Influence without Authority

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1.1 Abstract

It is somewhat ironical, but the higher one goes in the management hierarchy, the more one has to rely on "external stakeholders". These are people who can have a huge impact on your program (positive or negative) and at the same time, you have no direct authority over them. They may be in either another department, working for other managers or they may even be in a different company.

Undoubtedly, this lack of "formal" authority makes it extremely challenging to ensure that their contribution is positive and consistent. At this point, it boils down to your inter-personal skills and your ability to establish a rapport and forging constructive partnerships with other people. Some are born with superb social skills and seem to be able to get along, seemingly without even making much of an effort.

For others however, it tends to be hard. Several managers get stuck forever in the middle-management layer because of their excessive reliance on their own "expertise" or "seniority" or even "professionalism" to get things done. They understand very well what needs to get done for the success of the program, but they are not able to motivate people to do what they are supposed to do.

This presentation is about understanding what makes people tick, and some simple tools and techniques that everybody can use. It relies on published literature as well as several years of personal and collective experience of working on complex, matrix organizations.

1.1.1 Nature of people

First of all, it is important to understand that every individual is different. They get "turned on" by different things. It is important to understand what makes people tick.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator [1] is one such framework that helps us understand personality types. This framework identifies 4 broad parameters based on which people's preferences are classified.

How you derive your orientation? (**I**ntroverted or **E**xtraverted)

How do you receive information? (**S**ensing or I**N**tuitive)

How to you make your choices? (**T**hinking or **F**eeling)

What is your action orientation towards the world? (**J**udging or **P**erceiving)

I have seen teams that actually have everybody go through a formal assessment and publish personality types to encourage sensitivity in working with other people. Even if this information is not published (or if people are not comfortable publishing this information), being able to understand personality types gives valuable clues about how to customize your conduct with different people so that they will be at their most receptive.

1.1.2 For instance …

- The introvert will want you to schedule an appointment and double check before you enter into even casual conversations with them, whereas an extrovert would want a high level of interaction without any bureaucracy.

- To convince the "senser"s, one needs to provide a lot of data, whereas the intuitive people would want analysis of patterns and possibilities.

- The thinking people would normally make a decision based on cold facts, but the feeling people would want to understand the impact of their decisions on other people.

- The judging people would fuss about if things do not follow a plan, whereas the perceiving people always want flexibility and experiment with new stuff.

A common mistake many managers and teams make is that they assume everybody wants to work for the larger "strategic" goal and really love to be working in a team with others. While humans generally do have the capability of doing both these, there is no guarantee that they always "want" to do it. An interesting framework proposed by David Maister [2] classifies people on the basis of their propensity towards "team working" and towards "short term or long term" thinking (see Fig.1).
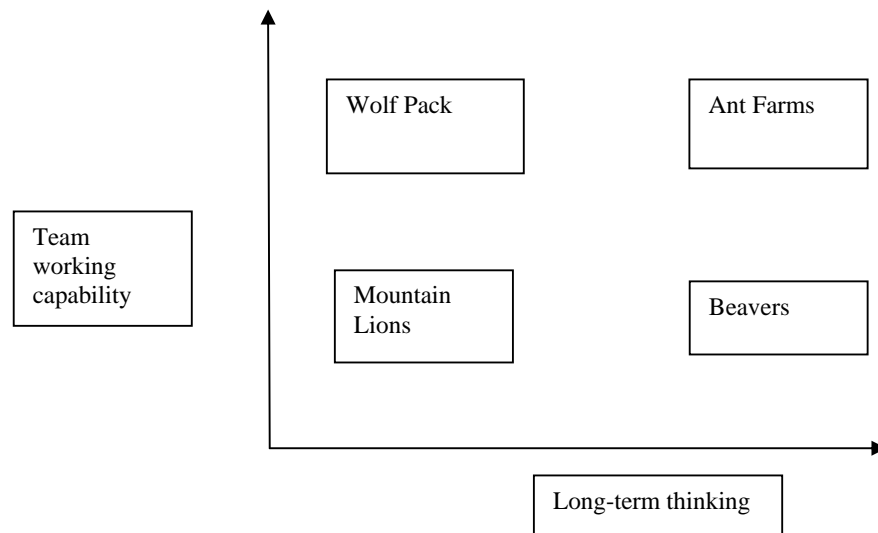

Fig.1: Framework for classifying team preferences

The broad classifications are as follows.

- Mountain lions: These are people who prefer to hunt alone, and have no tendency to think long term. As long as they have a kill for today, they are fine.

- Beavers: They prefer to work alone, but show a higher propensity towards thinking about long term. They will preserve food for the harsh winters for example.

- Wolf packs: They normally hunt in packs and show excellent team-work, but have no long term thinking.

- Ant farms: Prefer to work in teams and also show a tendency to work for the long term benefit.

- Based on an individual's personality type and preferences, one has to customize the tasks that you assign them and the way you interact with them. For instance

- To motivate mountain lions and wolf packs, you need to show immediate gratification. To motivate ants and beavers, you have to inform them about the big picture and the long term goal.

