

A Domain Based Framework for Effective Project Leadership

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Abstract

This paper argues that the project environment is unique, complex, and uncertain and therefore an understanding of project leadership should be approached from that point of view. It also argues that the prevailing project leadership theories do not explain project leadership in an integrative manner. Essentially the article attempts to answer two research questions namely Can project leadership be defined as an integrated-domain based construct (RQ₁)? and how can the identified domains be mastered by project leaders in order to be effective during project delivery (RQ₂)? By conducting a literature review to analyse definitions, theories and studies conducted in leadership or project leadership coupled with actual experiences of project leadership and project team membership, the paper proposes an integrated framework consisting of four project leadership domains. It proposes that for an effective project leadership process to take occur, a project leader requires self-leadership in order to exercise leadership of project stakeholders, leadership of project tasks and leadership of a project situation. The framework deviates from the normal premise of viewing project leadership as a process directed at only influencing a project team or stakeholders. The paper further proposes that certain strategies and capabilities are needed to 'master' each domain in order to achieve effective project leadership.

Keywords: Project leadership, leadership, project manager, project leader, project management

1. Introduction

In modern times, projects are used as focused organisational work structures for achieving corporate goals (Pinto, 2013). However, the latter happens only if projects are delivered successfully. Project leadership has been identified as one of the critical factors for achieving project management success (Gray and Larson, 2011). This premise has made project leadership the subject of intensive research for over a decade (Clarke, 2012). A number of theories have been developed (or adapted from general management) by project management scholars to determine what capabilities are required for an effective project leader (see reviews by e.g. Turner and Muller, 2005; Toor- and Ofori, 2008a; Clarke, 2012; Walker and Walker, 2011; Hiller et al., 2011). The research has enriched our understanding especially in two areas. First, the increased likelihood that an effective project leader will achieve project management success (Nixon, Harrington, and Parker, 2012; Anantaltmula, 2010), as measured by the 'iron triangle' (Cooke-Davies, 2002) - the scope of a project leader. Second, that project leaders are not born but can be trained and developed to be effective (Toor and Ofori, 2008a; Muller and Turner, 2010a, b).

Despite the development of a myriad of project leadership frameworks, a holistic understanding of project leadership is still illusive. Project leadership is often depicted in a disjointed manner without providing linkages among its constituent constructs. Cleveland, Stockdale and Murphy (2000) noted, for example, that theories discuss leadership from different angles, for

example, the nature of the construct (e.g. process); the nature of who leads (i.e. characteristics or personality of leaders), how they lead (i.e. leadership behaviour or style), and under what circumstances they lead (i.e. situation or context) and what they do to lead or amidst the leadership process. Clarke's specific review of project leadership literature added to non-integration of leadership theories by noting that three major streams of research are often carried out namely leadership style; leadership behaviours and roles; and leadership traits i.e. competencies, characteristics and personality (Clarke, 2012). This trend is referred to here as the 'single spanner syndrome' where a person on the ground, passes on one spanner at a time, instead of the entire tool box, to another fixing a roof of a house. Sydänmaanlakka (2003) added that today there are a lot of theories which try to describe leadership from different points of view only to make the [project] leader's life more confusing rather than being helpful.

This article joins others (e.g. Fernandez, 2005; Ismail *et al.*, 2011) in arguing that literature lacks an integrative framework which practioners can apply to increase their project leadership effectiveness. The objective of the article is to discuss a proposed framework based on four project leadership domains. The aim is to provide an integrative view of project leadership. The next section describes the approach used to develop the framework while the third section discusses the justification for having the specific project leadership domains of the model. The discussion goes further to describe the strategies and capabilities required to master the proposed project leadership

domains. The last section provides the implication of the framework particularly for effective project leadership and how it can be improved through further research.

2. Methodology

Being a conceptual study, the methodological approach was based on an extensive search and critical review of literature. However, the model of Bennett, Dunne and Carre (2000) provided a baseline guide to the development of the framework. The model was developed to address the question of graduate employability and has been cited widely in various scholarly articles (e.g. Google Scholar search yielded 420 citations). The model consists of four domains of employability viewed as necessary for obtaining meaningful and sustained employment by graduates. The domains include *managing oneself*, *managing others*, *managing information*, and *managing tasks*. Bennett *et al.* (2000) noted that employable graduates must master and possess an adequate dose of all four domains at the time of seeking employment. Employable graduates must manage tasks by utilising the information which is directly or indirectly related to the tasks. Simultaneously, they must manage themselves, as well as others in the organisation. Conceptually, the framework defined a domain as a group of graduate attributes with related outcomes, for example, managing task domain may include attributes and skills such as meeting deadlines; and creating viable solutions for solving problems (Katz, 1993).

