

CREATING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAMS THAT LEVERAGES COMPETENCE, TEAMWORK, AND ORGANISATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

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1. Introduction

The last two decades have brought about shifts in perceptions of what constitutes effective leadership within project teams. Researchers report significant findings that people do not change that much as a result of training (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Their findings reveal that the best managers and leaders advocate that one should be building on strengths and teach people to manage around their weaknesses (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Collins & Porras, 2000). Clearly, without knowing the natural inborn creative strengths of any project team member, one can effect very little change. Many HR specialists and program and project managers that currently grapple with competency issues have not yet discovered that human beings will always fall back on their inborn cognitive and conative talents regardless of what they have been taught (Kolbe, 1990). The way we have been created must therefore be understood. Thus, whenever one falls back on one's natural inborn strengths, this is regarded as one's "sustainable competency". Inherent in one's natural instincts is contained one's knack and ability. Cognitively, all human beings also have acquired "learnt skills" which represents a separate level of competencies. However, these are not sustainable and are found to merely serve as a set of adaptive skills. The new millennium dilemma facing employers is that most organizations are increasingly adopting contemporary 360 degree assessment techniques to pinpoint observed competencies from which team leaders can help their subordinates develop a PDP (Personal Development Programme). Many users of the 360 degree technique are not aware that there are several tools in the market place (Fisher, Schoenfeldt, Shaw, 1999). So far the application of the 360 degree assessments do not stand up well as regards scientific rigor, objectivity, and learning for self development purposes (Heathfield, 2002). The old adage says, "you get what you measure". Is your organization getting what it needs from its existing performance measurement system? Has it created an effective

leadership support system through the scorecarding system that is currently in use? (Neely, Adams, & Kennerly, 2002).

Creating effective leadership support for project management is essential. Reality tends to reveal that often this aspect is sadly lacking. Where projects are not delivered on time, or are stopped before they are completed, the evidence often points to a lack of top management leadership support. Furthermore, this problem becomes compounded within project management teams where project managers are simply appointed as team leader to lead a team (i.e. they inherit a team) without being given the authority to make team changes. Because their team member's strengths and weaknesses are not known, and little or no contracting has taken place, project managers are not in a position to provide effective leadership and are thus found to be inept in effectively managing essential employee relationships. Many project managers lack the human skills to effectively journey as leader-coach within their team, and by having no or only limited authority to remove anyone who does not perform, project managers cannot provide effective leadership.

The purpose of this paper is to take a look at where the scorecard for measuring and managing business performance through people stands, and to introduce to readers the **Leadership Scorecard**[™] as tool for creating effective leadership support. The new tool will not only enable organizations to take the right steps to improve overall performance and stakeholder relationships, but the correct application thereof will significantly enhance the skills and competency of project managers as leaders and coach to their immediate direct reports. The tool is focused on "Management Performance".

2. Historic Review

During the latter half of the last century most organizations have instituted a standard performance appraisal system (the "Performance Management" arena). Rewarding employees for their performance has become a critical issue. Researchers believe that a critical factor to an organization's long-term success is its ability to **measure how employees perform** and then use that information to ensure that performance meets presently determined service standards and, where required, also further improves over

time (Fisher et al. 1999). The striving towards a “constinuous improvement” culture is a leading indicator towards building a sound service structure within any organization.

Performance appraisal (PA) is known as “...*the process by which an employee’s contribution to the organization during a specified period of time is being assessed....*” (Fisher et al.,p493), whereas **performance feedback** (PF) lets employees know “..*how well they are performing against the standards of the organization..*”

To conduct a proper and useful performance appraisal requires both skill and competence, something which many managers lack. The performance appraisal and feedback process can be emotionally laden, as well as destructive, and impact employee attitudes negatively. Worst of all, because most managers seldom know or work with the **cognitive** and **conative** profiles of their immediate subordinates so as to build on strength (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Nelson, 1996), they consciously attempt to influence (force) many a subordinate’s growth into a direction that can make the performer end in **conative transition** (Kolbe, 1997). Inappropriately used, the appraisal process can have disastrous effects. Whilst most organizations are primarily promoting a top-down process, they struggle to transform themselves into truly learning organizations. The top-down process promotes primarily single-loop learning whilst leading organizations are already into double-loop learning and promote as HR strategy bottom-up appraisals of their managers and supervisors by their immediate direct reports.