- Mountain lions and beavers would be very uncomfortable working on tasks that require a high level of coordination and teamwork, but they would be perfect for complex tasks that need to be worked on in isolation and chased to completion. Ant farms and wolf packs would derive their comfort from being in company of others and would feed off each other's energy.

1.1.3 Forms of authority and Leadership Styles

Apart from the receptiveness of the receiver, influence is also a function of the authority you are able to command and the style of leadership that you display. Generally, a leader can bring to bear the following types of authority.

- Formal: By virtue of the position/organization structure

- Reward: By having the ability to reward

- Penalty: By having the ability to punish

- Expert: Through expertise and knowledge

- Referent: By having a connection with somebody in a position of authority

In the Project/Program Management context, you may want to utilize these forms of authority in the following ways.

- Formal authority has to be negotiated up-front by the while accepting a position. Depending upon the organization structure, such power may be limited.

- Reward is generally considered the most desirable as it emphasizes positive reinforcement. To this extent, one must pro-actively create a "rewards and recognition" budget and manage it.

- Penalty is the least desirable, but may have to be used in extreme circumstances.

- By the nature of the work, the Project/Program Manager may not be the expert in the domain. One could argue that even if he is, this authority should be invoked sparingly, because the job of the manager is not to do work himself, but empower the team to get things done.

- It is important for a manager to have referent power, i.e. to have good connections within the senior management that he can use to escalate when things are not moving the way they should.

A manager also needs to display leadership qualities in order to enhance the likelihood of influencing the external stakeholders. Almost tangential to the formally vested authority, one needs to at least "act" like a leader and direct everybody's efforts

in a way that maximises the possibility of success. Fig.2 depicts a leadership model that is used at the Toyota Motor Company [3].
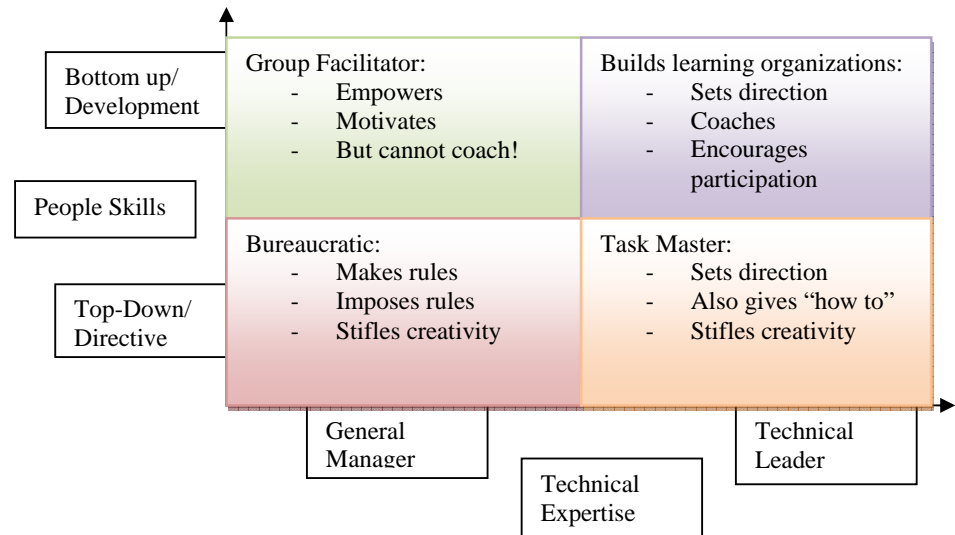

Fig.2: Leadership styles: The Toyota way

While many of the leadership traits may boil down to "style of management", a good manager must learn to assume the leadership style that best suits the team and the specific situation. Where there is a lot of uncertainty, directive methods are required. But at no point must the management style become "prescriptive", or one that will stifle individual creativity.

1.2 Personality traits useful for expanding positive influence

There are a number of ways to create a positive impression and increase your influence on people. Some of them are mentioned here.

✦ **Start by "giving":** When you want the other person to take a decision or do something that helps you out, it helps a great deal if you have done a good turn earlier. One must cultivate a habit of "giving" first. Try to see things from the other person's perspective and see if you can help them in any way whatsoever. If nothing else, you can start by giving recognition and respect.

✦ **Punctuality:** When you want something from somebody, the last thing you want to do is to waste their time.

✦ **Pleasant personality:** Not everybody can ooze charisma like a George Clooney or Shahrukh Khan. But dressing elegantly, wearing a smile on your face can go a long way.

✦ **Earn and maintain trust:** People must believe they can trust you. When you say you will do something, you must "mean it" and follow up on it. When somebody confides in you, respect their confidence.

- **Communication:** Not everybody can be as inspiring a speaker like Obama, but you must be clear and consistent with your messaging. Above all, communication is more about "listening" and "understanding".

- **Show by example:** Actions speak louder than words. When you want people to exhibit a certain kind of behaviour, you must set the example first.

- **Provide reasons:** When you want something, you have to say "why" and make sure you include in the answer the WIIFM (What's in it for me?).

- **Have fun and let it show:** Nobody likes to deal with stressed out personalities, who are all about work. Learn to project a positive side, be humorous (without being flippant and sarcastic) and provide recognition and positive reinforcement.

