

THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON PROJECT SUCCESS: CASE OF A TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY

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Abstract

Challenges within the customer service industry make leadership styles a key factor in the success of customer service project delivery. This research provides an overview of information and knowledge within a corporate environment with an underlying theme of defining leadership styles within the customer service projects environment to ensure successful project delivery. This research aims to investigate the perception of leadership styles required and factors that contribute to successful project delivery effectiveness within a telecommunication customer service environment. A conceptual research model is formulated and is followed by a quantitative research process and analysis. The results of the study identified that employees had a neutral perception to leadership styles however; different leadership styles are important to themselves and the organisation.

Keywords: Leadership, Leadership Style, Project Management

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1. Introduction

There are many challenges that today's organisation face in order to justify their existence. Some of these challenges include staying competitive; growing shareholder value, and sustainability. These organisations participate and implement a magnitude of initiatives to achieve their objective, whatever those objectives might be. In order to achieve these objectives, organizations are often faced with the challenge of finding the right skills and leadership to deliver the desired results. For example, in today's mobile telecommunications company, South Africa provides modern and efficient facilities to urban areas, including cellular and internet services. 20 years ago, the telecommunications network in South Africa introduced the world of cellular communications and today the cellular industry continues to grow from strength, to strength providing improved technology every day. Currently, there are five cellular providers that form part of this competitive industry.

According to (Adair, 2005:12) leadership is defined as the ability to make decisions, having energy, having a sense of duty; confidence; and pride in command; however Daft (2007:4) defines leadership as an influential relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes. Burke (2007:28) believes that without dynamic leadership, the project teams responsible for delivery of organisation objectives would be like a rudderless boat. A rudderless boat defined as: moving without direction. Summers (2009:126) states that the aim of leadership should be to ensure that there is

improvement of human beings as well as equipment, to improve quality standards, to ensure that there is a substantial amount of delivery; and to bring pride of workmanship to human beings. Yudelowitz, Koch and Field (2002:2) postulate that leadership is a quality, a culture, a role, a mind-set and a set of actions. Leadership encompasses everything that is necessary to induce a constructive change.

2. Literature Review

Project management is defined as an application of knowledge, skills, and techniques to project activities in order to meet the needs of project requirements, according to Heagney (2011:25). Leadership, in these applications, is required to enhance successful project deliverables. With various leadership styles and methodologies this can be achieved. Kerzner (2013) states four elements, which are essential when exercising good project management leadership methodologies, namely effective communication, effective co-operation, effective team work and trust.

Effective communication can be implemented within the project team, amongst internal customers, and the wider organization. Effective co-operation is required within the wider organization in order to align to its objectives. Effective team work is obtained within the internal projects team, and the element of trust is exercised throughout the life cycle of a project.

Rad and Leven (2002:56) stipulate that project managers should be competent in most or all of the details of the technical area of the project to ensure that those who manage projects have appropriate skills to achieve success for the project or enterprise.

In order to understand the technical areas of a project, people engagement is of vital importance. When delivering successful projects, Kerzner (2013) stipulates that stakeholder engagement is essential when you physically meet with the key stakeholders and determine their needs and expectations. The objectives of physical engagement sessions should have the following objectives:

- Understand the expectations of the customer;
- Understand the needs of the customer;
- Value the needs of the customer; and
- Identify any stakeholder’s problems.

2.1 Reasons for project failure

When a project is initiated there are three factors to take into consideration: time, cost and quality. Time is defined as the timeline for which the outputs need to be met; cost is defined as the amount of budget allocated to the particular project, which needs to be adhered to, considering the scope of work; and quality is defined as the standard of the outputs. In reality, project managers find it challenging to ensure that all three factors are met simultaneously. Hence, projects or certain project deliverables often fail owing to one of the three factors not being met according to the organization’s objectives.

Sometimes organizations are too concerned with achieving their ultimate objectives that they overlook severe consequences where budgets are over-run; they have limited resources and time constraints, which all lead to a negative effect on quality.

