

## ***Don't Manage Your Project. Lead Your Project!***

Today's most successful **project leaders** contribute to enterprise performance by integrating the best practices of project management and change leadership. They **manage** their project schedules, budgets and resources but they also **lead** their projects through the:

- design of systemic solutions that address the people/process/technology implications of an initiative
- integration of stakeholder participation and feedback within the project plan
- proactive negotiation, mitigation and resolution of project changes and conflicts.

**Project leadership** blends the best of project management and leadership skills to produce outstanding business results.

The following **Power Project** steps may be compressed or extended depending on the complexity of the project and the corporate context. A company that excels in project leadership may complete the first five steps in a single day for a small project. Developing a charter and work plan for a transformational project that involves significant changes in culture, work processes, human resources and technology may take months to complete. Regardless of the size and complexity of the project, it is important to complete all of the following steps.

### **Ten Steps to Project Leadership**

#### **Brand Your Project**

- Align your project with the corporation's strategy.
- Create three bullet points to describe your project so that everyone will want to join your team.
- Create a metaphor for your project

The boss might have assigned you to a project called "updating the filing system". Redefine the project! Let everyone know that you are working on "Fast Facts", a knowledge management system that:

1. will help bring new products to market faster than the competition
2. reduce development costs
3. improve quality through the reuse of corporate knowledge.

1.

#### **Form a Powerful Coalition**

- Enroll a powerful sponsor
- Identify colleagues who share your passion for the outcome and have the ability to support you.
- Involve as many players with different perspectives as possible.

Enrolling a powerful and active sponsor is critical to a project's success. The sponsor must not only have the authority to promote and protect the project but also the skill and commitment to do so.

2.

Engagement of key stakeholders will also create a bias for success. The right stakeholders will not only contribute valuable skills and knowledge to your project but will also help you to design a workplan that supports a sustainable outcome.

### Launch Your Project

3.

- Recruit a powerful team
- Engage the team's spirit and a sense of shared responsibility
- Provide the appropriate logistical and administrative support.

An effective project leader will actively recruit team members with the appropriate skills and will launch the team with the necessary information and resources to be successful.

### Assess Your Organization

4.

- Assess whether your IT, business processes and HR systems are aligned with your project.
- Engage stakeholders in identifying challenges and solutions.

Successful projects produce sustainable results. This requires addressing the organization "systems" that will support and reinforce the change you are introducing. Are IT systems aligned with the proposed changes? How will the change affect business processes? Does the enterprise have the right skills, reward systems and accountabilities to support the change?

### Create a Project Charter and Work Plan

5.

- Gain management approval of a written project charter
- Design the project plan with your project team and key stakeholders
- Gain written approval of the project plan

Designing a project charter requires rigorous thinking about what the enterprise wants and why it wants it. Signed approval of a written charter will confirm management's commitment to the project's goals.

The next step is to design a detailed work plan with the project team and key stakeholders. This plan should define the critical success factors, schedule, budget, resources, change controls and risk management program. Management approval of the work plan will ensure that they endorse your approach and are assigning the resources needed to succeed.

### Design a Communications Plan

6.

- Design your key messages
- Identify the audiences that are affected by and interested in your project
- Create a communications plan that includes both words and behaviour and makes use of multiple venues

Leaders continually underestimate the importance of communications when introducing change to an organization. A powerful communications plan will engage all possible venues including meetings, workshops, progress reports, training events, informal gatherings, e-mail, the intranet and special events.

## Manage Your Project

7.

- Standardize and manage your project reports including budget, timetable, issue, risk and team satisfaction reports
- Run your meetings efficiently
- Implement proper gate controls so that you can abandon projects that no longer meet your business goals

Team members must regularly report work progress against the approved project plan before a project can be managed successfully. And not doing so must have consequences. Effective reports will address variances to the agreed schedule, budget, quality and risk- and not simply tell stories of progress without reference to the agreed plan. The schedule and format of these reports are best introduced at the project launch.

Meet regularly but don't waste time at meetings. Meetings must be organized, productive and engaging to provide value to the project. Leading effective meetings is a skill and an art enjoyed by the most successful project leaders.

If the project is no longer a priority-abandon it. Gate controls at the end of each phase are essential for determining the continued viability of a project. Gate meetings will review a project's priority relative to other projects and determine whether there are funds, resources and time available to proceed.

## Lead Your Project

8.

### 8. Lead Your Project

- Enroll and inspire people. Be straight! Take risks!
- Manage conflict powerfully rather than avoiding it.

Powerful leaders are effective at doing things with people-not to them. They are able to inspire people to be their very best by being straight and getting underneath the excuses and waffling. They also inspire by taking risks and putting themselves on the line. And they don't assume support for their project. They continuously enrol people to participate in the initiative.

Project leaders also require outstanding negotiation and conflict management skills. Conflict is inevitable within a project due to competing priorities and the uncertainty inherent in creating something new. But powerful leaders maximize the opportunities arising from conflict by proactively:

**Stimulating** conflict to ensure a diversity of opinion and new ideas

**Mitigating** against unnecessary conflict through constant communication with key stakeholders. AND

**Managing** structural conflict, interpersonal conflict and prolonged opposition in a manner that generates possibility and insight.

### **Consolidate and Institutionalize Strategic Changes**

9.

- Instil strategic changes within your leadership development and succession planning programs.
- Hire, promote and train employees, managers & executives who will support the changes.
- Align your performance measures and rewards with the changes.
- Re-invigorate the change process with new projects, themes and change agents.

Leaders engaged in lengthy projects must continue to address structures, policies and processes that undermine their vision for change. Strategic change must be instilled within the recruitment and succession plans, as well as performance measures and rewards systems for the outcome to be sustained in the long-term. The change must also be re-invigorated through new projects and themes so that people continue to develop the skills and behaviours required to realize the vision.

### **Close and Evaluate Your Project**

10.

- Capture and share project knowledge
- Evaluate the project, team and leader's performance
- Celebrate!

Project leaders leave a legacy within the organization only when they empower subsequent teams to succeed. This requires the scheduling of transition time to introduce new managers to the project staff, stakeholders and key issues. It also requires contributing to the organization's knowledge by capturing and sharing project knowledge.

Most importantly, it requires a celebration of all the learning and growth that has occurred and acknowledgement of those who participated in the challenge of creating something new for the enterprise.

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