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Title of the Paper:

Managing Project Teams in a Rapidly Changing World

Theme:
National Conference Sub-Theme that the paper is being submitted under

   PROJECT MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP > IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

Keywords:

Uncertainty, complexity, Rapid changes, context, alignment, creativity, diversity, flexibility, decentralization

Abstract:

The expectations from the project organizations to deliver complex and multifarious projects in a much lesser time has increased than ever before and this trend is likely to continue. Project organizations are also constantly encountering the challenge of managing the changes in requirements and technology throughout the lifecycle of a project. To deal with the complexities, changes and speed in the projects, involvement of several individuals who are specialists in their respective knowledge domains has now become imperative.

The major challenges for the project leaders in the changing circumstances are to manage: -

- Seamless **integration** of several disciplines and functions.
- **Changes** in the interest of the project.
- Increased level of **uncertainty**.

A radical shift from the conventional leadership styles is required to manage these challenges.

In this rapidly changing world the project leader should keep the team engaged and aligned throughout the project lifecycle for delivering the most optimum solutions. The project leader also has to act as an integrator for facilitating collaboration among the specialists while keeping focus on managing the Risks and Changes in the project.

Intent: (Mandatory)
The intent of the paper is to identify the challenges rapid changes happening in the world can pose for the project leaders and changes in leadership styles which will be required to be done. The paper also briefly lists out the important personality traits of the leaders for managing the projects in the rapidly changing world.

Table of Contents

Introduction

This is age of "rapid-change"—where technological, environmental, and demographic changes are accelerating and transforming the world at unprecedented rate. We are uncertain about the nature and magnitude of many of these changes, and often cannot predict them.

The rapidly changing world is posing challenges for the project teams to design and build projects, that meet stakeholders' needs while incorporating the newest technologies and employing efficient design and construction processes. Such a situation is compelling the project management bodies to evolve for effectively addressing the new challenges posed by the changing world.

To propose the most appropriate strategy for managing the projects in future, we have to begin by evaluating the impact which the rapidly changing world is making and will continue to do so in the future and pose challenges for leaders of future projects.

Main body of the paper

Impact of Rapid Changes on projects

    1. **Speed of change**

The Technological changes occur at a head-spinning pace in the world and are impacting all spheres of life including the way projects are developed and managed. The challenge for the project teams is not just the change but the speed at which the changes are happening.

    2. **Domino effect of Changes**

Several things are happening at once to transform world. Globalization is shaping a world which is faster, closer, and more connected. Today, we are more interdependent and interconnected than ever before, and this connecting process will only accelerate. The interconnecting world means any change in one part of the part world may make impact on a project in any other part of the project.

    3. **Increase in the complexity**

The rapid pace of changes in the world has caused multifold increase in the complexities of the projects has led to the increase in the involvement of number of stakeholders, increase in the number of interfaces and requirement of number of specialists; whereas the increase in the pace of change in the world is causing frequent changes in the project requirements.

    4. **Increased interdependencies and Increased dependency on technology**

In today's connected, rapidly changing world, most project teams function in an environment which is imbedded in lots of technologies and has multiple dependencies on large pool of stakeholders, hence any change in any of the elements impact all the other elements of the project.

    5. **Increase in uncertainty**

The rapidly changing world is increasing the volatility, uncertainty and probability of conflicts in the projects. All the above mentioned impact of changes are making it increasingly difficult to manage the projects, but on the other hand project teams are expected to deliver projects at a much faster pace and better outcome than before. In response to the new challenges posed by the rapid pace of changes happening in the world, project management methodologies are also transforming dramatically. In light of these changes, a new leadership profile is required for managing the projects.

Challenges for managing projects in rapidly changing world

To efficiently lead the future projects for delivering the projects of future in highly uncertain, complex and rapidly changing environment shall require innovative approach and radical change from the current models of leadership. Leaders must be able to recognize the emerging new and complex patterns and be flexible to make frequent adjustments and must continuously innovate; while never loosing focus from the big picture.

To deal positively with rapid-change and all the factors driving it, leaders for future projects will have to have broad understanding and training and quickly master a wide variety of skills.

The critical aspects for managing projects in the rapidly changing world

1. Vision

Vision is a powerful leadership tool to keep the team focused and take appropriate decisions. A vision allows the leader to see where to go and to move in that direction. A vision is a snapshot of the future, a dream realistic enough to be attainable yet different enough to inspire and attractive enough to gain commitment. It is about selling hope. Using vision as a driving force will be more relevant and effective in volatile and uncertain times. Vision allows others to buy into something bigger than themselves in pursuit of a common goal.

2. Decentralization of power

To manage the increase in the nature of complexity shall require involvement and collaboration of the specialist organizations and individuals (within and outside the organization) and sometimes from several different geographical locations to design, execute and commission the project. The functions performed and the contributions made by the specialist organizations and individuals are usually distinct and unique in nature. In order to make successful contribution for the project, such individuals and organizations require more autonomy, freedom and power to take decisions which they consider most appropriate for the best contribution of their function for the project.

The traditional hierarchical model of leadership especially top-down controls, based on centralized command and communications, are no longer sufficient for generating satisfactory results in the projects for the interconnected world. Today's more complex projects and dynamic business environment requires a much more interactive management style to deal with complex sets of interrelated, nonlinear, and often difficult-to-define processes.

To manage such a situation, the leader will have to increase the number and scope of decisions that can be made quickly and locally. This also gives the staff more authority and autonomy to get work done and drive continual improvements to the organization's policies and processes.

The future projects will not have a single leader with all the powers but the decision making power will be distributed among several individuals. The project organizations will be fluid structure of loosely interconnected highly specialized large number of stakeholders/individuals.

