



CREATING THE “WORLD CLASS” PROJECT MANAGER – PART 1

Abstract

While more project managers are gaining certification and more organisational dollars are being expended on technical training programs, many organisations still report little movement by way of project management maturity and improved project delivery. Success in project delivery is no longer contained to “within time, agreed budget and according to requirements”. The definition must be revised to consider the emotional maturity and behavioural competency of the project manager as a key factor in successful delivery. This paper discusses the role of emotional intelligence in a project management environment and presents a model for the development of project managers moving forward.

Bio Data

Silvia de Ridder is a qualified executive coach and project management specialist. Silvia has an extensive background in corporate environments developing and leading cross functional teams on a broad range of business change management programs within the Telecommunications, Airline and Construction industries for over 10 years. In addition to her qualifications as an executive and team coach Silvia also holds qualifications in Business, Project Management and Engineering. She is also an accredited consultant in Emotional Intelligence. The author can be contacted at silvia@unconsciouspotential.com.au

Introduction

Project Management success is traditionally defined as one in which a project is delivered within time, agreed budget and according to requirements. In today’s complex delivery environments however this definition is insufficient. Not only must we consider the technical factors associated with delivery (time, cost and budget) but one would add more importantly the behavioural elements and dynamics of the project manager and team to function and deliver effectively.

This paper discusses a solution focused approach associated with developing the behavioral skills of project managers in order to address project manager effectiveness and maturity. Improved effectiveness ultimately resulting in improved stakeholder management and satisfaction; motivated team environments; better delivery and an impact on the organisation’s bottom line.

This paper is presented in two parts. Part 1 discusses the subject of project manager effectiveness presenting a case for emotional intelligence within project management environments. Part 2



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presents a framework for the development of project managers incorporating both technical competency and the development of effective leadership capability.

Project Manager Effectiveness

While more project managers are gaining certification and more organisational dollars are being expended on technical training programs, many organisations still report little movement by way of project management maturity and improved project delivery.

In 2007, the PMO Executive Council undertook an extensive survey of more than 2000 people (mostly from the IT community) to identify the drivers of effectiveness for project managers.¹

The survey highlighted the following key findings;

Issue	Implication
Average project manager effectiveness varies significantly by company	There is a great opportunity to address the skill gaps by understanding the factors impacting on effectiveness
Two of the top three drivers of project manager effectiveness are “passion to succeed” and “ability to meet internal deadlines”	High performing project managers have additional characteristics that differentiate them from low performers
Formal Certification (PMI) does not improve project manager effectiveness	Avoid using exam based certification to screen out prospective project managers – instead turn to skills and experience (competency) based criteria. Additionally, support certification with other forms of project manager training and development
Extent of and amount of experience in a specific project domain area both do not impact project manager effectiveness	Look beyond the use of “tenured” project managers and specialist project managers to those with generic and diverse project management skills and business experience.

¹ PMO Executive Council, (2007) “PM Effectiveness Diagnostic - PMO Executive Council Research”



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Organisational tenure is an important driver of project manager effectiveness	High company tenure project managers have a superior understanding of the business and its operations and are better able to navigate through the organisation
Project Managers with poor team management skills are unable to deliver successful projects	Understand the opportunity to develop leadership capability or manage out the resource
Stakeholder training is the only form of training found to be effective in driving project manager performance	Shift resources away from process and methodology training to the development of leadership and behavioural skills.
High performing project managers are highly effective communicators with all audiences	Train project managers to adopt a solution-orientated approach to communication, rather than simply providing status updates as fast as possible

Table 1: PMO Executive Council Key Survey Findings

Overall, the survey found that the top ten Project Manager Effectiveness Importance Factors were

Process Based

- Ability to meet internal deadlines
- Mitigates project specific risks
- Aligns project with organisational strategy
- Connects project to broader organisational goals
- Assigning the right people to the right tasks
- Understands project interdependencies
- Evaluates team competencies

People Based

- Logically solves problems
- Is passionate to succeed
- Brokers consensus among stakeholders

The results of the survey provide an insight and link to what makes for project success. The survey's recency also allows for an understanding suited to the complex environments projects currently



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operate within. The identified effectiveness factors however do have a high focus on project management process. The challenge however that is put forward is one that states that an average project manager can possess the process attributes and still however not be successful in delivery.