Tracy (2007:129) states that there are four main concerns within project management that cause projects to fail, which are described below:

- Not enough time set aside for certain tasks to be completed;
- The assumption that there will be no obstacles in the way of completing a project successfully. Projects fail owing to no extra time and resources forecasted;
- Project managers tend to rush projects to safeguard the limitation around money, time and quality. This often leads to errors, which lead to poor quality; and
- Project managers take on too many responsibilities or place too much responsibility on their team members.

Presently, the demand for project work is much greater with the limited supply of skilled resources within organizations. In today’s economy, people are faced with many financial difficulties, whilst they have to employ more skilled resources to reduce project failure.

2.2 Differentiation between managers and leaders

One of the challenges that organizations face daily is trying to distinguish the difference between leaders versus a manager’s attributes. Too often people lose focus of the vision and mission of an organization, and whether the organization fundamentally has the correct resources to manage the mission through to project delivery.

As stated by Taylor (2004:101), management skills without leadership skills are likely to lead to poor results or failure of a project. Van Zyl (2010:28) differentiates between a leader and a manager in terms of their characteristics (Table 1).

Table 1. Differentiation between managers and leaders

MANAGER	LEADER
Focuses on the implementation of the vision.	Focuses on the vision on the organization.
Orientated to adapting to change, not taking the initiative.	Orientated towards driving change, and anticipating environmental changes.
Concerned more with techniques; sometimes with maintaining order and the status quo. Adapting to the culture.	Concerned with dynamics of a situation, on how to leverage or shape; concerned with setting or changing the culture.
Concerned with being empowered.	Empowering people.
Sees a more limited web in terms of relationships in terms of immediately adjacent areas.	Sees relationships as opportunities for growth; personal goals are in alignment with organizational goals.
Tends to avoid risk for self-protection; and hence growth is more limited.	Understands personal strengths and weaknesses, and is willing to learn from mistakes and grow.

Source: Van Zyl, E (2009)

Table 1 above shows that there are huge variances between a manager and a leader. As a manager, the focus is on implementation compared to a leader, where the organisation’s vision is the main focus. A manager will adapt change as opposed to a leader who will drive change. As a manager you are

concerned with being empowered versus a leader who will empower people.

2.3 Leadership definitions

Leadership comprises of various components, skills, styles and attributes. Although there are various leadership styles, it needs certain qualities in order to be effective. Rossiter (2004:7) state that leaders should be innovative, have respect for others, be courteous, sensitive, and go beyond their ability in order for any organization to be highly effective. Elloy (2008:803) also states that the goal of a leader in a project environment is to improve performance of team members by developing the team's own capabilities of displaying leadership and goal settings.

Various skills and styles of work are dependent on the type of project that is managed, as well as the diverse personalities within a team in order to achieve maximum outputs.

Yudelowitz et al. (2002:26) agree and state that leadership is a skill that is different from other skills, which is more necessary in some situations than in others. Bussiswe M. Maseko & Cecile N. Gerwel Proches (2013) emphasises that there are certain leadership styles and characteristics identified as being critical for successful project delivery. Heldeman et al. (2005:8) also indicate that project managers should have certain skills that are required to ensure an effective organization: communication skills, planning skills, budgeting skills, conflict management skills, negotiation skills, leadership skills and motivating skills.

The people management component is vitally important for project managers. Without a motivated team, and an empathetic and caring project manager, how can project delivery be a success? Clarke (2009: 192) states that leadership skills are not identified as part of project management, but are regarded as a soft skill. Westland (2006:48) states that project delivery within the stipulated time, given costs and maintaining a certain quality of work, level of customer satisfaction achieved, as well as the level of staff satisfaction achieved, creates a successful project.

2.4 Leadership attributes

All human beings have certain attributes which make them unique. Acquiring and motivating personnel is one attribute that is required when employing any project manager in any organization, state Meredith et al. (1995:20). These factors include having:

- High quality technical skills;
- Political sensitivity;
- Strong foundation;
- Strong goal orientation; and
- High self esteem

High quality technical skills are factored as a leadership attribute for the following reasons. Firstly, project delivery varies from a micro, meso and macro project management level within any organization. Secondly, in order to be successful in project

delivery, being an expert in the technical aspects of the requirements is highly recommendable, however it is not essential. But it is essential to understand the quality of skills required to deliver a project in order for project managers to select their project team effectively.

