

ACTS OF LEADERSHIP IN COMPLEX PROJECTS

KEY WORDS: Leadership, Project manager competencies, Complex projects, Meyers-Briggs, Management Drives, NTCP model, Complexity mapping, Cynefin model, Uncertainty, Group Decision Tools, Complexity preamble.

ABSTRACT

In the project management arena it seems common understanding that project managers profile as highly result- and action- driven. Although project management academia nuance this topic, stressing leadership characteristics like team leadership, personal effectiveness, and e.g. interpersonal understanding, others (indeed) focus on achievement orientation. Research by Gehring (2007) concludes with a set of favourable MBTI (Meyers-Briggs) types, with Thinking and Judging (“TJ’s”) as preferred indicators. TJ’s see the world as logical and like to have matters settled. In “Management Drives” terminology this relates to orange, red, yellow profiles. Author’s pragmatic research as a program manager on projects X & Y indicates that in complex projects, where one deals with messy problems, another profile might prevail: one that understands patterns, believes in the wisdom of crowds, emerges with the situation, and considers the relativity of (project management) frameworks .

1. PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Project leadership has some specific characteristics. A project is temporal and functions within the formal organization. Some refer to a shadow organization (Stacey, 1996). A project manager steers a team that consists of members that are taken out of their formal jobs because they

have expertise that is needed to successfully complete the project. This team is often complemented with hired personnel. The formal boss is still there, and hired personnel also report to their management. It’s this complicated matrix, with all kinds of power roles, that a project manager needs to deal with, apart from the fact that (s)he needs to start building a team out of a group of individuals. Furthermore projects normally also stand for risk: known- unknowns. These risks imply and include career risk both for the project manager and for the project owner, an executive who operates in the formal organization, who will manage that career risk leading to behaviours that a project manager needs to be aware of. Finally, although far from being exhaustive, I would like to stress the element of time. The concept of time is food for philosophers, but to keep it simple: projects can have a short-term time horizon—in an extreme form with a need to deliver yesterday, such as a compliance project when an organization falls behind on current laws or regulations. Such a project puts the team under extreme pressure. This (time or pace) is an element of project complexity (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007). Conversely, projects can also have a long-term time horizon, and with time, the changing context creates complexity and a call for flexibility. In both cases a project manager needs to deal with levels of project complexity, but what exactly is project complexity?

2. COMPLEX PROJECTS

Although there is not much consensus on what project complexity is some writers point to interrelatedness defined as many varied interrelated parts. Others refer to perceived complexity. This type of complexity can be labelled subjective: not only do all of the actors perceive the same problematic situation, but also no one actor can perceive the whole context, and, moreover, all players do not even perceive the same context (research by Chronéer & Bergquist, 2012). Another definition of perceived complexity: Components plus interactions plus context plus



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