With Bennett *et al.*'s model (Bennett *et al.* 2000) in mind two research questions were posed to guide the quest for developing a project leadership framework. The first was: *Can project leadership be defined as an integrated-domain based construct (RQ₁)?* A systems theory approach (Ashy, 1956) was used in defining 'domain' in the sense that project leadership was viewed as made up of interrelated and interacting parts (domains) linked together to produce an outcome (effective project leadership) amidst a dynamic project environment. This means that the project domains are broad 'elements' that make up the scope of effective project leadership. The second question which flows from the first was: *How can the identified domains be mastered by project leaders in order to be effective during project delivery (RQ₂)?* As explained later to master the domains, project leaders need to identify appropriate strategies and deploy suitable capabilities. Strategies are defined as broad capabilities designed to collectively master a project leadership domain.

To answer the two research questions, a search was conducted for definitions, theories, models, frameworks and study results on general leadership and project leadership. This involved searching for terms 'leadership', 'management', 'project leadership' and 'project management' in scholarly work that included books (e.g. Yukl, 1989; Bass and Stogdill, 1990;

Northouse, 2012); articles in peer reviewed journals found in on-line databases such as Emerald, Science Direct and Ebscohost; and references from leadership or project leadership reviews such as those by Bolden *et al.* (2003), Turner and Muller (2005), Toor and Ofori (2008a,b), Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber, 2009; Walker and Walker (2011), Hiller *et al.* (2011) and Clarke (2012). The terms 'management' and 'project management' were included in the search because they are often closely linked with leadership and project leadership, respectively. Where appropriate, effort was made to change or interpret the wording used in general leadership discourse to fit the project management nomenclature, for example, 'followers' was interpreted to mean either 'project team' or 'project stakeholders'. The content analysis technique was used in identifying project leadership domains, strategies and capabilities. The technique allows the identification of emerging 'themes' in the text in order develop a synthesised and structured view of the patterns of the phenomenon being studied (Bryman and Bell, 2003)

3. Results

The search for articles that contained leadership and project leadership definitions by various authors (e.g. Rost, 1993; Barker, 2002; University of Warwick, n.d.; Sydänmaanlakka, 2003; Northouse, 2012; Adeoye, 2009; Winston and Patterson, 2006) yielded a total of 55 definitions. In addition, a total of 65 leadership/project leadership models/frameworks were identified from articles and scholarly reviews (e.g. Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber, 2009; Clarke, 2012).

Project leadership domains, project leadership strategies and capabilities were extricated from the definitions and text of the scholarly work reviewed. Figure 1 shows, for example, how the analysis of a definition was conducted.

Further analysis of literature indicated that in most definitions (83%) and models (70%) [Project] leadership was referred to as a process of influencing (though in some definitions and models, for example, it was referred to as a process of exchange). Table 1 shows results of the analysis to identify project leadership domains. Four domains emerged namely leadership of project stakeholders and leadership of project tasks which were mentioned in all (100%) definitions and models; leadership of project situation was mentioned in 64% and 71% of the definitions and models, respectively; and self-leadership was least mentioned i.e. in 53% and 63% of the definitions and models, respectively.

A comparison with Bennett *et al.* (2000) model indicated that three of the domains were similar namely self-leadership ('management of self'), leadership of project stakeholders ('management of others') and leadership of project tasks ('management of tasks'). framework.

process. Manz and Sims (1991:23) succinctly noted that ‘it is important for leaders to first learn how to lead themselves before they lead others’. Drotter and Charan (2001) also noted that potential leaders must learn to ‘manage’ themselves as this prepares them to effectively deal with [project] work and human relationships.

Self-leadership can be achieved through the development of appropriate strategies and deployment of various capabilities. These are based on the individual’s persona as characterised, for example, by their cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual and social (CEPSS) elements (Goleman, 1998, Sydänmaanlakka, 2003; Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Muller and Turner, 2005b; D’Intino, Goldsby, and Houghton, 2007). The cognitive element refers to the individual’s thinking, reflective and learning pattern which drives and affects (positively or negatively) personal actions and decisions. The emotional element relates to the ability to identify, understand, use, and manage emotions in such a way as to relieve stress, overcome challenges, and defuse internal conflict (Segal and Melinda, 2012). The spiritual element relates to the values, meanings, beliefs and personal objectives of an individual while the physical element relates to the physiological aspects of an individual (e.g. health and eating, sleeping, exercising and resting habits). The social element refers to a catalogue of environmental factors which affect the well-being of an individual (e.g. housing, financial and human relationships).