Political sensitivity plays a major role when engaging with employees within an organization. South Africa is a diversified country, which constitutes different races, cultures and religions. In any organization awareness of diversity should be created when engaging with employees. It is often found that owing to different cultures, it is important to take cognisance of political differences.

A strong foundation and goal orientation are important leadership attributes. Firstly, a strong foundation is required to understand different cultures, religions, and personalities of the human race. Secondly, as a leadership trait, it is relevant to understand the context of the environment within an organization, as well as the skills, which are required to achieve an organization's objectives. Thirdly, being goal orientated is essential to be aligned with the organization's needs, and a factual mind-set in order to achieve successful delivery of what is required.

2.5 Stages and levels of leadership

Yudelowitz et al. (2002: 79) state that there is a wheel of learner leadership, which involves four stages namely:

- Self-awareness;
- Learning;
- Judging; and
- Acting.

There are two aspects of self-awareness, namely humility and confidence. As a leader you do not have to be an expert in all spheres of an organization or in your personal life. There is a time to ask questions when there is uncertainty. Learning is a continuous process. Reflection on self and the job at hand is prevalent when one wants to improve unceasingly. Judging plays a key stage in leadership, as this allows a leader to take cognisance of his/her surroundings and acting, which could be defined as mobilising, consulting and influencing others, respectively.

2.6 Leadership styles and skills

Frigenti and Comminos (2002:25) assert that the ability to persuade should be auctioned rather than commanded as a skill within project management. With diversity in human personalities, project managers need to approach project team members objectively by utilising certain approaches whilst engaging. Boddy and Buchanan (1992:44) state that projects often need staff who are competent in an operational area and who possess skills and an attitude that are relevant to the project. Boddy et al.

(1992:52) also state that to be successful, project managers should be able to use a wide range of methods, especially drawing on political and interpersonal skills (communicating, negotiating, team building and creating ownership). Cagle (2005: 30) believes that there is a need for five skill sets to accomplish project leadership tasks of today's

projects: Basic Skill Set, Advanced Skill Set, Expert Skill Set, Specialty Skill Set and Principal Skill Set.

According to Muller, Geraldi and Turner (2012:87-88), there are three Intellectual Dimensions, five Managerial Dimensions and six Emotional Dimensions, which every project manager should have as part of their skills. Table 2 below which illustrates the different dimensions:

Table 2. Three intellectual dimensions

Intellectual Dimensions	Managerial Dimensions	Emotional Dimensions
Critical Analysis and Judgment	Resource Management	Self-Awareness
Vision and Imagination	Engaging Communication	Emotional Resilience
Strategic Perspective	Empowering	Intuitiveness
	Developing	Interpersonal Sensitivity
	Achieving	Influence
		Motivation

Source: Muller, Geraldi and Turner (2012:87-88)

Chan and Chan (April, 2005) postulate there are two types of leadership styles, namely Transformational and Transactional leadership. Table

3 indicates the differences between the two types of leadership.

Table 3. Differences between transformational and transactional leadership

Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership
Idealized Influences	Contingent Rewards
Inspirational Motivation	Management by Exception
Intellectual Stimulation	Laissez Faire
Individualized Consideration	

Source: Chan and Chan (April, 2005)

Within transformational leadership, idealized influences are described as leadership where there is respect to follow from the reaction of a transformational leader. Inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation define a leader who “gives back”. Transformational leadership also takes into consideration the needs and skills of team members. This leadership style is completely dissimilar to transactional leadership where contingent rewards are to work harder in accordance with mutually agreed performance. Management by exceptions is when there is intervention only when work is done or performance levels are below the agreed timelines. The definition of Laissez Faire is defined as avoiding

responsibilities and making key decisions, according to Chan and Chan (April, 2005).

