leadership comes when the leadership style is matched with the characteristics of the follower. Problems with leadership come when the leadership style does not fit the

Follower. Delegation of responsibility to a person not prepared to handle the responsibility frustrates the worker and disappoints the employer. What appears superficially to be an employee attitude problem is in fact a leadership problem caused by the leader's inappropriate leadership style. The leadership gurus Ken Blanchard, and Paul Hersey created a model for Situational Leadership in the late 1960's that allow a leader to analyse the needs of the situation he is dealing with, and then adopt the most appropriate leadership style

- **Directing** Leaders define the roles and tasks of the 'follower', and supervise them closely. Decisions are made by the leader and announced, so communication is largely one-way.
- **Coaching** Leaders still define roles and tasks, but seeks ideas and suggestions from the follower. Decisions remain the leader's prerogative, but communication is much more two-way.
- **Supporting** Leaders pass day-to-day decisions, such as task allocation and processes, to the follower. The leader facilitates and takes part in decisions, but control is with the follower.
- **Delegating** Leaders are still involved in decisions and problem solving, but control is with the follower. The follower decides when and how the leader will be involved.

Effective leaders are versatile in being able to move around the grid according to the situation, so there is no one right style. However, we tend to have a preferred style, and in applying Situational Leadership you need to know which one that is for you.

*Source: ICFAI Press Research Center*

which the strategies were laid out bounced right back.

The last one is the operation process i.e., linking strategy and people. On this, Larry Bossidy, the founder of Honeywell International

says that operating plan is a crucial responsibility of the team. It ties a thread through the members of the team, strategy and the operations involved in the project. The project plan is to be owned by everybody

involved in the task. Though that is not all that is required, the three aforementioned elements form the three most crucial aspects that are sought after in a project leader. n

*Reference # 17-03-11-03*

### Quotations

- A project is one small step for the project sponsor, one giant leap for the project manager.
- Good project managers admit mistakes; that's why you so rarely meet a good project manager.
- The most successful project managers have perfected the skill of being comfortable being uncomfortable.
- Powerful project managers don't solve problems, they get rid of them.
- It will go wrong in the worst possible way—Sod's law.
- The more time you spend in reporting on what you are doing, the less time you have to do anything. Stability is achieved when you spend all your time doing nothing but reporting on the nothing you are doing. – Cohn's law
- The nice thing about not planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression.
- If an IT project works the first time, it is wrong.

*Source: [www.project-training-uk.freemove.co.uk](http://www.project-training-uk.freemove.co.uk)*