Given the findings of this and other surveys as well as the real life situation of failed projects and poor delivery, we need to pause and ask ourselves, what is missing?

What is missing is effective leadership capability founded on the development of behavioural skills and the use of emotions to support the successful delivery of projects.

Effective Leadership

To begin to answer the above posed question in more detail, let's first consider Figure 1 which shows a relationship between the skill sets of “Task, Process and Outcomes” and “People, Relationships and Emotional Management”.

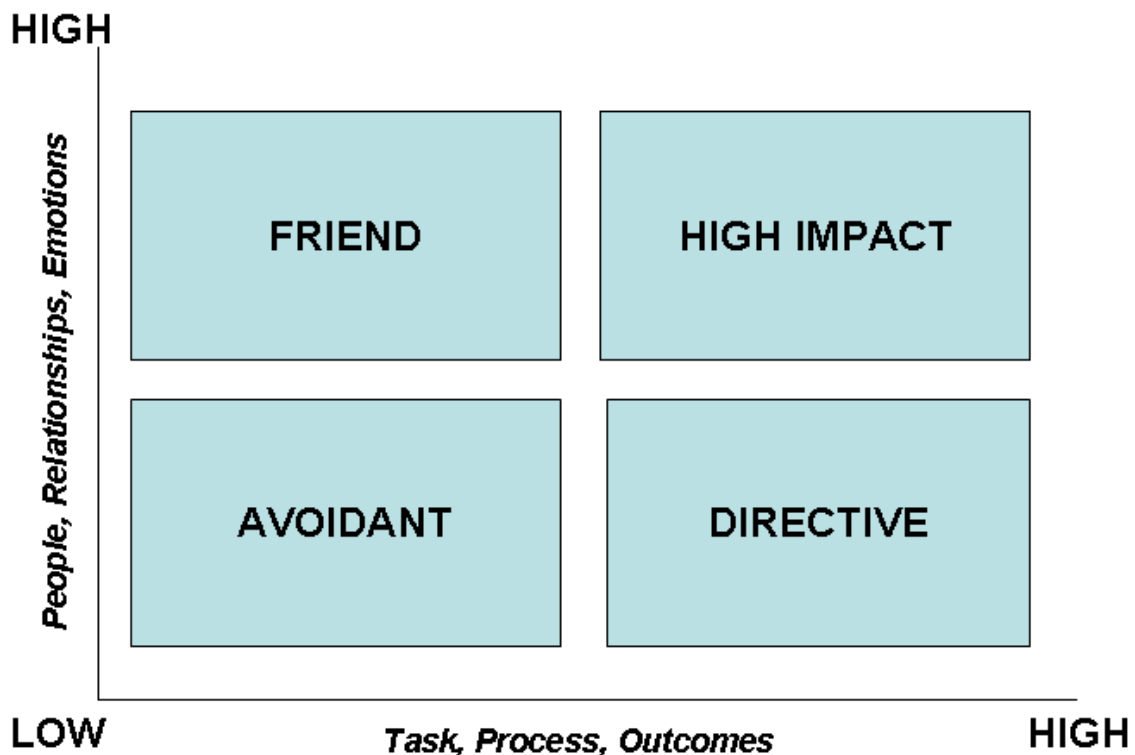


Figure 1: Relational Model of Process vs Behaviour

In the project management context, where the task or process skill set is low and equally the people, relationships and emotional skill set is low, the resulting behaviours is that of avoidance of either



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task or leadership towards delivery. An avoidant leader can also be aversive engaging in intimidation, and dispensing reprimands.

Where the task or process skill set is low yet the people, relationships and emotional skill set is high, the resulting behaviour is that delivery is achieved through friendships developed rather than leadership. Tasks do not typically get done in a timely or quality manner impacting on cost.

Moving to the other end of the horizontal scale, where the task or process skill set is high yet the people, relationships and emotional skill set is low, we encounter delivery via directive leadership. This is often the case with technical project managers who have domain knowledge and are worth their value in their technical capability. This type of leader tends to issue instructions and commands and assigns goals.

