Handling projects involves both leadership and management

In this session of project management we are going to introduce the nature of project working and introduce some of the basic concepts involved with projects. In particular we are going to illustrate that effective leadership ability is now an important part of the project manager’s toolkit.

Running a project effectively involves both management and leadership. There are three main aspects to the role of the project manager and leader. Firstly the person running the project has to understand the role of the project leader and manager. This role involves both leadership and management and as we will see later communication plays an important part in the role of effective project management and leadership. The person running the project needs to look up and down the organisational hierarchy, be aware of historical events and at the same time give consideration to possible future events and manage relationships outside the project as well as internal team issues.

Promoting organisational team working is important and this involves both the visible and invisible teams as well as the stakeholders. Organisational politics can hamper greatly the activities of a project team so attention to the issue of organisational team working is vitally important. We will present a framework for promoting organisational team working in a later slide.

The project life cycle is an important issue to which the project leader needs to pay attention. Every project goes through the same phases of definition, planning, resourcing, implementation and handover. We will deal with these issues as the sessions progress.

Study questions: How well do you understand your role as a project manager and leader? What do you understand by the term ‘organisational team working’? How closely does the project life cycle of definition, planning, resourcing, implementation and handover fit with any of the projects in which you are currently engaged?

The project leader often works outside day to day business activities and thus maybe outside the normal organisational hierarchy. There are often unusual and temporary links to senior managers and there are few formal rules on how project managers should behave in this sometimes ambiguous environment. It is important that the project manager creates and develops informal lines of communication throughout the organisation if they are to develop sufficient influence to be effective. The project leader and manager is responsible for the achievement of project goals which are specific and which require visible and dynamic activity. Project managers and leaders have to look upwards, outwards, backwards, forwards, downwards and inwards to be successful.

We will use a questionnaire later in this module so that you can assess how well you perform according to this approach to the project leader and manager’s role. In the meantime, before considering the
study questions it would be a good idea to look through the various sections on ‘Project Leadership’ by Briner, Geddes and Hastings as listed in the bibliography on the last slide of this session.

Study questions: Would you describe yourself as a project manager or a project leader or both? What evidence can you present to support your view of your operation? Before undertaking the questionnaire later think about how effective are you at the six areas of upwards, outwards, backwards, forwards, downwards and inwards to which the project manager and leader should pay attention?

Project teams tend to have characteristics which set them apart from many other teams. The project team is often brought together for a specific project, its members are seldom full time and do not usually form a hierarchy within the team. The team is invariably cross functional in nature and will include both visible and invisible members.

To ensure that the team works effectively both within itself and within the context of the organisation a number of factors are important. First it is important to establish a shared view of success criteria. There needs to be an agreed code of conduct for working together. The leader must keep in touch with the team members when they are apart and ensure that each individual team member is able to contribute and made to feel important as regards those contributions.

Leadership of the team particularly if it is dispersed and part time is very important and one way to achieve this is by setting realistic targets, milestones and reporting times. It is important to review constantly the progress and performance of the project and its team. Finally the external relationships need to be managed effectively.

Study questions: How would you describe your project team in terms of full or part time, focusing on a specific project, cross functional and its hierarchical nature including both visible and invisible members? How effective have you been at establishing the shared view of success criteria, setting up a code of conduct for working together, keeping in touch with dispersed members, unlocking the potential contributions of individual team members, setting realistic targets, reviewing progress and managing external relationships?

An aspect of project working which makes the work different from normal operations is that the project has a start, a middle and an end. Operational management on the other hand tends to be ongoing and continuous. Thus we talk about the ‘project life cycle’ and that life cycle tends to have a number of distinct phases. Firstly there is the definition stage where the strategic fit of the project is identified, specifications created and the various stakeholders become involved. Once that initial project definition phase is completed then the planning and resourcing stage takes place. This leads to the implementation phase where the bulk of the project work is undertaken in practical development terms. Finally it is usual for handing over stage to take place and for the project to be wound up. This final
phase can have significant implications for the morale and human side of the project team if it is not handled in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

**Study questions:** How well defined is your project life cycle? Is the project definition clear and concise and has the planning been carried out with reference to resource issues effectively? How is the implementation phase proceeding and what plans do you have for the handing over of the project to the end users?

In the 1990s much discussion took place about the differences between what we understand by leadership and what we understand by management. The feeling was that many of our organisations were strongly managed but weakly led. The pendulum then swung the other way and a much greater emphasis was placed on leadership development than management development. It was clearly identified that although leadership and management are related, they are not the same processes. Both are equally important. One approach was that leadership and management are like two overlapping circles. A number of writers including Warren Bennis then separated those ‘circles’ to see what each contained. The next two slides show how Warren Bennis identified some of the possible differences between leadership activity and management activity. All are relevant to project working.

**Study questions:** Would you describe yourself as a project leader or a project manager? What steps can you take to develop your skills both as a project manager and a project leader?

The differentiation between leadership and management in our diagram can be effectively explored using the leadership-management debate proposed by Warren Bennis. The idea is that in an executive leadership and management position the management functions may be viewed as two overlapping circles. By pulling the circles apart it is interesting to see what the leader circle contains and what the manager circle contains. Whilst Bennis has his critics with regards to this approach the distinctions between what might be classed ‘management’ and what might be classed ‘leadership’ provide a useful insight for our typology of leadership problems.