Since inception of the concepts (**PA** and **PF**) and their application, numerous useful spin offs have resulted. HR practitioners, development consultants, and researchers started to focus more specifically on the following areas:

- Consistency between the organizational strategy and job behaviour
- Performance assessment as an employee development (PDP) and career progression tool
- Criteria for a good appraisal system
- Deciding what types of performance to measure (i.e. trait based; behaviour based; results based Performance Scorecard)
- Methods of appraising and issues regarding ‘raters’ of employee performance

- Self-evaluation, peer evaluation, sub-ordinate evaluation, customer evaluation (giving rise to attempted 360-degree appraisals)
- Using computers as a tool in performance evaluation
- Enhancing the measurement of employee performance
- The PA interview, types of feedback and problems with PA processes
- Contemporary appraisal practices: self-managed teams, and 360 appraisals
- Enhancing manager/supervisor development and performance as leader and coach through bottom-up evaluation solicited from their immediate direct reports (i.e. their subordinates). The Leadership Scorecard™ has been designed for this purpose
- Building on Strengths and managing around weaknesses (i.e. achieving self-mastery)

3. Developing Increased Employee Competence

Research data tends to reveal that people do not change as a result of training. Training only adds more information. Knowledge building within the individual is the result of building on strengths, reading, education, research, and application of theory into practice, or the building of theory from sound research and innovative pioneering. At best, training enables those who choose to try things out, to acquire adaptive behaviours and skills. Observed, these behaviours can be interpreted as a competency if accompanied by some kind of ability and skill. But if these are not based on one's natural talents (strengths), they remain, at most, 'adaptive skills' which are not naturally sustained. So, these acquired skills/behaviours are simply learnt behaviours and not a true competency which is strength based. For example, breaking your right arm or hand! You have to switch to your left hand as helper function as a balancing part of your personality. However, no sooner does the plaster cast come off, the individual switches back to their natural right-handedness (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

4. 360 Degree Feedback Processes

Fisher et al. (1999) and Heathfield (source internet website) report on '360 Degree Feedback: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly'. There appear to be a number of these tools around the world. The researchers report that their reliability is questionable due largely to

the fact that numerous organizations do a very poor job of introducing and implementing 360 degree, or better known as multi-rater feedback.

For those who are unfamiliar with the concept, 360 degree feedback is an attempted method and tool that provides each employee the opportunity to receive performance feedback from his or her supervisor and four or more peers, reporting staff members, co-workers and customers. Most 360 degree feedback tools are also responded to by each individual in a self-assessment. The 360 degree feedback allows individuals to understand how their effectiveness as employee, co-worker, or staff member is viewed by others. Its proponents argue that the most effective processes provide feedback that is based on behaviours that other employees see. Furthermore, the feedback provides insight about the desired skills and behaviours required within the organization to accomplish the mission, vision, goals, and expressing the organization values in action. The feedback is firmly planted in behaviours needed to exceed customer expectations. Their reliability of 360 degree assessments is currently questionable, largely due to:

- Subjectivity and design process downfalls.
- Failure to connect the process with the overall aims of the organization.
- Single-loop learning (one-way feedback). No recourse to providers of feedback.
- Problems associated with observed behaviour: problem of differentiating between learnt behaviours/skills versus true talent-based ability/natural strengths.
- Employee receiving feedback has no recourse to the raters who provided the ratings. So person receiving feedback cannot actively engage in productive learning. The recommended PDP thus becomes questionable.
- Inexperienced and incompetent raters. Insufficient training and process understanding.
- Focus on negatives and weaknesses. "...People don't change that much; Don't waste time trying to put in what was left out! Try to draw out what was left in..." (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).
- Some selected raters don't know the employee being rated or don't have much to do with him or her.
- Poor counseling, little coaching.
- Feedback not based on employee's natural cognitive and conative profile of strengths and weaknesses.

- Counselors still steeped in the belief that ‘training changes people’.
- HR lacking competent in-house consultants to effectively manage this process.
- Increased paper work despite some computerization of assessments.
- Some companies had to call in outside psychologists to assist with feedback and counseling (cost escalations and less control over scorecard results).
- See also Heathfield’s reported findings summarized as appendix.

