Review Paper

Leadership is Vital for Project Managers to Achieve Project Efficacy

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight the significance of leadership skills that are vital for project managers while managing projects effectively and efficiently. An interesting observation has been noted from literature in the field of project management that research on leadership of project managers is still limited even though calls have been made to conduct more research for more than one decade. It becomes important to understand and adopt leadership skills and competences to cope with modern challenges of project which affect on success or failure of project. The function of project managers is rapidly evolving from managing or directing to leading the projects who must possess essential knowledge, skills, and new emerging concept of leadership. The utility of project management will be more exciting, challenging and critical in coming years, while the position of project manager will also be much more diverse. Future research has been suggested in similar field.

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explore the leadership role of project manager which has largely been ignored in literature that is noted through an observation that research on project manager's leadership is still limited[1]. It is becoming difficult to differentiate between the roles of project manager or leader in context of leadership and management as well as project management. Therefore, it becomes important to understand the differences between project leadership and project management, to determine the effect of project leadership performance on success or failure of project[2]. The project leadership needs attention in project management literature, even though calls have been made for more research on project leadership[3]. It is momentous to determine the effectiveness of project success by recognizing the distinction between the leadership and management roles of project managers[4].

Role of a Project Manager

This article is an effort to address new emerging challenge of leadership demonstrated by the project managers in project management perspective. The role of project managers revealed significant influence on project success through different studies[5] but literature has largely ignored to consider the impact of project manger's leadership on project success as one of the key project success factors[6], although few project management practices have been exercised and few abandoned, but no empirical research has been conducted to determine association between project manager's leadership and teamwork[5]. The imminent effects of leadership skills and contextual factors in context of leaders while managing important activities associated with planning for organizational change through effective management of projects needs to be addressed[7].

Leadership is a vital factor of effective management but its function and direct influence on project success or failure in term of internal and external factor has not been addressed in literature even leadership performance founded moderately ambivalent[2]. The swiftly rising change of manager's leadership characteristics and behaviors influence the success or failure in organizational change[7] and relationship between leadership characteristics or behaviors and organizational changes has been explored over more than last two decades[8]. The essential leadership and managerial knowledge, skills, competencies and characteristics ensure successful completion of projects through right decisions at right time and by employing right people at right places[4].

The leadership fundamental function is to produce change and set direction to cope with change which is not similar to planning or long-term planning, but perplexity between both often take place among people[9]. A large number of studies have been explored to identify leadership traits and characteristics, including personality, abilities, physical factors, knowledge, dominance, and self confidence, as the list goes on[3], but there are no common traits, behavior or processes which can identify the qualities of an effective leader[10]. Leadership style and personal traits have been determined as critical success factor for failure or success of a project, in most of research[2,11].

The project leaders motivate and inspire people by satisfying their basic human needs instead of pushing them in right

direction because burst of energy is required for achieving grand vision[9]. The significance of leadership being a requisite for project excellence has been accorded throughout the literature of project management[12] and a mean for motivating people for change[13] which is influential for overall project ethnicity[14]. Project staff leaded by strong leadership possessed by project managers ensures their contribution towards project success with a great deal of dedication, commitment, significance and accomplishment of project objectives[15]. Leadership motivate group member for ensuring to improve project outcomes through performing at higher level which might not happen otherwise[15] and one of the key principal of leadership is to turn project managers into leader by making them responsible for project outcomes[16].

Role of Leadership versus Management

In latter part of the last century, management's two "children" evolved into leadership and project management fields[17]. It is commonly assumed that everyone in management position is a leader and leaders are not concerned to manage but leadership is performed by the people even though not in management positions[18]. Management practices are considered for many centuries as planning, organizing, directing, and controlling. Management skills were required for all mega events including building Great Wall of China, preparing armies for battle, and running the Roman Empire. Traditionally, management was viewed as an art that transferred from generation to generation until late nineteen centuries and science of management has also developed in last hundred years[17].

It is difficult to differentiate between leadership and management that which is necessarily better because both have their own characteristics and functions which are necessary for success of any increasingly multifaceted and capricious business environment[9]. Leadership and management are involved in a unique set of functions or activities[18] and this issue was addressed in a landmark article published by Abraham Zaleznik in Harvard Business Review in 1977. Both leaders and managers have valuable contribution for organization and nature of each one's contribution is different[18]. Leadership does the right things and management does things right[18]. Mostly scholars argued that overlap exist between leadership and management but both the activities are not synonymous[19] and degree of overlapping between both the terms is a point of disagreement[8].

Role of Leadership in Project Management

There is an important endeavor for research on project manager's leadership through the field of project management as it is essential that project management field must take the responsibility for development of apt theories of project leadership either using deductive approach or inductive approach[1]. Since mid 1940, project management is considered one of the key activity for business success in modern organization and projects have achieved immense attention from

researchers as combined projects frame for the organization's future[1]. Time, budge, and quality are three dimensions of project success in many definitions of project management success[2,20]. Quality of project management processes, leadership performance, and satisfaction of project stakeholder's expectations are also needed to be considered as time, budget and quality are insufficient for measuring project success are also other dimensions of project success[21,22].

Leadership is an effective tool to be used by the project manager which moderately influence project outcome, otherwise, lack of leadership skills are directly associated with project failure [2]. The prediction about functions of the project managers in future to become key players in organizational world[23] has been come to reality[24]. The project managers articulate clear vision of project and communicate to project team in order to create a project strategy well connected to business strategy[16]. The project manager is an emergence of new professional and there has been a continuous dialogue about what a project manager or leader does[23].