Sydänmaanlakka (2003) noted that a leader will be impacted positively when there is balance in the total well-being as characterised by these elements (CEPSS) because they provide the individual with the mental and emotional stability to act and behave in an appropriate manner. For example, illness, distress in marriage or financial problems, can be some of the destabilising factors in an individual’s life which could normally have a huge knock-on effect on project leadership.

Some scholars have included spirituality in the self-leadership domain, for example, Fry (2003) noted that the ultimate effect of leadership is to bring together four fundamental forces of human existence namely body, mind, heart, and spirit. This provides the motivation for high performance and personal experience of joy and tranquillity which flows to the project leadership process.

From the work of various scholars (e.g. Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia, 1973; Manz and Sims, 1991; Goleman, 1998; Drotter and Charan, 2001) three interrelated strategies were identified as being critical to achieving self-leadership. They include self-awareness, self-management and self-concept.

4.1.1 Self-awareness strategy

Through self-awareness individuals are able to recognize a deviation in any of, or combination of all of the CEPSS elements and their impact on the total well-being. The

deviation may affect, for example, the individual’s thinking pattern, decisions, actions and behaviour which in turn has an impact on the self-leadership domain. To deal with the deviation especially if it is adverse, individuals must have the ability to read or seek information on CEPSS elements through what Manz and Sims (1991) called self-observation. Soliciting and accepting feedback from a project team, directly or indirectly is part of self-observation.

4.1.2 Self-management strategy

Self-management, regulation or control is a natural follow up of self-awareness. Goleman (1998) noted that self-management deals with managing the thinking and emotions such that they do not adversely affect judgement, actions and relationships with others. However, self-management goes beyond thinking and emotions and includes the ability of an individual to control of CEPSS elements in order to adapt to the changing circumstances. One of the self-management capabilities is self-assessment which is the ability to determine own propensity to change the observed deviation in personal elements (Manz and Sims, 1991). Self-assessment must be optimal, i.e. neither too pessimistic nor too optimistic, but a reflection on personal strength and weakness. Other self-management capabilities geared at managing observed deviations in the CEPSS elements include being able to:

- i) motivate oneself to achieve set targets in terms of time and extent;
- ii) identify and seize opportunities that initiate personal changes;
- iii) develop confidence in oneself to sustain a sense of self-worth;
- iv) adapt to changing situations to cope with stressful and uncertain project situations (i.e. being patience and resilience);
- v) organise and prioritise personal affairs to create time to meet project milestones; and
- vi) constantly reflect and learn from past experiences to improve the self-image (life-long learning).

4.1.3 Self-concept strategy

By developing a self-concept capability project leaders should strive to preserve and sustain their true image. The premise of the self-concept is that no individual is born with an undesirable behaviour, it is shaped by the environment and hence it can be changed. Literature review (e.g. Brown and Trevino, 2006; George *et al.*, 2007; Brown and Trevino, 2006; Walker and Walker, 2011) identified several capabilities for achieving the *self-concept strategy*, including *self-respect*, *integrity*, *accountability* and *servitude*. Self-respect requires a project manager to be true to themselves. They need not to fake their image or persona and therefore have to uphold their values and principles; and practice what they preach through setting a good example both in

action and behaviour (Kouzes and Posner, 2003). Closely related to self-respect, is the ability to uphold their integrity through the sustenance of an ethical, honest, fair and transparent personal profile (Walker and Walker, 2011). In addition, individuals must be accountable for their decisions and actions. In project management this is important, the mistake of a project leader must be owned and not blamed or passed on to the project team or any other stakeholder. Lastly, servitude requires being able to avail oneself to the service of project stakeholder and sharing with them decision making processes i.e. being selfless (Greenleaf, 1996).

The theory of authentic leadership reinforces the self-concept strategy. According to the theory (see details in e.g. Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Walker and Walker, 2011) authentic leaders are those who are deeply aware; of how they think and behave; of their own values, knowledge, weaknesses and strengths; and aware of the context in which they operate. In addition, they are confident, optimistic, resilient, and display a high moral character.

Two real life project experiences can put some aspects of the self-leadership domain in context. In one project scenario 'a project manager often came late to meetings and each time gave all sorts of excuses to the project team for being late. It became unbearable to the project team members who were agitated for time they often spent waiting for the meetings to start'. The reaction of the project team provided the project leader a cue to recognise the undesired behaviour (self-observation). The project leader targeted to change (self-assessment) the behaviour of late-coming which was most likely emanating from lack of organising and prioritising personal or even project activities to create time for project meetings.