3. Shift from Managerial Control to Self-Direction

It may seem as though no one is in charge, but many specialists working as independent leaders performing diverse functions in tandem for the common objective. However, to achieve this shall require the project leader to find ways to lend them support, empower them, provide the technology and tools necessary and keep less control for effective leadership.

The leader in such an environment acts more like a guide rather than director, more persuader than commander. It is about finding, developing, and pursuing common interests. By conceiving of leadership as a style of cooperation, leaders will be able to cross the barriers between individuals from diverse backgrounds to address the difficult issues. In part, it requires the ability of leadership for skillful guidance of local management in collaboration with overall project leadership.

The dynamics such an environment shift toward more team ownership, empowerment, and self-control. All of this will have a profound impact on the way managers must manage and lead, and analyze the work environment for effective intervention. The methods of communication, decision making, soliciting commitment, and risk sharing will have to shift away from a centralized, autocratic management style to a team-centered, more self-directed form of control.

4. Unify Management Process

Successful management of geographically and culturally diverse project teams requires a unified managerial process. Though the power sharing will be required in future projects but unified management process shall also be equally important and must exist with clear boundaries of authority, jurisdiction, responsibilities and decision making, otherwise a power vacuum might develop, resulting in undesirable shifts of power, organizational conflict, power struggle and organizational tension.

To manage and bring efficiency in the project teams project leader will have to use influencing skills and act as a facilitator to allow Collaboration among the diverse group of project team members and nimbly manage the needs of multiple, varied stakeholders.

5. Nurturing and leveraging diversity.

Leaders of the future projects shall be part of a deeply interconnected entity where they will no longer manage through a top down approach that caters to the instinctive desire for control. A new, constructive approach will require a new kind of leadership—a leveraged leadership. The leveraged leader shall muster all the available resources to bring others to the table, sets the agenda, frames the issues, and offers solutions, all in the hope of aligning forces behind a common effort. The rigid, larger-than-life leader giving orders is outdated. The future projects will need flexible leaders who can recognize and seize opportunities and build consensus among the stakeholders.

The challenge for the future project leaders will be to lead a complex adaptive system, which is fragile by its very nature. Leading will be about building resilience within the organization by successfully integrating all its autonomous and differentiated parts into a harmonious whole that can adapt to changing circumstances and harness the opportunities in an increasingly uncertain world.

Leaders have certain expectations placed on them that natural tendency to predict and control. However, the challenge in the future projects will be to live with the discomfort and vulnerability of not knowing, and act based on the available partial information and emerging trends.

The leader in the rapidly changing world will be constantly seeking ways to bring together diverse group of stakeholders, build coalitions, and form consensus to achieve preferred outcomes and bringing together various leaders as well as cultivating common interests that led to a unified response. Leading such self-directed teams can rarely be done "top-down," but will require a great deal of interactive team management skills and senior management support.

6. Alignment

Various organizational processes can either help or hinder team performance. To manage the volatility and changes Project leaders need to fine-tune these processes to best align with the project execution. Updating and fine-tuning of the established project management processes to changing conditions also makes team members feel empowered and unified with the organizational environment.

Effective project leaders can foster a climate of active participation by involving people at all organizational levels in the planning, formation, and execution of projects. Team building, talent recognizing, and talent rewarding are key skills for the effective leader in the rapidly changing world.

7. Context

Tomorrow's leaders must also develop contextual intelligence. It has always been critical for leaders to be sensitive to context, but it is even more applicable in this world where situations are rapidly shifting. Thus, it is essential that leaders use their skills to manage and adapt quickly and creatively. This means that leaders must recognize the context as well as the forces of change at work and reconcile these with their goals and values. Effective leaders must develop a contextual awareness that allows them to read the situation accurately and apply the correct remedy to the problem.

8. Creativity

The rise in complexity and uncertainity will make it difficult to have the complete information about all the parameters required for making decisions. Leaders will have to make decisions without knowing all facts. Projects will have to constantly adapt to new conditions and challenges. This is where creativity is crucial. Leaders will have to look at problems from different perspectives, combine old ideas in new ways, develop connections across disciplines, recognize new relationships, see new patterns.

9. Utilizing Information Technology

Today's technology provides managers in any part of the enterprise with push-button access to critical information on operational status and performance. The availability and promise of technology has led to the development of an enormous variety of powerful IT-based tools and techniques, and the acquisition of these tools by managers at all levels. The tools and techniques are expected to continue to evolve in response to the complexities required to be managed. The use of IT enabled tools shall become essential for the leaders to manage the projects. Project leaders will be required to demonstrate a robust understanding of the capabilities, applications, and future potential of emerging technologies.

Personality traits required to be an effective leader in a rapidly changing world

1. Strong people and analytical skills
2. Inspiring, empowering and supporting others in volatile times
3. Communicating openly and honestly
4. Conveying a clear vision
5. Leveraging the diversity of team members.
6. Willingness to listen and implement other people's ideas.
7. Nurture relationships, through small actions that build trust.
8. The ability to consider all available options with a long-term lens and draw on the best ideas.
9. Ability to work well in unknown conditions and chaos.
10. Ability to Work with People and Technology Together.

Conclusion

The rapidly changing world is creating complexity, volatility, uncertainty and chaos. The traditional leadership models are not sufficient to manage the projects in such an environment and requires radical shift.

The major changes that will be required in the traditional leadership styles are moving from sharing of decision making powers among the leaders of each specialist function and role. The processes, systems and structure of the project organizations will have to be flexible enough to adapt the required changes swiftly. Major role of the leaders in such an environment will be to facilitate collaboration, keep the team focused & aligned, have the ability to read the emerging patterns, have the holistic generic idea of most of the relevant and applicable things, make intensive use of IT enabled services and take decisions quickly as per the context, while always keeping objective of the project in mind.

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