**Study questions:** Do you think it is useful to separate leadership and management in this way? Do these lists tend to favour ‘leadership’ as being more important than management? Which of these elements are particularly relevant to project

This next slide continues the leadership-management debate in a similar theme. However in this slide a particularly interesting distinction occurs in that Bennis argues that managers can be trained to be managers but leaders have to learn how to lead and that is a more complex process.
Study questions:

- Can you add to this list of distinctions between leadership and management?
- Do you feel you need to spend more time on the leadership aspects or on the management aspects?
- Do you agree that leadership is primarily an emotionally based process

Another prolific writer on leadership is Professor John Kotter of the Harvard Business School. Kotter focuses on the processes created by the leader and the manager rather than the individual themselves. Planning, organising, controlling and predictability are important project management processes. Setting overall direction, aligning the team in emotional focus terms, inspiring them to ‘go the extra mile’ and encouraging a healthy attitude to change are significant elements of project leadership. Once again we see that the balance needs to be created by combining both leadership and management effort.

Study questions: To which of the two columns in the slide do you pay most attention in your operation as a project manager and leader? Can you identify three issues in either column or both which if you made improvements in those areas would make a major impact on your effectiveness as a project manager and leader?

In 1997, Hooper and Potter created their set of seven core leadership capabilities. These included setting direction, communicating effectively, aligning people in emotional terms, bringing out the best in people by developing them, acting as a change agent, setting a good example and handling crisis and ambiguity effectively. In this slide we have taken this baseline set of capabilities and added three key issues: developing self awareness, delivering results in appropriate timescales and creating structure out of chaos. These three aspects of leadership are particularly relevant to the project environment with the close working relationships and quality, cost and time pressures that tend to be involved.

Study questions: If you assign a mark out of ten for your assessment of your ability at each of the ten issues in the slide what mark out of 100 do you achieve? Which three issues if you focused on developing your ability in those areas would make the most significant positive impact on your performance as a project leader and manager?

There are many ways we can describe leadership style. John Adair with his functional leadership approach focused on taking care of the needs of the task, of creating a team and taking account of the attributes of the individuals within the team. Adair would argue that style is determined by where the emphasis is placed in the work of the project team: on the task, the team or on individuals. The international approach based on the American research of the Ohio and Michigan State Universities would suggest that leadership style is determined by the mix of task and relationship behaviour on the
part of the leader. See the Leadership in Action programme for more details of this approach. We can identify leaders who are high on task behaviour and low on relationship behaviour and various combinations of strengths of those two types of behaviour. This would propose a wide range of styles dependent on the mix of task and relationship behaviours. Daniel Goleman in the Harvard Business Review article ‘Leadership that Gets Results’ identifies six styles of leadership: authoritative or vision based, affiliative and cross functional, coaching, democratic or inclusive, coercive and pace setting styles. His work suggested that the coercive and pace setting styles tend to produce a negative impact on the working ‘atmosphere’ or climate. Vision based leadership style seems to be the most successful style in terms of motivating people.

Finally autocratic leaders tend to tell people what to do in the way of giving them orders, democratic leaders involve their people but reserve the right to make the final decision and laissez-faire or ‘covert leaders’ immerse themselves in the group and steer the group decision making process in a subtle and non-obvious way.

**Study questions and assignment:** Where do you place your emphasis on the important issues with the work of the project team – on the task, creating the team or working with individuals? Would you describe yourself as a task oriented leader or a relationship oriented leader? Which of Goleman’s six styles of leadership do you tend to use most frequently? In terms of communication style would you describe yourself as autocratic, democratic or laissez-faire most of the time? Can you obtain a copy of the article “Leadership That Gets Results” written by Daniel Goleman and published in the Harvard Business Review as in the bibliography at the end of this session.

The subject of success in project working and in life itself is a complex one. However it is useful to identify the characteristics of those individuals who do seem to attract success in whatever they do. In recent years attention has fallen to what has been called the Secret of human success – understanding that you become what you think about. A psychologist Dr Patrick Jordan has distilled over 300 books on success psychology and produced five key principles which we can apply to project working. Firstly individuals need to take responsibility for their part of the work. Shifting from ‘blame frame’ to ‘outcome frame’ when problems occur is a key indicator for a successful team culture. Secondly it is important to focus on positive issues rather than negative ones on the basis that we tend to manifest that which we think about. Thirdly the concept of goal setting is very important in project working and shows itself through milestones and their timely achievement. Work does not always proceed smoothly and we all have challenges along the way. Persevering intelligently through the difficult times is important in terms of maintaining momentum. Finally none of us is an island. We are gregarious individual deep down and it is vital to develop one’s networks both in business and in personal terms.

That’s the end of this session on project leadership and management. Take a little time to give some thought to the study questions below and to review the bibliography on the next slide.
Study questions: Do you feel you have a ‘success’ mindset in that you focus on what you want rather than on what you want to avoid? How well do you shape up on the five characteristics of taking responsibility, being positive, setting goals, persevering intelligently and building your networks?

Project Leadership by Briner, Geddes and Hastings is a core text for this module and although written in 1990 is still highly relevant in terms of defining the role of the project leader and manager. A Google search or similar search engine process will yield a great deal of useful information about project management. Effective leadership by John Adair covers the task, team and individual approach very concisely. The article by Daniel Goleman on ‘Leadership That Gets Results’ is a classic piece combining intuitive thought on leadership with relatively hard data. Warren Bennis and John Kotter both address the issue of the leadership-management debate in their books and The Principles of Success by Patrick Jordan is relevant to all business endeavour, particularly project management.