In another project incident 'a project team member uttered something which a project leader interpreted ('thought') as a statement meant to undermine his authority. The project leader lost his temper ('emotion') and this resulted in a nasty exchange of words and incident'. Loss of temper was a result of loss of control of emotions which in turn blurred the thinking of the project manager leading to the adverse behaviour. The scenario indicates that a habitual loss of temper must be targeted by project leader for change to avert its disruptive potential.

4.2 Leadership of Project Tasks

The inclusion of the leadership of project tasks domain deviates from the commonly held view of leadership which is about 'influencing stakeholders'. Literature (e.g. Kerzner, 2013; Meridith and Mantel, 2011) indicates that project leadership often manifests through the execution of project tasks. Project leaders are held accountable for the smooth and efficient execution of tasks by project stakeholders, even if they delegate the

responsibility (Meridith and Mantel, 2011). The project team members, for example, look up to the project leader to guide them in identifying, resourcing, assigning, coordinating and controlling project tasks. Comments such as '*... he is an ineffective leader who cannot even marshal adequate resources for the project*' have been heard from frustrated project teams starved of resources to carry out project activities. It would then appear that the legitimacy and credibility of project leaders is sustained only if project stakeholders perceive project leaders as having the capability to execute the project tasks, including marshalling adequate project resources. The project sponsors too, often judge the effectiveness of a project leader based on the progress of project tasks and the meeting of project deadlines and milestones. Other project stakeholders (e.g. suppliers) expect project leaders to use their leadership prowess to maintain a smooth relationship, particularly by solving project related challenges including communicating and negotiating with the finance departments to expedite payments.

One might say that the examples above are functions of the project management processes. Kotter (2001) defined management and leadership as separate functions with the former dealing with complexity while the latter dealing with change. However, this paper argues that in delivering projects, there is a close relationship between project management and project leadership. Despite the fact that the two are distinct constructs, in project practice their separation leads to an inadequate understanding of the latter. Parry (2004) observed that an effective project leader is one who sustains the efficient and effective execution of tasks throughout the project's life cycle. However, project leaders with poor leadership of project tasks eventually turn out to be ineffective leaders. Muller and Turner (2010a) quoting Henry Mintzberg noted that the 'separation of management and leadership is dysfunctional: leaders who do not manage will not know what is going on (perhaps practising lassie-faire style); management without leadership [of project stakeholders] is demoralising'. The reason for this is simple. As already noted project leadership manifests through the execution of project tasks or processes. Project leadership and project management are Siamese twins whose separation can lead to a 'very complicated surgical project leadership process.'

Project management processes starts by 'downloading' the project objectives and deliverables from the business case and proceeds with the planning by organising and arranging work in a systematic structure i.e. by using work breakdown structures (WBS); identifying responsibilities and roles for project stakeholders; resourcing project tasks; budgeting, accounting and controlling project resources; coordinating and monitoring project tasks to ensure an integrated and efficient execution to achieve the project goal; and reporting and providing feedback on project

progress and issues to project stakeholders. These generalist but not technical functions (Meredith and Mantel, 2011) require a project leader who has a good dose of project management knowledge and is able to use associated, tools and techniques to successfully complete project processes and tasks (PMI, 2013).

What strategies and capabilities does a project leader require to master the domain of leadership of project tasks? In reviewing literature, the transactional leadership was found to be offering the most appropriate strategies for mastering the domain of leadership of project tasks (see e.g. Bass, 1985). The theory views a task as a transaction between the project leader and the project team or stakeholders. According to the theory a project leader needs to identify the needs, wants and expectations of project stakeholders in order to satisfy them (reward) in exchange for their effort to complete the project tasks (Rollinson, 2005). The theory offers three strategies a project leader may use in the leadership of project tasks namely *management by exception*, *contingent reward*, and *laissez-faire*.

4.2.1 Management by exception strategy

Managing by exception is where a project leader has the competence of setting standards or defining objectives required for executing project tasks (OGC, 2009; Kotter, 1990). This can be done in two ways, by active or passive management by exception. Tyseen, Wald and Speith (2013) noted that active management by exception requires a project leader to attend to the work of project stakeholders almost in ‘real-time’; correcting deviations where they occur in order to meet project task requirements (or complimenting where there is achievement). This is useful where work is unstructured and where the project leader has to coach and mentor the project team to complete the tasks. Passive management by exception on the other hand is where the project leader works in an ‘off-line’ mode i.e. waits until project tasks become almost severely impaired by challenges before intervening. Passive management by exception is a natural strategy for a project that requires specialist skills and where the project leader is simply a coordinator for the tasks that delivers project output as often found in the construction process.