2.7. Influence/power as a leadership skill

Leadership is about influence, and influence comes through power, and power is the ability to influence. Maxwell (2004:242) cited in McElroy Charles (1998) states that power is usually recognized as an excellent short-term anti-depressant. There are many people who thrive in achieving power over others by influencing them positively or negatively.

Daft (2007:363) mentions five different types of power that leaders have, and these are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Types of power

Types	Description
Legitimate, coercive and reward power	Positional leaders who have an extensive influence over the organization's policies and procedures.
Expert power and referent power	Individual's personal characteristics.

Source: Daft (2007:363)

The types of power as in table above have been broken up into two descriptions for the five types of power displayed. Legitimate, coercive and reward power which illustrates internal organizational power

versus expert and referent power which is aligned to the personal empowerment.

Morris and Pinto (2007:90) disagree with Daft (2007:363) and state that there are in fact seven types of power that a leader can have (See Table 5).

Table 5. Type of powers

Types	Description
Positional power	Defined as having influence on an individual that is occupied within an organization.
Personal power	Defined as the personal qualities of an individual.
Resource power	An individual's influence over critical resources needed for a particular project.
Dependency power	An individual or team acquired when others depend on them and their outputs that they can provide.
Centrality power	Defined as an individual that is linked to the primary activities of the organization.
Non-substitutability power	The perception that the individual possesses a skill that cannot be replicated by someone else, namely have certain talents, and lastly, coping with uncertainty, where power that is derived from the ability to effectively cope with environmental uncertainty.

Source: Morris & Pinto (2007:90)

As per Table 5 above, there is a breakdown of seven types of power that a leader can have, which include: positional power, personal power, resource power, dependency power, centrality power and non-substitutability power. Positional power is related to the power within an organization. Personal power is part of a leader's individuality. Resource power is having power over critical resources/stakeholders within the project. Dependency power is when as a leader one is able to depend on critical stakeholders to ensure successful project delivery within a given timeframe. Centrality power is having power centrally within an organization and non-substitutability power where one can identify expert

skills, which cannot be substituted for particular project delivery. These types of powers, which a leader holds are seen as a type of leadership style, which could impact successful project delivery. In order to obtain this power, effective engagement within the organization and within project teams are essential in order to be successful.

2.8 Leadership skills for project types

Briner et al (1996:36) indicate that there are three types of projects with different characteristics that are required from the project manager which are shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Three types of projects with different characteristics

Type	Characteristics
Concrete	Full Time Leader Full-Time Visible Team Members with clear roles, specialism & hierarchy Project Owner and sponsor are named and are active Resources allocated and formal decision making Project team and organization very experienced Well established systems for estimating, planning and controlling
Occasional	Often Part Time Leader Part-Time team members with conflicting priorities of time and interest Unclear roles and relationships Cross-organizational or professional boundaries Unclear roles for sponsors and clients Planning and control methods are unfamiliar Resources a guestimate
Open	No formal leader Team members selected themselves, attracted by the idea or opportunity Self-organizing activities and monitoring Try out low-key experiments until something works

Source: Briner et al (1996:36)

2.9 Leadership styles versus competencies

Fifteen leadership competencies as mentioned by Dulewicz and Higgs (2003:55) and the competence profiles of their three styles of leadership are listed below in Table 7.

Table 7. Fifteen leadership competencies

Group	Competency	Goal	Involving	Engaging
Intellectual	Critical analysis and judgment	High	Medium	Medium
	Vision and Imagination	High	High	Medium
	Strategic Perspective	High	Medium	Medium
Managerial	Engaging Communication Medium	Medium	Medium	High
	Managing Resources	High	Medium	Low
	Empowering	Low	Medium	High
	Developing	Medium	Medium	High
	Achieving	High	Medium	Medium
Emotional	Self-awareness	Medium	High	High
	Emotional Resilience	High	High	High
	Motivation	High	High	High
	Sensitivity	Medium	Medium	High
	Influence	Medium	High	High
	Intuitiveness	Medium	Medium	High
	Conscientiousness	High	High	High

Source: Dulewicz and Higgs (2003:55)

As per table above, Dulewicz and Higgs explain that there are fifteen leadership competencies, which are summed up into three leadership styles. The three mentioned leadership styles are Intellectual, Managerial and Emotional. A scale of a high, medium and low rating is utilized in order to ascertain the requirement of involvement of different leadership styles within an organization. Goals are defined as achieving milestones for the organization, team members and the project manager. Involvement is defined as engaging on an organization and team level.

