

MANAGEMENT VERSUS LEADERSHIP: WHERE DOES THE PROJECT MANAGER STAND?

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ABSTRACT

The modern project manager needs many skills to be effective and ensure the successful completion of the projects undertaken. The question is raised as to whether successful project management is more due to good management or leadership skills. This paper looks at the issues relating to both management and leadership and puts them into a project management perspective. The paper then looks at the role of the project manager and concludes that a high level of skill in both management and leadership is important for effective project management.

Keywords: management, leadership, project management.

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INTRODUCTION

The question regarding the relationship between management and leadership has been debated by many scholars and is the subject of much literature. Some consider leadership to be an essential part of the general management function (Dessler, 1982), whilst others see management and leadership as being two distinctive though complementary systems of action (Chapman, 1984; Kotter, 1990a).

This paper intends to look at the management versus leadership issue from a 'project management' perspective and identify the characteristics of both which are required by a project manager to operate effectively. The paper will identify the elements that make up both management and leadership, highlight the differences between them, define project management and the special role of the project manager, and then assess this role in relation to the management/leadership criteria.

MANAGEMENT

Traditionally, management has been loosely defined as *the process of getting things done through other people* (Dessler, 1982; Organ & Hamner, 1982). So what are the elements and functions of 'management' that enable managers to get things done? Dessler (1982) indicates that management involves the performance of the following traditional functional elements:

- planning – setting goals and targets, developing plans and forecasting for the future;
- organising – determining what work needs to be performed, allocating tasks to staff, delegating authority and coordinating the work between staff;
- staffing – determining the type of staff required, recruiting and selecting staff, setting performance standards, and providing staff training and development;
- controlling – setting performance and quality standards, monitoring actual performance against the standards and instigating corrective action where required; and
- leading – getting others to get the job done, maintaining morale and motivating staff.

Although Dessler (1982) considers leadership to be an integral and important part of the management function, later authors considered it to be a separate activity.

According to Chapman (1984), management is primarily concerned with the achievement of 'organisational objectives', through a process of communicating, planning, organising, controlling and evaluating. He considers that this is achieved through:

- resolving conflicts;
- setting goals and moving employees towards them;
- keeping people productive;
- maintaining optimal working conditions;
- making the best possible use of all resources;
- anticipating and solving problems before productivity declines; and
- holding things together.

Kotter (1990b) also provides a similar view of the management function, describing it in terms of the following functional elements:

- planning and budgeting – determining the time, cost and steps to meet commitments;
- organising and staffing – determining what staff is required to achieve the commitment and then finding the staff to do it; and
- determining and problem solving – monitoring results against the plan.

Based on the above, ‘management’ is about getting things done – through others – on time, on budget and to the required standard, consistently.

LEADERSHIP

If management is about how things get done, then what is leadership about? Kotter (1990b) indicates that leadership involves carrying out the following:

- establishing direction – developing both a vision of the future and strategies for producing the changes needed to achieve that vision;
- aligning people – communicating the vision by words and deeds to all those whose cooperation may be needed to achieve the vision; and
- motivating and inspiring – helping people energise themselves to overcome political, bureaucratic and resource barriers to change.

Zairi (1991), however, has a slightly different view of leadership and although it is provided in the context of TQM implementation, it is considered relevant to the overall discussion. He suggests that leadership requires the performance of the following five ‘tasks’:

1. Setting the corporate identity (organisational culture) – defined by a mission statement to set it apart from rivals and competitors. A mission statement needs to reflect purpose, strategy, values and behaviour standards (Campbell 1991).
2. Generating commitment – by implementing the following ‘three pillars’ (Martin & Nicholls, 1985) – noted as being essential for generating commitment:
 - create a sense of belonging to the organisation – by informing people, involving people and sharing success;
 - create a sense of excitement in the job – by creating pride, trust and accountability for results; and
 - create confidence in management leadership – by exerting authority, showing dedication and displaying competence.
3. Managing power processes – ensuring that the levels of power and control exerted are managed to suit the situation, at all levels in the organisation. In this context, power can be defined as either *the force which gets things done* or *the imposition of the will of an individual upon the actions of others* (Price 1987).
4. Managing the culture transformation – by acknowledging its existence and understanding its effect on organisational performance. In this context, culture can be defined as *the social energy that drives – or fails to drive – the organisation* (Kilmann, Saxton & Serpa, 1986).
5. Avoiding being a ‘visionary leader’ – by ensuring that the vision is guided by organisational objectives and not personal obsession. If care is not taken, vision could lead to a state of illusion.

From the above it can be seen that while management is about the process, leadership is about the people who carry out the process. Leadership is about providing people with direction and a reason to accept it. It is about getting people to commit to and become enthusiastic about their

work to enable the vision to be realised. Leadership is about getting things done *with* other people.

MANAGEMENT VERSUS LEADERSHIP — CREATING A BALANCE

So which is more important; management or leadership? Both, it is proposed, are equally important, with the balance between the two, being determined by the particular situation. As Zairi (1991) states:

“Management and leadership tend to complement one another. Strong leadership with weak management is no better than strong management with weak leadership. For organisations to deal with the various complexities and frequent changes, there has to be strong leadership to direct the organisation forward and strong management to pull the strings together.”

According to Deming (1986): “The job of management is not supervision, but leadership”. Therefore, in the modern business world, to be effective, managers also need to be leaders. They must coach, develop, remove barriers and create an environment of innovation and creativity. They need to motivate their teams and, above all, work with them, not against them. No manager can manage (effectively) from behind a door or a desk (Peratec, 1994).

However, project management and the role of the project manager are considered to be different from traditional management (Sayles & Chandler, 1971). So where does the project manager stand in relation to all this?

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project management is considered to be different from traditional management, due to the temporary nature of the endeavour being undertaken. This means that every project has a definite beginning and a definite end. A project team, created for the sole purpose of performing the project, seldom outlives the project. In most projects, when the project is complete, the team is disbanded. This creates a unique set of organisational problems for the project manager to overcome.

THE ROLE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER

Although the role of the project manager is defined as *the individual responsible for managing a project* (PMI, 1996), this does not tell us what a project manager does. According to PMI (1996), project management is ‘the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities in order to meet or exceed stakeholder needs and expectations from a project’.

For the project manager to ‘meet or exceed stakeholder needs and expectations’ implies the application of the traditional functional elements of traditional management – i.e. planning, organising, staffing and controlling. This does not, however, take into account the unique organisational problems associated with projects.

Although managers generally are people who get things done through others, project managers are different in that they are largely dependent on people outside their own organisation and direct control, to get their work done. Project managers, therefore, must constantly seek to penetrate these outside organisations to provide pressure and influence from within to ensure that project goals are being met (Sayles & Chandler, 1971).

Due to this dependence on others outside of their direct control, Sayles and Chandler (1971) liken project managers to a metronome – a device designed to keep a number of diverse elements responsive to a central beat, or common rhythm. In this role, project managers ensure that all parties involved in the project respond to the needs or ‘beat’ of the project.

This, it is proposed, can only be achieved effectively if the project manager provides the leadership needed to establish and communicate the project direction, motivate and inspire the people involved, and maintain commitment to the project right through to completion.

CONCLUSIONS

Although closely interwoven and complementary, it would appear from the above that the principles of management and leadership are distinct and separate. Where management is about the process – getting things done on time, on budget and to the required standard – leadership is about dealing with the people who carry out the process – by providing direction and maintaining their focus.

Although project managers are generally expected to be project leaders as well (PMI, 1996), it would appear from the above that their leadership qualities are likely to be equally as important to the success of a project as their managerial capabilities. A high level of skill in both management and leadership is therefore considered necessary for effective project management.

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