5. The Leadership Scorecard™ (abbreviated LSC™)

During the last 22 years of research, several researchers attempt to find out what the world’s best leaders and greatest managers do (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Goleman, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Schmickl, 1997). From the reported research findings it is clear that it would be better to introduce a double-loop learning feedback mechanism which will enable leaders and managers to establish on a quarterly basis how well they are leading and coaching their immediate direct reports. Such a feedback mechanism enables every manager and supervisor from the CEO level downwards to receive bottom-up feedback from their direct reports within their team. By receiving this feedback, they not only have their personal development requirements defined by their subordinates in how effectively they are journeying with each of their direct reports, but they are also afforded the opportunity to build on each team member’s strengths and cultivate the ‘**mindset of constant improvement**’ whilst developing their own leadership-coaching skills. The whole emphasis is to:

- build trust and support as team-leader
- build on Strengths and coach sub-ordinates to manage around their weaknesses (journey with them)
- align coaching and leadership focus with the organization’s strategy and mission towards a service culture and constant improvement
- provide effective leadership support for project management teams
- develop a passion for one’s work
- empower and encourage knowledge building and innovation
- take responsibility, - get out of the role of playing ‘Blame, Victim, and Denial’

- remove fear and promote constructive open communication
- promote entire managerial-leadership competency curve of the organization through active application of a well developed leadership support scorecard
- dramatically improve customer service, as well as creative inter-change
- promote single-rater bottom-up computer scoring, thus eliminating lots of paperwork and enabling manager to have recourse to each rater and accelerate knowledge building, and foster better stakeholder relationships
- manage and leverage your knowledge (intangible) assets

Based on the cumulative research findings with respect to 'performance appraisal' and 'performance feedback' processes, the originators of the **Leadership Scorecard™** (Schmickl & Schmickl, 2002) developed a 16 item questionnaire that allows managers and supervisors to undertake via 'stand alone computer' or the intranet of their organization a quarterly feedback from their direct reports. By receiving this direct feedback, greater objectivity is ensured. Furthermore, the double-loop learning process is activated as each manager can sit on a quarterly basis with each of his/her direct reports (subordinates) and grow from the feedback received whilst simultaneously building on the strengths of each subordinate.

The Leadership Scorecard™ is an easy-to-use 'interactive management performance feedback tool' that will rapidly enhance your organization's service levels and leadership position by leveraging the skills levels of your managers and supervisors. Cascading the process from the CEO level, a focused organization strategy will improve the organization's stakeholder relationships, foster an effective and accelerated leadership support system, actively promote team development and improved customer service levels, enhance personal and organizational development, empower stakeholders to take responsibility for their career development, and reduced prejudice. The bottom-up feedback process will furthermore define each manager's and supervisor's training and development needs, and allow them to build on strengths. When all employees grow, the organization grows and prospers. The Leadership Scorecard™ (LSC™) comprises 18 questions which have been carefully selected. Based on many years of research, it has been found that the selected questions account for 75 percent or more of the performance impact within all organizations. The questions have been grouped into five categories (camps), each of

which requires its own process and mastery. These questions form part of a people factor scorecard which balances the spectrum of key “human resource criteria” and “intrapreneurship” criteria (Neely et al., p.274).

To be classified with the world’s most successful managers and leaders, project and program managers must therefore achieve mastery on all five levels.

A Cautionary Word

Before implementing the LSC™, organizations must ensure that their project management teams are ready for such a process. It is imperative that project managers are clear about the objectives and strategy behind the interactive feedback process. Also, they need to be guided and trained how to instill and build trust and support within their subordinates. Most of all, each project manager must be willing and open to receive feedback. It is essential that training is provided how to coach and respond constructively to the feedback received, and develop one’s PDP and ability to provide effective leadership support to the team. The rule is: don’t defend. Analyze, explore, take responsibility, journey with your subordinate/s, and build on strengths. Ensure action plans that help both you and those you lead to grow. The project manager’s improved skill and competence in building effective stakeholder relationships must lead to improved customer service. By creating a strategy that fosters an effective supportive leadership culture, the organization is ensured of being more competitive. Researchers report that people-factor benefits take time to emerge, and that it can take four or more years for a pattern of competitive advantage to become visible (Neely et al. 2002).

