

In difficult times it is the people with leadership skills who can engage all around them to create success; as success becomes harder to achieve so the demand for more such capable leaders inevitably grows. **Brenda Hales** of Team Animation discusses the phenomenon, assisted by Donnie MacNicol.

DEVELOPING PM LEADERSHIP

WE ARE at a fascinating point in the development of project management. A number of drivers are combining the push for professionalism, the growing ranks of project managers, an economic downturn and – at first sight somewhat paradoxically – organisations demanding more project management leaders.

Given this demand, the challenge most organisations are facing is how to develop their project management leaders. Those who are tasked with fulfilling this leadership gap are asking some recurring questions:

Are leadership skills an inherent quality individual project managers either do or do not have?

We all know people who just seem to be natural project leaders, at their best those who 'have it' and inspire all around them. These are the leaders who nurture relationships even when under extreme pressure: who retain the strategic perspective even as problems are erupting.

These 'just seem to' qualities that the best leaders operate will encourage the theory that leaders are 'born not made' and that no amount of training can give, even very competent managers, leadership skills. This view is supported by much of the traditional training for project managers, where most of the investment in developing project management has been on the tools, processes and procedures.

Can project management leadership skills be taught? The short answer is no. Traditional project management competency training provides the building blocks of project management by teaching 'what' needs to be done. It misses the subtlety of the 'how'. Since it is the 'how' that differentiates the best leaders, training the traditional skills on their own simply cannot impact the required leadership skills.

Project management leaders can be enabled to

emerge, but this requires an entirely new learning process and focus. In addition, to create a cadre of leadership requires cross organisational linkages around such elements as recognition, reward and processes to be developed.

How can organisations develop their leadership capability?

We think this starts by recognising that project management at its best, while led by project managers, is at its most successful when all of the individuals, teams and organisations are fully co-ordinated. We call this newPM® which is shown in overview here.

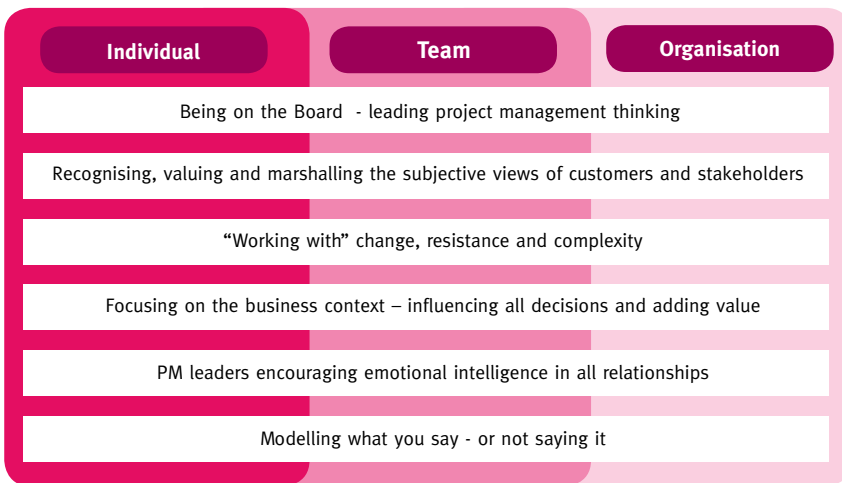
Each of these six guiding principles applied through the lenses of the individual, team and organisation engage not just the individual leaders but rather the whole organisation's capability: identifying, encouraging, rewarding and leveraging the benefits of its total leadership potential.

Developing leaders

One of the most effective ways to encourage enthusiastic support for thinking differently about developing leadership skills is to conduct a 'best from rest' exercise. Our process starts by involving project management stakeholders in organisations to identify their very best project managers and then conducting an investigation of what makes them the best, in their context. People are typically surprised at just how much the 'how' qualities of trust, respect, commitment and passion dominate. Unlike the more technical 'what' skills, these leadership competencies are more art than science and are undertaken in different and often very individual ways by every leader.

The project managers who operate with these competencies are the most successful precisely





because they inspire people to put their hearts into their work and who create teams that somehow, magically, are more than the sum of their parts. Ask the best leaders what inspired them and they will typically cite a small number of mentors and messages they took to heart.

Suddenly it becomes obvious why it is impossible to teach leadership prescriptively, precisely because it is so very personal and there can never be a 'one size fits all' leadership proforma. Rather it requires the potential leadership capability to be encouraged to emerge through experiential learning at workshops, emotional intelligence, peer learning, specific focus on working with leadership topics, coaching and mentoring.

Creating real leadership transitions

Although many project managers are promoted through a number of roles, few make the transitions. So while their positions become bigger and more prestigious, they do not undertake a change in how they manage. So it is not infrequent to find project, programme or even portfolio directors enthusiastically rolling up their sleeves to show project contributors how to do the tasks they once did.

Our PM Transition Model™, shown in overview below, is utilised as part of our development programmes to highlight the kinds of steps individuals must make if they are to become leaders.

Making these transitions requires a number of fundamental shifts to be made by the individuals making the change. The project manager must not only make the personal shift but help others to feel the transition they are making.

Transition is not a matter of doing more of what was done before; it is more about doing things differently. Some of the changes that must be made are around:

- Behaviour: individuals must leave behind the familiar and be challenged to welcome the discomfort that undertaking new ways of doing things will bring. Others must accept that when undertaking new things people will need time to learn; they cannot be fully effective immediately

- Time –what the PMs spend their time doing. As a project manager there is much that will occupy them that is focused on the completion of task content. While moving up the steps the focus increasingly

shifts to enabling others and business strategy.

- Time – the horizon over which the project manager is looking. So an early entry project manager is focused predominantly on the end of the project while a portfolio director needs to be surveying the whole market place years ahead.

- Personal contribution: on the basis that what you value is what you focus on, project managers must change what they value about their individual contribution and hence what they do. As a project manager transitions upwards, their value is more about how they enable others and not what they personally deliver.

Asking project managers to accept that when they transition they should feel uncomfortable and be trying to do unfamiliar things is a real challenge. Yet this is of particular significance to leaders since at the very core of complex programmes is the need to shepherd others through the inevitable discomfort of change.

One of the additional ways we support individuals to move through the transitions is to utilise our project management competency framework which identifies the skills, behaviours and experience pertinent to each stage.

Leadership development must be implemented holistically.



The challenge?

Paradoxically, the current market provides the ideal opportunity to rethink the investment strategy on how to develop project management leadership professionals. Rather than spreading ever more thinly the available investment in traditional training, the time is right to target the available investment onto leadership.

Since the biggest determinant of team and organisational success are the current and emerging leaders, if an organisation relies on project management success, then this could be just the opportunity to change the focus of investment, always remembering that 'The opposite of courage in our society is not cowardice, it is conformity' (Rollo May).

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