4.2.2 Contingent reward strategy

Contingent reward is a follow up strategy of management by exception based on two extreme possible outcomes: either project stakeholders perform their tasks and achieve set standards; or fail to attain what is required (Kotter, 1990). The former requires a contingent reward while the latter requires a contingent sanction. Literature (e.g. Alimo-Metacafe and Alban-Metacafe, 2005) seems sceptical about the project leader’s ability to reward or sanction because project leaders are often not endowed with adequate formal authority. However, where feasible, the strategy

nonetheless adds to the project leader’s strategic arsenals. Northouse (2007), for example, suggests that if the contingent reward strategy is possible and is used appropriately it can improve performance.

4.2.3 Laissez-faire strategies

Though in practice, the laissez-faire is sometimes employed by some [non-]project leaders, it is not really a leadership strategy because it is an abdication of responsibility by avoiding taking project decisions. Since the purpose of the proposed framework is to identify strategies for effective project leadership, prescribing laissez-faire would be a misnomer. Furthermore, a project leader is often referred to as ‘single point of responsibility’ (PMI, 2013) hence abdicating responsibility contradicts this key principle.

4.3 Leadership of Project Stakeholders

Leadership of project stakeholders was the most discussed domain in literature (see reviews by e.g. Northouse, 1997; Bass and Stogdill, 1990). Frameworks which discuss this domain include, for example, transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978; and Bass, 1985), exemplary leadership model (Kouzes and Posner, 2003), leader member exchange (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1985). The central theme of these theories is that leadership is a process of influencing others to achieve a project goal. The view of this article is that this is true but a partial view of project leadership. As already indicated, the proposed model is based on the premise that project leadership begins with the project leaders i.e. the ability to lead themselves and project tasks. This gives them credibility (Kouzes and Posner, 2003) for obtaining favourable perception, attitude and cooperation from the project stakeholders (this is the cradle of the influencing process). In addition, they must be seen to be competent in managing project tasks. All these aspects must be managed simultaneously. A leader who cannot handle his own tasks cannot influence and cannot sustain the project leadership process.

Literature (e.g. Tyseen, Wald and Speith, 2013; Prabhakar, 2005) seems to indicate that transformational theory provides a significant baseline of strategies for influencing project stakeholders. The strategies are *idealised influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation* and *individualised consideration*. Before commencing of a discussion of these strategies it is worth noting that there is criticism levelled against the theory. Yukl (1999), for example, noted that it is ambiguous regarding the influencing processes. The view of this paper is that some of the observed inadequacy stems from viewing leadership as a single domain construct— leadership of followers – instead of a multi-domain concept as suggested by the proposed framework. Therefore, if transformational leadership theory is viewed not as the sole contributor to leadership

understanding, greater appreciation can be made of its contribution to leadership strategies. It is noted, for example, that to execute the idealised influence strategy a project leader must master the self-leadership domain while intellectual stimulation strategy manifests during the leadership of the project tasks. As discussed later, other models, for example, the exemplary leadership model augments and reinforces several constructs in the transformational theory. The next sections briefly discuss the four strategies of transformation leadership and how they apply to the domain of leadership of project stakeholders.

4.3.1 Idealised influence strategy

Idealised influence strategy depicts the nature of project leadership and how it manifests during project leader's interaction with project stakeholders. It is linked to the cognitive and emotional elements discussed under the self-leadership domain. For project leaders to deploy the strategy they must have a clear set of values and principles to act as role models for project stakeholders. Bass and Avolio (1994) noted that idealised influence strategy requires positive charisma. This capability gives a project leader the vision and a sense of mission to reassure project stakeholders that project challenges are surmountable. This disposition promotes confidence among project stakeholders in the execution of tasks and hence the achievement of a project goal (Conger and Kanungo, 1998; Howell and Frost, 1989). Incidentally, this is a kind of charisma that is not self-centred and deviant but one which facilitates a project leader to behave in an admirable manner based on a display of cognitive prowess and appropriate behavioural conduct. Another capability required to implement idealised influence is networking i.e. the ability to acquire and maintain contacts with individuals who can be relied on to facilitate in solving of project challenges when they arise. The 'network only hangs around and maintains contact' where there is idealised influence from a project leader. The idealised influence outcome results in gaining the trust and confidence from the project team for effective project leadership.

4.3.2 Inspirational motivation strategy

Implementing the inspirational motivation strategy requires project leaders who craft a vision, articulates in a manner that the vision appeals and inspires project stakeholders with optimism about the possible successful completion of a project (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Once this is communicated it provides, especially for the project team, the binding glue to efficiently and effectively execute project tasks. Therefore, this is closely linked to the idealised influence strategy.