In the top right hand corner we have the scenario of what can be defined as High Impact leadership – those that inspire, engage and motivate. It represents that group of project managers who have the task capability as well as equally people, relationships and emotional skill set. Within this space, one could even further subdivide the leadership styles into Transactional, Transformational and Empowering Leadership. The representative behaviours of each type are listed in Table 2.²

Leader Type	Representative Behaviours
Transactional Leadership	Providing personal rewards Providing material rewards Managing by Exception (passive or active)
Transformational Leadership	Providing vision Expressing idealism Using inspirational communication Having high performance expectations

² Pearce, C.L. & Sims JR, H.P. (2002). “Vertical Versus Shared Leadership as Predictors of the Effectiveness of Change Management Teams: An Examination of Aversive, Directive, Transactional, Transformational and Empowering Leadership Behaviours”, Group Dynamics Theory, Research and Practice, Vol 6, No 2



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Empowering Leadership	Encouraging independent action Encouraging opportunity thinking Encouraging teamwork Encouraging self development Participative goal setting Encouraging self reward
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Table 2: Leader Type and Representative Behaviours

Similar to the concept of the quality triangle (the balance of scope, time and cost), a High Impact project manager utilises the respective leadership type dependent on the situation (Figure 2) or even dependent on the stage of the project.

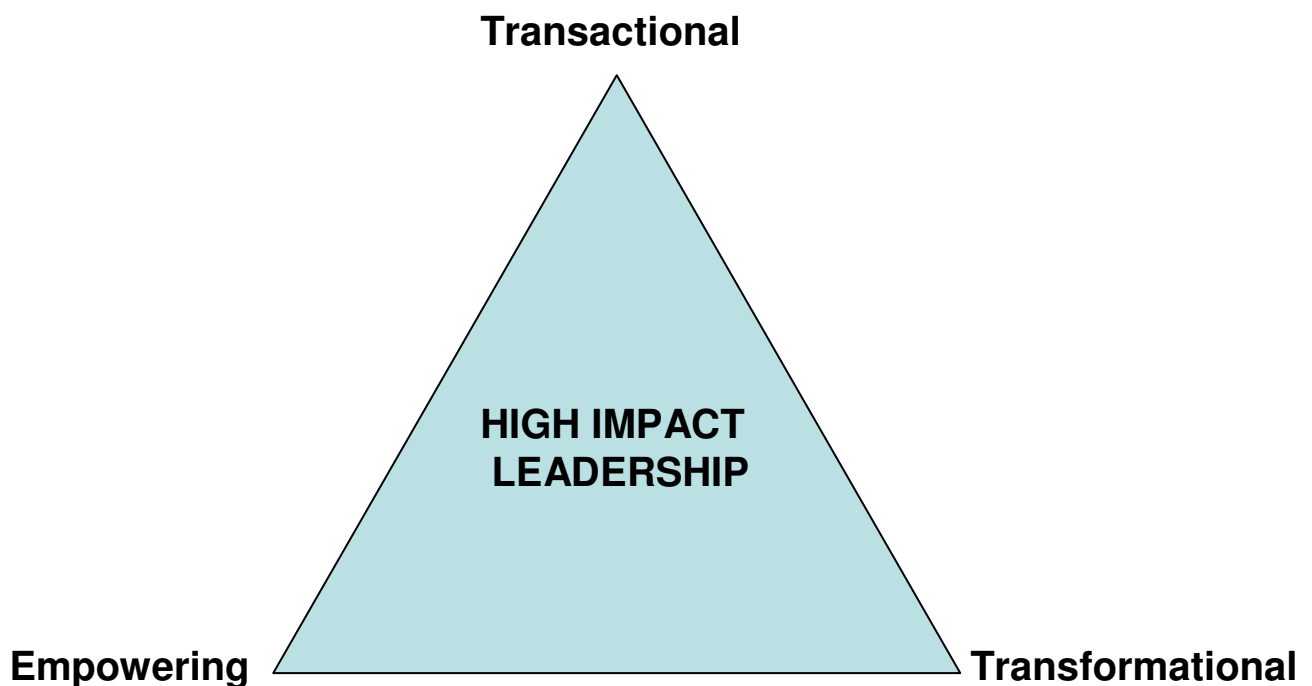


Figure 2: High Impact Leadership as a function of type

In summary a High Impact Leader is one who demonstrates both technical (process) competency as well as behavioural competency