2.10 Project success

The key learning points of competencies identified for successful project delivery is: Communication, Planning, and Progress Tracking (Goal Setting 2014). Communication is defined as verbal, telephonic, email, face-to-face engagement, which takes place between inter-relationship, namely project manager vs. team members; and project manager vs. customers. Planning is defined as identifying the needs of the customer in order to execute successful project delivery. Progress tracking is defined as the method of ensuring that tasks are executed timeously with the correct level of quality. Goal setting is trying to achieve successful implementation of a project by agreeing on adequate timelines. According to (Goal Setting 2014), emotional competences such as

attitude towards the task directly correlate with project outcome. Attitude is a personality trait, which magnifies the relationship between the project manager and the customers, which demonstrates good project management.

3. Methodology

3.1 Purpose of the study

This study is descriptive in nature, which sought to determine whether there is an improvement rate in project success within the industry when utilizing certain leadership skills, styles and attributes within an organization. Important variables that are associated with the problem were used in this study in order to determine whether critical attributes are required for project success.

3.2 Study approach

The questionnaire was administered electronically. An email of the questionnaire was sent in the English Language. The questionnaire was distributed to Executive Heads of Departments, Project Managers, Project Teams, Operational Managers, Operational Customers and Business Analysts within a specific organization's customer care division specifically in the Western Cape and Gauteng regions. There were 201 questionnaires distributed of which 100

responses were received. The distribution process was in an attempt to gather responses to the questionnaire from a variety of stakeholders who are impacted by project delivery within the organizations customer care division.

3.3. Research strategy

A strategy was formulated in order to address the research question. Therefore, the kind of research questions that were posed in this study led to the adoption of a quantitative survey-based study, which used a self-administered structured questionnaire (Appendix A) that was guided by the researcher. Thus, a quantitative survey-based study was deemed as most appropriate to investigate the role of project managers and project teams and their specific styles and methods of working. The instrument used for this study was a questionnaire distributed to members within the largest mobile telecommunications company in South Africa.

3.4 Research setting

The field study was conducted within one of the largest mobile telecommunications company in South Africa in the context of project management. The identification of project management skills, styles and attributes in their current context was to be determined in order to elicit whether successful outputs can be delivered.

3.5 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis of this study was employees within a mobile telecommunication company in South Africa in a specific division who are impacted by project delivery.

3.6 Method of Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was utilized in order to collect data, which comprised closed ended questions and a few open-ended questions.

English is the official language and medium of communication within the organization, and every individual is expected to utilize the language. Thus, research instruments were designed and presented in English to avoid any ambiguity in questionnaires, and to ensure that all questions were clearly understood by the respondents.

3.7 Data collection procedure

Before commencing this research, a letter, which authorized the research was required and issued by the Managing Director of the mobile telecommunications company within the customer care division. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher. A brief description about the researcher and the purpose of the research was provided to the respondents in order to obtain their consent to participate in this survey. The questionnaires were comprehensively designed to facilitate easy and quick completion.

3.8 Study population and sampling technique

This section describes the research population, the research sample, as well as the sampling method that was used for the purpose of the study.

3.9 Study population

The population of this study comprised of the customer care division, which includes Project Teams and Operational Teams with various levels of experience within the organization.

Table 8. Population frame of the study

Gender		Position within the organization	
Male	115	Executive Heads of Departments	8
Female	86	Project Managers	24
		Project Team	45
		Operational Managers	25
		Operational Customers	64
		Business Analysts	35
Total	201		201

3.10 Sampling method

A stratified random sampling method was used to draw a sample size of 100 units from a population size of 201 units. In this study levels were based on the position held within the organization, age group and work experience (number. of years at the

organization). The stratified random sampling was, therefore, suitable for this study, as the employees would have had different opinions depending on their level of work experience and direct interaction with the projects team.