Inspiration motivation requires two related capabilities; the ability to craft a vision and the means to articulate it to project stakeholders. Crafting a vision is the ability to develop a compelling project vision and

aligning it to both the goals of the project team, project and organisation. This requires, first, a good mental imagery (an outcome of the self-leadership domain); and second, an eloquent use of oral and written communication or even body language to articulate the vision and inspire project stakeholders to 'buy-in and own' into the project vision.

In one project experience, a project leader tried to inspire a project team at a kick-off meeting by the following remarks:

'... The company has selected a few of us to deliver this strategic project not because our mere existence in the organisation but because of what they see in us, a team of capable people. The journey we are embarking on will be sometimes joyful, in some cases treacherous. However, it is worth travelling because it is achievable. There will be trying moments but unity, cooperation, hard and smart work will make us together triumph. The achievement will be yours, mine and above all for the organisation we serve'.

In addition, researchers (e.g. Bass and Avolio, 1994) have noted that the use of symbols and artefacts e.g. in the above speech the likening of project delivery to a journey, can simplify the project vision and enhance its conveyance to the project stakeholders.

4.3.3 Intellectual stimulation

The intellectual stimulation strategy aims at provoking the project stakeholders to 'think out of the box' in order to develop project solutions and also solve project challenges in a different way. A project leader needs to empower project stakeholders through the creation of a conducive and enabling environment (democratic and with no-blame seeking tendencies) that allows participation in the creation of solutions, ideas, reflection and learning (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

4.3.4 Individualised consideration

Individualised consideration strategy requires a project leader to treat each project stakeholder in a 'customised' manner by attending to their personal and project related needs. In general terms, when using this strategy the project leader gives due respect to project stakeholders by recognising and appreciating their individual strengths and weaknesses but above all their varied contribution to project work. Two capabilities have been identified to execute the individualised consideration strategy namely empathy and mentoring. By empathy a project member or leader seeks to understand the emotional structure of a project stakeholder and respond to his or her emotional reactions (Goleman, 1998). Mentoring aims at coaching and developing project team members where there is a skills gap. This enhances their self-worth and self-fulfilment resulting in further performance, learning and growth (Bass and Avolio,

1994). Some scholars (e.g. Kouzes and Posner, 2003; Greenleaf, 1996) have suggested that this strategy if perfected ‘makes leaders out of the followers [project team]’.

4.4 Leadership of the Project Situation

Project leadership does not take place in a vacuum; it takes place in an environment where a project leader interacts with so many facets, both human and non-human. In other words, projects are planned and implemented within a particular environment. The environment may remain stable over time but often changes occur over the project’s life cycle, for example, organisational procurement policies may be changed during the implementation of the project; or when the project assumption fails to hold. Project situations are disruptive events which last a fairly short time. Project situations affect the project leadership process to the extent that a project leader may fail to deliver a similar project that he/she successfully implemented before. This is because of different situations manifesting in each project. Therefore, the inclusion of leadership of project situation in the framework is to acknowledge this domain. Likewise some leadership theories, for example, the contingent and situational schools (see e.g. Fiedler, 1967; House, 1971; Vroom and Jago, 1988; Hersey and Blanchard, 1988) have acknowledged situational variables as factors in achieving effective leadership. Unfortunately, no exhaustive list of all possible situational variables exists.

However, literature (e.g. Hammuda and Dulaimi, 1997; Slevin and Pinto, 1986; Chan et al., 2004) indicates that situational variables emanate from various sources of the project’s profile and its environment. They include the nature of a project (e.g. tasks complexity, tightness of schedule, duration, resource endowments and size); nature of stakeholders (e.g. diversity, culture, support of the project team, and competence of the project team); spread of participants (e.g. virtual vs. face-to-face teams); organisational factors (e.g. management or union/employee support, organisational culture and structure, policies and procedures and project maturity); industry factors (e.g. industry standards and norms, competition levels, strength of trade associations, green issues and state of industry - boom, down turn or stable); national (e.g. state of economy, political stability and state of the infrastructure); and global (e.g. threats of terrorists, epidemics and recession).

Review of literature indicated that it is not possible to use one strategy for all situations. The contingent and situational schools of leadership provide two broad strategies for dealing with project situations namely changing the project situation and changing the leadership style (Rollinson, 2005).