6. The LSC™ Questions

Below find listed the LSC™ questions:

1. I know how my superior (boss) wants me to do my job.
2. I have the materials and necessary equipment to do my job effectively.
3. **I daily have opportunities to exercise my natural talents by doing what I do best.**

4. **I regularly receive recognition or praise for doing my job efficiently.**
5. **My immediate superior actively cares about me as a person.**
6. **My immediate superior regularly encourages my self development (growth) and learning.**
7. **My natural talents (strengths & weaknesses) have been assessed and I understand them.**
8. **When I need to have a heart-to-heart discussion with my immediate superior, he/she is easily approachable.**
9. In my job, my superior listens to, and encourages me to share my opinions.
10. The mission and purpose of my company makes me feel that what I do in my job is important.
11. My team-mates are, at all times, committed to doing quality work by maintaining set standards.
12. I have someone at work with whom I can discuss my problems.
13. In my job, the work demands continually change.
14. **In the last 3 months, my immediate superior has talked to me about the progress I have been making in my job.**
15. **In the last 12 months I have had the opportunity to learn, gain experience and grow in my job.**
16. My immediate superiors' leadership style satisfies my expectations.
17. My immediate superiors' leadership style fits our work teams' competence level (ability).
18. My immediate superior is effective in dealing with interpersonal and group conflicts.
19. How satisfied are you with your company as a place to work in?

Question 19 pertains to the organization's climate and culture and captures the respondent's level of work satisfaction.

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Appendix

360 Degree Feedback: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The 1999 State of the Industry Report, from the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) revealed the following (as reported by Heathfield):

More than 750 Firms training practices were reviewed.

1. Fifty-five firms, described by ASTD as leading edge in their training approaches rely heavily upon employee feedback, including 360 degree feedback and peer review for individual development plans (PDP) and annual performance reviews;
2. 75 percent of these companies provided individual development plans;
3. 33 percent provided 360 degree feedback for most of their employees in 1998, compared to 50 percent and 10 percent in 1997.

The following positives and negatives were found:

<u>POSITIVE Aspects</u>	<u>DOWNSIDE Aspects</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved feedback from more than one source provided raters know the employee to be assessed and are honest and unbiased or don't seek reprisal.• Team Development: members learn to work more effectively together.• One of the best methods for understanding personal and organizational developmental needs.• Multi-rater feedback can provide excellent information about what to do to enhance ones career.• Race, age, gender discrimination is reduced.• Improved customer service.• Provides comprehensive information about organization training needs.• Many proponents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exceptional expectations for the process. Proponents may lead participants to expect too much from this feedback system. Insufficient integration into a complete performance management system.• Design process downfalls. The implementation did not always follow effective change management guidelines.• Failure to connect the process with the overall strategic aims of the organization.• Insufficient training and process understanding given to employees about implementation, interpretation of results, how to provide feedback, etc.• People receiving feedback have no recourse if they want to further understand the feedback.• Focus on Negatives and Weaknesses instead of building on strengths.• Rater inexperience and ineffectiveness.• Multi-rater feedback creates paperwork/computer data entry overload.

ABSTRACT

CREATING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAMS THAT LEVERAGES COMPETENCE, TEAMWORK, AND ORGANISATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

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The “Performance Prism” relating to the fostering of better stakeholder relationships in project management and greater ultimate business success for this decade remains a daunting challenge. The presenter takes a look at the current status of performance appraisal and performance feedback systems and presents a new leadership based scorecard that can, if implemented, foster a more effective leadership support structure for project management within organizations. The last two decades have brought about shifts in perceptions of what constitutes effective leadership within project teams. Researchers report significant findings that people do not change that much as a result of training. Their findings reveal that the best managers and leaders advocate that one should be building on strengths and teach people to manage around their weaknesses. Clearly, without knowing the natural inborn creative strengths of any project team member, one can effect very little change. Many HR specialists and program and project managers that currently grapple with competency issues have not yet discovered that human beings will always fall back on their inborn cognitive and conative talents regardless of what they have been taught. The way we have been created must therefore be understood. Thus, whenever one falls back on one’s natural inborn strengths, this is regarded as one’s “**sustainable competency**”. Inherent in one’s natural instincts is contained one’s knack and ability. Cognitively, all human beings also have acquired “**learnt skills**” which represents a separate level of competencies. However, these are not sustainable and are found to merely serve as a set of adaptive skills. The new millennium dilemma facing employers is that most organizations are increasingly adopting contemporary 360 degree assessment techniques to pinpoint observed competencies from which team leaders can help their subordinates develop a PDP (Personal Development Programme). So far the application of the 360 degree assessments do not stand up well as regards scientific rigor, objectivity, and learning for self development purposes. This paper will stimulate debate around focused actions that are guaranteed to create an effective leadership support structure for project management teams.