3.11 Sampling bias

In order to avoid sampling bias, the researcher adopted a probability sampling technique, whereby samples were randomly selected within a specific group within the organization for purposes of the

survey. The following table indicates a sample size of 100 units, which was selected with reference to the table of sample size for a given population size (Table 9).

Table 9. Stratified sample size

Gender		Age		Position within the organization	
Male	67	Over 35	48	Executive Heads of Departments	2
Female	33	31-35	47	Project Managers	3
		26-30	5	Project Team	20
				Operational Managers	7
				Operational Customers	45
				Business Analysts	23
Total	100		100		100

4. Results

This chapter presented and discussed the results of the survey. The chapter presented the research results in the form of tables and charts, whilst analysing them in order to find answers to questions that were posed for the purpose of this study.

The Chi Square was tested against the success rate on project delivery variable to test whether there is a difference in perception based on the success rate on project delivery categories versus influence over critical and beneficial stakeholders, orientation towards driving change, easily adaptable to change, having a trusting relationship, commitment to work hard, showing confidence, showing integrity, showing extraordinary persistence, showing responsiveness, show high degree of energy, show humility, display value to project delivery, produce deliverables timeously, and understanding expectations.

The question was posed: Does the customer care projects division display the following characteristics where there is an extensive influence over critical and beneficial stakeholders? According to the data received, the respondents who indicated yes were 32% and 44%, respectively. Less than half of the respondents illustrated that leaders have an extensive influence over their stakeholders; this result indicates that leaders do not necessarily have an extensive influence over their stakeholders. The results of the questionnaire where respondents responded to effective people engagement and whether that leads to project success showed that, regarding effective engagement through regular steercoms, bi weekly engagements and face to face engagements indicated that less 50% of respondents indicated yes. The results from the questionnaire indicate that project success does not depend on effective people engagement.

52 respondents claim that 100-50% of projects are implemented successfully; 30 respondents claim that 49-30% of projects are implemented

successfully; 10 respondents claim that 29-0% of projects are implemented successfully; and 8 respondents could not rate the project team's success.

It is evident that all respondents are fully aware of the ever-changing environment and sometimes the deliverables are out of the projects team's control, namely system implementations/enhancements, and so on.

The purpose of this question was to gauge the success rate of all projects within the projects team, which have been implemented successfully to date. This is a positive response, considering that merely 49% of the total population managed to complete the questionnaire with all the attributes and skills being rated considerably high.

Conclusion

Leadership is defined as improvement of human beings and equipment; improves quality standards; ensures that there is a substantial amount of delivery; and brings pride of workmanship to human beings. Leaders should be influential, have a sense of power, demonstrate persistence, and engaged in consistent people management.

To be successful, project managers should be able to use a wide range of methods, whilst drawing on political and interpersonal skills (communicating, negotiating, team building and creating ownership), state Boddy et al. (1992:52). Leaders should be innovative, have respect for others, be courteous, sensitive, and go beyond their ability in order for any organization to be highly effective. Leaders should show confidence, display integrity, demonstrate extraordinary persistence, work hard, be responsive, have a high degree of energy and develop humility (Flanagan & Finger 2003:38). The various leadership components which are required within the projects environment, and that are illustrated in the results indicates that more than 50% of the responses were positive. The purpose of this question was to ascertain what leadership styles are required within a

projects team to create project success. According to the results, the customer care projects team displays all the leadership styles stipulated above with a positive rating of over 50%. These are the underlying factors that are required to draw project customers. Even though the projects team may be under-resourced, according to the respondents, 52% of projects have been implemented successfully, which indicate that even with a lack of resources, there are effective resources and skills at the project team's disposal.

In summary, across the different variables, it is evident that there is a critically significant value that is displayed with the position within the organization versus orientation to drive change, and having extraordinary persistence.

The role of leadership styles was found to be vitally important within an organisation's path to success. The literature study outlined the importance of leadership styles to a learning organisation, and proposed key traits for successful management thereof.

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