4.4.1 Change the project situation strategy

The reason for changing the situation could be because the current setup does not allow a smooth execution of project tasks. In their exemplary leadership framework, Kouzes and Posner (2003) support this view by asserting that challenging the process is a good leadership strategy. Capabilities for changing the project situation were identified as conceptual, negotiation and persuasion. Katz (1955) noted that the conceptual capability provides a ‘bird’s eye view’ of how various parts of a project fit together. In fact this is why a project leader is required to assume a stance of a generalist than a specialist (Meredith and Mantel, 2011) so that he/she is not subsumed in specialist details. This ability is useful in reconfiguring the project situation to achieve the same objectives and avoid being bogged down in technical, professional or functional silos. However, changing the situation will often attract disagreements and misunderstandings with some project stakeholders. Therefore, negotiation and persuasion capabilities are needed to sell the change and persuade project stakeholders that a ‘win-win’ situation will emerge and is the best for the achievement of the project’s goal.

4.4.2 Change the leadership style

In some cases it is not possible to change the situation due to lack of authority and time but it may be possible to change the leadership approach. In reviewing literature, a range of capabilities were identified ranging from the extreme case of the need to attend to project tasks or relationship with project stakeholders. This provides four strategies namely directive, supportive, and participative and achievement oriented (House, 1971; House and Mitchell, 1974, Vroom and Jago, 1988; Hersey and Blanchard, 1988; Houghton, 2005). Directive capability is where a project leader gives subordinates firm guidance and clear instructions wherever possible. Supportive capability is where a project leader tries to be as approachable as possible to project team. Using the participative capability the project leader solicits project team’s suggestions and incorporates the input into the decision process. Lastly achievement-oriented capability is where the project leader tries to get the project team to assume full responsibility for their work, to set challenging targets and expects them to achieve them. Rollinson (2005) noted that in practice, it is possible that project leaders may use all capabilities during the life cycle of the project due to the varied situations.

5. Discussion

Based on the preceding discussion a working definition and an integrative framework for effective project leadership are proposed. The proposed framework is specifically directed at project leadership and hence project work which is often described as temporary and unique both in context and outcome (PMI, 2013). It is strongly argued that to construct a realistic

understanding of project leadership, the nature of project work and the situation in which the project tasks are executed must be recognised and understood (Tyseen, Wald and Speith, 2013). This sets project leadership apart from group, political and corporate leadership. Effective project leadership is therefore, defined as: ... *an interactive process in which a project leader's persona influences project stakeholders towards the achievement of project tasks within a given project situation to achieve a project goal* [sometime called purpose]. The definition includes the nature (a process), expected outcome (project goal) and all the four project leadership domains identified.

Figure 2 summarises the proposed model and indicates that for an effective project leadership process to successfully occur a project leader requires self-

leadership in order to exercise leadership of project stakeholders, leadership of project tasks and leadership of the project situation. The self-leadership domain emphasises that the project leader needs to manage his persona – thinking, behaviour, actions and all aspects surrounding him – to gain credibility in the eyes of project stakeholders. In line with other leadership discourse (e.g. transactional theory) the framework views project leadership as an interactive process. However, the point of departure is that a number of theories concentrate on the domain of leadership of stakeholders (e.g. transformational theory) and ignore the other three domains. In addition, some theories (e.g. transformational theory) view leadership as a one-directional process where a leader influences a group of passive followers.

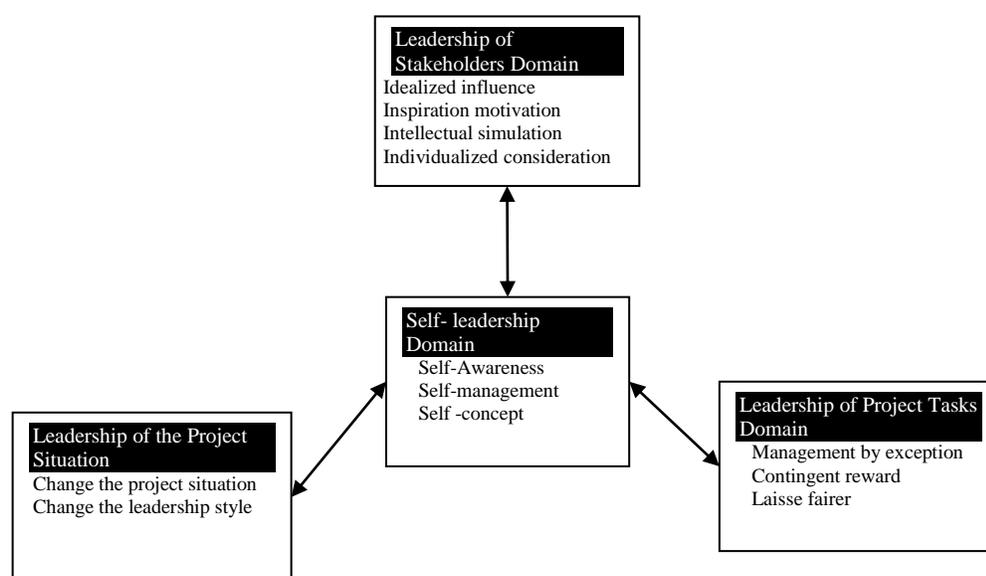


Figure 2: Project leadership process brought about by project leadership domains and associated strategies