The Case for Emotional Intelligence

Today’s leaders must be able to create climates that foster not only performance but also pride and purpose. They must have what is often referred to as emotional intelligence – a heightened sense of self awareness, the ability to manage their emotions as well as those of others, to build rapport and



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relationships with a diverse group of people ranging from the sponsor, project team and a myriad of stakeholders; to motivate others, create a believable vision for the project, and negotiate a broad range of situations impacting on the project or program.

Emotional Intelligence is a term we have all heard and made widely known by Daniel Goleman in his book titled “EI – Why it Matters More than IQ”. Emotional Intelligence can be defined as a set of skills that define how effectively we perceive, express, understand, reason with and manage our own and others feelings.³

Emotional Intelligence (EI) contributes to a number of important workplace performance indicators including;

- leadership style and effectiveness
- creativity
- problem solving capability
- workplace innovation
- interpersonal skills
- the capacity to foster positive relationships with work colleagues
- motivation and enthusiasm and
- team productivity

The above factors defined independently are well aligned to the behavioural factors identified by the PMO Executive Council Survey of 2007 for what defines project manager effectiveness.

The importance of emotional intelligence to the effectiveness of a project manager can best be understood through a systems hierarchy.⁴ Considering Figure 3; mapping the project management function within an organisation in this way provides a schema for recognizing the potential impact that each system level will have on the other systems in the hierarchy. The centre of the system in this represents the member role – the project manager, the next level the work groups – project sponsor and team, the third level the stakeholders, the fourth level, the project itself and finally the fifth level – the community, in this case the organisation.

³ Palmer, B., & Stough, C. (2006). “The Genos Emotional Intelligence Assessment Scale (Revised: Interim technical manual”. Melbourne: Genos Pty Ltd

⁴ Gantt, S & Agazarian, Y (2004). “Systems Centred Emotional Intelligence: Beyond Individual Systems to Organisational Systems”, Organisational Analysis, Vol 12, No 2



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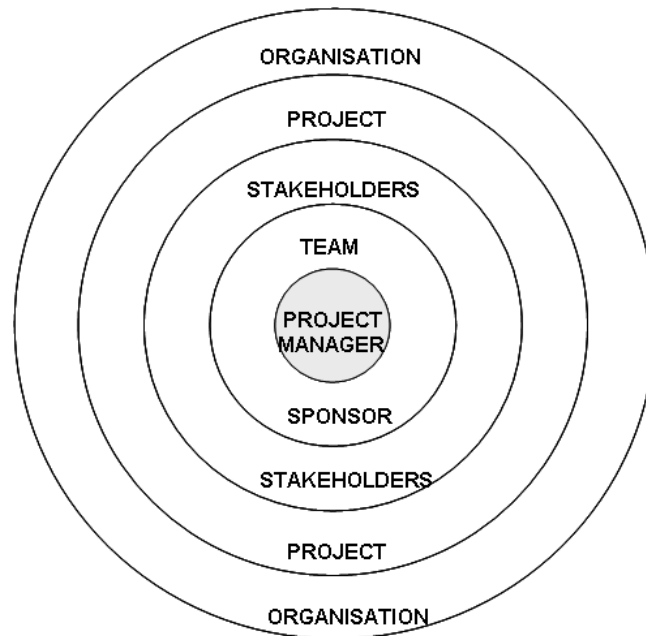


Figure 3: The Project Manager in the Organisational Context

The behaviours of the project manager impact on the project sponsor and team at the first level through day to day interaction, decisions and communications. At the next level, this behavior impacts on the wider stakeholders – Project Management Office, business representatives etc. This impact is both direct and well as indirect via the sponsor and team. For example; inconsistent or poor communications at a team level has a resulting impact on motivation which in turn impacts at a stakeholder, project and organisational level. At the outer levels then is the cascading effect of these impacted parties on the project and organisation – often what we view as culture.

