

The logo for the Major Projects Association features the text "Major Projects Association" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The text is centered and flanked by four blue horizontal bars. Two bars are on the left, pointing right towards the text, and two are on the right, pointing left towards the text. The bars have a slight 3D effect with a darker blue shadow on the bottom edge.

Major Projects Association

Management styles and leadership

Seminar 130 held at the Institution of Civil Engineering, London
5th December 2006

Summary

Key conclusions

- Leaders must clearly communicate and live the values they wish their teams to uphold
- There is not one best style of leadership
- Leadership styles may have to change during the life of a project: good leaders know when to change their style to suit the circumstances
- True leadership is transformational, not transactional (that's management)
- Consider getting personal support from skilled coaches. If you do: engage your boss; include your team; aim for you and your team to become self sufficient in self-help/co-coaching
- Good leaders are skilled in coaching their teams themselves
- Joint customer/supplier leadership can be very successful. It requires a 'baggage dumping' phase as the relationship passes from 'negotiation' to 'collaboration'. Stakeholders on both sides must commit to putting the project first
- Convince stakeholders to value leadership of a project (rather than management)
- Project leadership differs from business leadership (different focus, timescales, issues, stakeholders)

Introduction

Research has shown that successful project managers have firstly leadership skills, secondly conceptual and organisational skills and thirdly domain knowledge. The complexity and international nature of today's major projects means that increasingly it is no longer sufficient for a project manager to produce a tightly specified product or service within an existing organisational structure. Long life cycles and changing client requirements now require the ability to handle both a transactional and a transformational contract and many major projects and programmes now involve the delivery and leadership of change.

The seminar examined the qualities of successful leadership and whether leaders are born, and to what extent their qualities can be developed. It opened with the presentation of a large ongoing joint leadership project, followed by the experiences of a management consultant whose key role has been the coaching and mentoring of leaders of change. Subsequent contributions included a personal account of individual development from project manager to business leader in the infrastructure construction industry, and finally there was an analysis of the morning's proceedings.

Project Allenby/Connaught

The object of this £12 billion PFI project with a life cycle of 35 years is to provide a fully serviced living and working environment for 18,000 British Army personnel based in Aldershot and around Salisbury Plain, and includes a construction element of £1.2 billion for building accommodation over a ten-year period

Managing a project of this size is an enormous challenge, partly because the provision of services has to be efficiently maintained through all phases of army restructuring. Much of the day-to-day management is focused on the essential support services, for instance transport, building maintenance and armouries.

Joint leadership

The Allenby/Connaught project is a complex contractual framework between the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and a consortium of sponsors and first level contractors. The scope and complexity of the project and the diversity of requirements meant that it was too big to be managed from the centre. A broad spectrum of people with different interests had to be encouraged to point in the same direction and accept that change was inevitable – for instance, the construction element alone involves some 3,000 staff from many different environments and cultures.

Traditional management of a project or programme involves establishing structures and systems, allocating staff and resources, monitoring progress and correcting deviations from a plan – the aim is a strong delivery which is predictable, reliable and obtainable within a prescribed timescale. On the other hand, leading a project or programme involves creating a vision which people can buy into, developing strategies for driving change and building the alignment and commitment of people who subscribe to the vision. It is about improvement and renewal. The long term nature of this project required both strong management and leadership, with the bias on leadership.

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The key to success was seen as setting up ongoing communication links between the project manager, appointed by the MoD, and the chief executive of the first level contracting organisation. Speakers described how this joint leadership, with a significant array of stakeholders on each side, provides an interface and focal point in the management of the joint venture.

Conditions for effective joint leadership

A successful large scale project of this kind requires:

- Exorcism of the misconceptions of the past
- Stakeholder buy-in from the top
- Shared vision and values
- Development of appropriate cultures and behaviours
- Use of role model leadership
- Constant joint communication throughout the organisations involved

Leaders of change

The second presentation considered the role of a leader of change (LOC). Formal programmes for change can vary enormously in their objectives. They may result from company mergers or de-mergers, the aftermath of major IT implementation, or maybe just the consequence of a major change of strategy. Different challenges require different drivers, but wherever major change is necessary there will be a central programme, and an individual who is the leader of change. The role is a lonely one, which can make or break people's reputations and in the implementation of the programme it is 'where the buck stops'.

LOCs do not have to be natural leaders, but they need a certain combination of skills, some of which are innate and some to do with previous life experiences. They usually have a strong career track record and command respect as business unit operational leaders. LOCs want to achieve their own goals, but they have a desire to pull others up with them. However they also realise that they are on a learning curve and often need professional help to develop fully into the role required.

Coaching and mentoring

There is no 'one size fits all' solution for the development of leadership skills, but there are certain generic behaviour patterns and attitudes which are important in interacting with other people.

There are a number of ways of assessing leadership skills, including feedback information from peers above and below in the management structure, performance metrics and performance observation by a coach or mentor.

The coaching process is a cyclic one which seeks to identify a series of specific issues, and involves the individual in a gradual learning process on the part of the LOC. Frank and honest views are exchanged, but in general the aim is to build confidence and engage the LOC at a level best suited to his or her personal development.

Maintaining trust and ethical standards in coaching are paramount in getting the individual to understand where they are doing well and where they are having problems. The role of the coach or mentor is not to be prescriptive, but to listen and to point out alternatives on which the individual can build his or her skills.

Changing from managing to leading

The final presentation of the seminar examined the leadership qualities of successful leaders in society, and looked at the differences between project and business leadership and between managing and leading projects.



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Projects and programmes may change in their leadership requirements as they progress in their life cycles. Four different possible phases in the style of leadership within a project or programme were identified:

1. Directing, in which the leader tells the team what is to be done
2. Coaching, in which the leader points out possible alternative actions to the team but allows them to decide how the goals will be achieved
3. Supporting, in which the leader promotes and pushes through those objectives
4. Delegating, in which the leader allows the teams to explore the vision in ways they see as appropriate

It is vital that leaders adopt the behaviours appropriate to these four styles, understand when their subordinates are ready to move from one style of leadership to the next and be prepared to revert to previous behaviours when they are not. Good leaders develop their own coaching and mentoring skills.

The novelty of a project or programme will also determine which style is appropriate, as will its complexity and need for innovation. Putting together a team of individuals who have had previous experience of similar projects or programmes leads to quicker decisions on processes or procedures, and people are always flattered to think they have been specially chosen. Pressure for delivery and media reportage are also areas in which effective leadership is crucial.

Looking at leaders from business and politics, key characteristics for success include courage, excellent interpersonal and communication skills, ability to argue the case, personal authority, cultural sensitivity and vision.

Analysis

The morning's presentations and discussions sought to answer the following questions:

- What does leadership comprise?
- Is there a 'best' style of management and leadership?
- Does it really depend on the nature and circumstances of the project?
- Is there a distinction between 'transactional' and 'transformational' leadership?

It was concluded that effective leaders need vision, values and a firm idea of direction. They need to be able to inspire and motivate for a successful outcome. They need to be good listeners and communicators.

The style of leadership required by each project may differ and may change because of external factors. Leadership style may also vary throughout the life cycle of a project or programme.

Transaction is the specific agreement for handling the project or programme; transformation is the positive change brought about in the process.

In general most major projects today need either a leader with managerial capabilities or a manager with leadership qualities.

Participating organisations

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