In contrast, it is argued that project leadership is an interactive process which is multidirectional (hence the arrows pointing to and from the centre in Figure 2). The project leader influences and is influenced by project stakeholders task and situation (Gofee and Jones, 2007). Viewing leadership as an interactive process also means it can be learnt and developed through interaction. This is in line with the view that people are born with project leadership traits (Gofee and Jones, 2007).

Furthermore, viewing leadership as an interactive process also indicates the transactional nature of the construct. Some form of social exchange occurs between a project leader and project stakeholders (particularly the project team) during the execution of project tasks. Therefore, without project tasks, it is unimaginable how project leadership can manifest. In fact the life span of project leadership is equal to the duration of the project. In addition, the word 'tasks' was construed as leading to

a project 'goal'. From a project management point of view, the successful completion of project tasks leads to achievement of a project goal (APM, 2012). The execution of project tasks provides the interaction in which project leadership is exercised by a project leader. Project tasks are often performed in an ever-changing situation caused by a project's specific and dynamic variables (e.g. organisational policies). These situational dynamics combine to affect the effectiveness of the project leadership process. While most leadership models use the word 'followers', the framework adopts the project management terminology of 'project stakeholders'. The latter emphasises that a project leader does not only show leadership capabilities among the project team members but with diverse parties with various stakes on a project e.g. management, sponsors, regulators and suppliers (Cleland, 1986).

The proposed framework also emphasises that project leadership is a continuous process right from when a project leader is identified. It is neither a once-off activity nor one which comes in quanta. Furthermore, even though the project leadership domains have been ordered in a linear sequence in practice they are not engaged in any particular order. In fact the project leadership perspectives are ‘operated as if they were blades of a windmill rotating about a centre’ (hence the circular arrows in Figure 2). The speed of the blades may also depict the rate of change in project situation. The framework therefore, emphasises that when the project leader learns to ‘tame’ or master the four project leadership domains, there is a high chance for effective project leadership to occur. Lack of attention to any of the four domains is likely to lead to a dysfunctional project leadership process.

Project leadership is a very important aspect in project delivery. However, despite the numerous research studies, understanding how it works has often proved elusive. A number of project leadership theories have been developed or adapted to provide an understanding of its nature. What is noticeable is that most theories have not provided an integrative approach for project leadership. This paper has proposed a framework which views project leadership as a four-domain integrated construct consisting of self-leadership, leadership of project stakeholders, leadership of project tasks and leadership of the project situation. This has been noted as deviation from the normal view that project leadership is simply about influencing project stakeholders. The framework emphasises that for project leaders to be affective, they must acquire and develop capabilities to enable them to execute the various strategies identified for each the of four project leadership domains.

It suffices to note that the framework is expansive enough to include recent topics such as gender and cultural differences in leadership (e.g. Tirmiza, 2002). For example, if there are cultural issues, a project leader must deal with them by identifying them as belonging to the domain of project stakeholders and/or project situation and deploy the most appropriate strategies and capabilities. Further research is being carried out to test the propositions in the framework and will appear in a forthcoming article.

Conclusion

Project leadership is a very important aspect in project delivery. However, despite the numerous research studies, understanding how it works has often proved elusive. A number of project leadership theories have been developed or adapted to provide an understanding of its nature. What is noticeable is that most theories have not provided an integrative approach. This paper has proposed a framework which views project leadership as a four-domain integrated construct

consisting of self-leadership, leadership of project stakeholders, leadership of project tasks and leadership of the project situation. This has been argued as deviation from the normal view that project leadership should relate only to the process of influencing project stakeholders. The framework emphasises that for project leaders to be affective, they must acquire and develop capabilities to enable them to execute the various strategies identified for each the of four project leadership domains.

It suffices to note that the framework is broad enough to include topics such as gender and cultural differences in leadership (e.g. Tirmiza, 2002). For example, if there are cultural issues, a project leader must identify the domain they belong to (e.g. situation, stakeholder or both) and apply the necessary strategies. As a way forward in applying the framework data has been collected (July 2017) for a preliminary test of its validity

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