The systems hierarchy also highlights the following aspects in relation to emotional management. Each subsystem introduces a different context. Different contexts have different goals and different perspectives. High Impact leadership shifts the team from being team centred to systems centred so that decisions can be made or implemented with broader perspectives. Each sub system effectively defines a boundary. When a work team is clear on its role and what it is responsible for, it is easier for the team to work. Boundaries open to clear communication result in effective work whereas noisy information (contradictions, redundant communications, ambiguity) results in loss of productivity for all impacted by leadership.



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The behaviour of oneself as the project manager is something that can be controlled and modified. Equally it can be noted that the principals of leadership and emotional intelligence equally applies to the project sponsor, team members, stakeholders and ultimately the organisation.

Enhancing Emotional Intelligence

The development of Emotional Intelligence has been shown to provide true bottom line results for organisations. Research by Hay Group and that of Daniel Goleman notes that emotional intelligence is twice as important as cognitive abilities in predicting outstanding employee performance and accounts for more than 85 percent of star performance in top leaders.

In his paper “The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence”⁵ cites 19 key points building a case for emotional intelligence. Those relevant to the application of project management include:

- **Distinguishing Star Performers:** An analysis of more than 300 top-level executives from fifteen global companies showed that six emotional competencies distinguished stars from the average: Influence, Team Leadership, Organizational Awareness, self-confidence, Achievement Drive, and Leadership.
- **As Job Complexity Increases so to does need for EI:** In jobs of medium complexity (sales clerks, mechanics), a top performer is 12 times more productive than those at the bottom and 85 percent more productive than an average performer. In the most complex jobs (insurance salespeople, account managers), a top performer is 127 percent more productive than an average performer.
- **Two-thirds of Employee Competency related to EI:** Competency research in over 200 companies and organizations worldwide suggests that about one-third of this difference is due to technical skill and cognitive ability while two-thirds is due to emotional competence (In top leadership positions, over four-fifths of the difference is due to emotional competence.)
- **Primary Cause of Executive Derailment related to deficits in EI:** Research by the Center for Creative Leadership has found that the primary causes of derailment in executives involve deficits in emotional competence. The three primary ones are difficulty in handling change, not being able to work well in a team, and poor interpersonal relations.
- **Training in EI Impacts on Productivity, Lost Time and Grievances:** After supervisors in a manufacturing plant received training in emotional competencies such as how to listen better and help employees resolve problems on their own, lost-time accidents were reduced by 50

⁵ Cherniss, C (2002). “The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence”, Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organisations



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percent, formal grievances were reduced from an average of 15 per year to 3 per year, and the plant exceeded productivity goals by \$250,000. In another manufacturing plant where supervisors received similar training, production increased 17 percent. There was no such increase in production for a group of matched supervisors who were not trained.

- **The Impact of Self Assessment:** One of the foundations of emotional competence -- accurate self-assessment – was associated with superior performance among several hundred managers from 12 different organizations.
- **Success in Senior Executives directly related to levels of EI:** For 515 senior executives analyzed by the search firm Egon Zehnder International, those who were primarily strong in emotional intelligence was more likely to succeed than those who were strongest in either relevant previous experience or IQ. In other words, emotional intelligence was a better predictor of success than either relevant previous experience or high IQ. More specifically, the executive was high in emotional intelligence in 74 percent of the successes and only in 24 percent of the failures. The study included executives in Latin America, Germany, and Japan, and the results were almost identical in all three cultures.

Emotionally intelligent organisations report;

- increased innovation, creativity and strategic thinking capabilities
- better team players
- higher climate survey results and employee organisational commitment
- stronger customer service results
- better employee retention, and
- reduced absenteeism.

all which contribute to better project environments and successful project delivery.

Conclusion

Part 1 of this paper has presented a model of effective leadership in relation to addressing that missing factor to successful project delivery. In doing so, a case for emotional intelligence and its relationship to effective leadership has been put forward. The High Impact project manager has been defined as one who possesses both technical competency and emotional maturity.

What is key at this point is how this is applied to the development of project managers moving forward. Part 2 of this paper will present a model for the development of the High Impact Project Manager and the role and value that mentoring and coaching provides.