Role of Leader versus Project Manager

There is a real difference exist between leadership and project manager in complex working environment but yet a complementary relationship between these two roles are supposed to be performed by the project manager[3]. An intrigue distinction between leader and project manager roles identified by Bennis[25] is that "a leader does the right things (effectiveness); a manager does things right (efficiency)", while project leader create vision for project, bring together the resources, and provide motivation and inspiration to project stakeholders in doing the right things to achieve the project objectives[3]. Leaders focus on what needs to be done while managers focus on how things get done, namely "leaders do the right things and managers do things right"[16].

Typically, leaders are coping with transformation while managers are dealing with intricacy[9] but it is the need of the day to possess both skills to cope with fast growing competitive and volatile challenges of 21st century. A leader creates change and serves subordinates while manager handle change and serves super-ordinates[18]. The leaders manage changes while managers handle complexity[26]. Leaders and managers, both are needed to the organizations but each one perform in a different role[27], followed with enumeration of distinction between leaders and manager in beginning[28].

The managers and leaders differ from their chaos, psyches, and order. The project managers embrace process, hold stability and control, and intuitively try to quickly solve problems even sometimes before fully understanding the significance of problem. On the other hand, the leaders tolerate chaos and don't make decision before fully understanding the issues[28]. The good managers or leaders must be responsible for two approaches – vision and execution, direction and planning as everyone can perform equally good both at leading and

managing the projects[16]. In a nutshell, leaders cope with change, creating a vision, setting direction and building motivation and inspiration, while managers are concerned to bring a degree of order and consistency through organizing, planning, budgeting and staffing[9].

Role and Significance of Project Leadership

Project management refers to project activities of planning and organizing through decision making process which enhance effectiveness and efficiency of project. Leadership, in contrast, is a process of leading others for achievement of project objectives "motivating and guiding people to realize their potential and achieve tougher and challenging organizational goals"[11]. A strong project leaders is required to deal with administrative or bureaucratic projects but it does not mean that strong leader is always a more successful leader[29]. Any strong leadership with week management and vise versa is always not better for good results but actual challenge is to use combination of strong management and strong leadership for balancing each other[9].

The leadership traits are invariably associated with project leadership in contrast to project management, difference of which has been discussed throughout in the literature of project management[5]. It is imperative to comprehend the differences between project leadership and project management, to determine the effect of leadership performance on success or failure of project[2]. Project leadership is the ability to lead in most powerful manner while leading the others in project work[30]. Project leadership impact on improving project management practices in order to reduce uncertainty and complexity associated with project pursuit[31]. To achieve project objectives in complex working environment, vibrant leadership induces the need of change, inspire for new ways of thinking and problem solving, and motivate for working together[2,11].

The role of project leader can be illustrated through combination of leadership and managerial roles as well as internal and external roles[1]. The first dimension of project manager is leadership and management roles[32] while second dimension is based on internal and external roles[1]. Planning and execution both are just considered to an end due to new responsibilities of project leaders in which most important is to identify and articulate clear project strategy with emphasize to revisit and deal with business assumptions at higher level by defining the outcomes and business expectation[16].

Project leaders need to apply sound project management practices while leading the projects but project management is not a substitute for leading others[30]. The role of a project manager has become so important in today's organizations that dealing with strategy is not just sufficient at the senior level and there is no more need of time to realize while leaving the project manager only for operational activities in the projects[16]. Project leaders have a significant and dynamic role in simplifying complex projects and within performing organization[33].

Project leader needs to create awareness and trust among team to feel that they play fundamental part in project success or failure[34]. Projects provide opportunities for project leadership to transform new ideas into tangible outcomes where vision becomes a reality[16]. The role of information is powerful for project leadership as air for breathing. The project leader can be more powerful advisor, advocate and decision maker for project in hand, if able to get useful information[30]. There is a need of time that project managers must shift from only efficiency to effectiveness and efficiency; from getting job done to getting the business results and winning in the market place; and from operational issues to strategic, operational and human related issues[16].

It is seen from successful projects that project leaders wear 'bigger hats' to deal with both leadership and management roles[16]. Project leaders see their roles being responsible for providing directions and vision, for planning and execution, and for doing right things as doing it right[16]. There is a dire need of project leaders who challenge the status quo, inspire the team and influence the organizational members, and also need of competent managers who assist to develop and maintain smooth functioning at workplace[18]. Project leadership responsibilities include to shine the flashlight periodically and ensure timely support by closely listening and watching the team members[30].

Good managers are not necessarily good leaders and good leaders are not necessarily good managers[18]. Project leadership is a new paradigm which is becoming most important to achieve winning business results and project success. Strong leadership and strong management is required in organizations for optimal effectiveness as managers having legitimate authority are unable to give assurance to lead effectively in the organization. A project leader needs to create an environment of empowering, in addition to planning, executing and controlling the project, to provide best working environment to project team as leading the team work during project implementation is not a substitute for project management[30].

Conclusion

The literature reveals that project managers must possess essential qualities and competencies of leadership in addition to management skills for effective accomplishments of business and projects results. The project manager must apply right skills at right time and embrace right knowledge for right jobs. A sufficient research is required to develop and authenticate a single model for project manager's leadership which suits all the projects across the countries as well as all the industries. The impact of project management qualification on project success and career outcome also need to be addressed in future research. Hence, the project manager role as a leader is significant for successful management of projects which will remain an interesting and diverse area for research in future.

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