- **Establish and maintain relationships:** Influencing is all about establishing and maintaining a meaningful relationship with your stakeholders.

1.3 Influencing during Initiation

Ideally, a Project or Program Manager should get assigned during initiation and should play an active role in completing the initiation rites. Some of the things one should do during initiation are as follows.

- Prepare and widely publicize the charter within the organization. It should result in instant recall value for the Program.

- Negotiate a level of authority with the Project Sponsor. This is one of the few opportunities you get to influence the Sponsor. You should try to convince them into giving the right level of authorization to enable you to execute. Remember this is when they are probably at their most optimistic and generous and they have more at stake than you for this endeavour to succeed.

- Stakeholder identification and meetings: Identify all the positive and negative stakeholders and engage them early.

- Start negotiating for the critical staff that you need on the program.

- Write catchy mission and vision statements for the program. Establish a culture and character early.

- Organize a kick-off meeting to share the vision, mission. Organize team building activities and some fun activities to ensure you start off on a positive note. Err on the side of excess here, as well begun is half done!

1.4 Influencing during Planning

While the manager plays a critical role during planning, one must try to get the maximum involvement and buy-in from all the stakeholders.

Listen to opinion from one and all. Keep an open mind about all suggestions. You may not be able to accommodate everything, but everybody should get a feeling that they have been heard.

Respect the estimation done by your team. You may encourage discussions, breaking down the estimates to get more granularities, but ultimately the estimates need to

come from the people who are going to work on the activities. If you impose your estimates, the team will say later on "I told you so"!

Do all your due diligence in finalizing the plan, but also plan on doing several rounds of review with all stakeholders who may probably have an opinion about the plan. You want to hear feedback early, not wait until it is too late.

Encourage everybody to point out risks and possible issues with the plan. Remember they are doing you a favour by telling you. Do not discourage or brush these under the carpet. Use the risks to negotiate the appropriate level of buffer.

Once the plan is approved and base lined, publicize it widely. By all means use technology to publish it, but also use of visible physical tools to make sure everybody knows about the plan. You cannot over-communicate at this stage.

1.5 Influencing during Execution

When the team is busy "executing" on the plan, you should try to play the role of a "facilitator". Focus on how you can "help" the team. Employ the concept of the manager being a "servant" of the team. Some of the things you could do to make this happen are as follows.

Listen to people. Conduct regular team and one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders. Ask them how they are doing. Also pay unscheduled visits to uncover things they may not tell you at planned meetings. A concept called "management by wandering around" (MBWA) is becoming popular.

Look for opportunities for team building. Create opportunities for the teams to get together in formal and informal settings. If you have remote/virtual teams, organize cross-location visits to foster face-to-face time and building of rapport.

Help the team develop deeper knowledge and subject-matter expertise. Spend money on trainings. Ask the team what type of trainings they want and help organize them.

Help the team get around organizational bureaucracy and other things that block their work.

Communicate pro-actively. Talk to the team as well as external stakeholders about things that you are doing, of achievements you have had.

1.6 Influencing during Monitoring and Control

Monitoring is observing and analyzing. Control is trying to steer things in the desired direction if they have veered off course. The manager must try to achieve this without seeming to be intrusive. Give the team ample visibility and information to help them correct the course on their own before stepping in with a directive mode. Some of the ways of doing this are as follows.

- Trust but verify. Establish sources of information regarding the status and correlate observations.

- Protect the team for unnecessary changes. Change requests will come unannounced, and often unobtrusively. You need to function as the first check-

point. Engage the team only if the change is really "necessary". And if it is necessary, involve the team in analyzing the impact and negotiate for a baseline change.

- Monitor the performance of the team members and provide timely feedback. Engage in a constructive conversation to make things better.

- Look for opportunities to reward and recognize significant achievements.

- Make the indicators of progress visible to all. Always explain the rationale behind your actions in the context of the larger goal. Transparency will help break barriers and make people more receptive to input and will give you honest feedback.

The benefit of this layering is that the higher level workflows do not have to worry about the complexity of different commands to be used to delete files on different operating systems.

1.7 Influencing during closure

Closure can happen in any of the following ways.

Normal closure: Mission accomplished and transitioned to operations

Closure by starvation: Management slowly starves a Program to death, by denying fresh funding and resources.

Closure by integration: Carve up a program into several parts and integrate into other missions and programs.

Closure by executive action: Curtains are drawn suddenly and a program is deemed as no longer in existence.

While going about the closure processes as laid out in the standards, the following principles must be borne in mind.

Take care of your team: Closure results in snapping of an association with a project, program, other team members, stakeholders and an entire safety net. Help the team overcome this loss. Write recommendation letters that will help them find work on other programs. Ensure that they capture their personal learning and put it to good use.

Communicate the good, bad ugly: Be candid and honest in highlighting the achievements and failings.

Ensure that along with closure of formal contracts, you close formal "contacts" also on a cordial and professional note. Your paths may cross again, so make sure no matter what the situation, the rapport established during the program is maintained for posterity.

1.8 Summary

Project and Program Management is both a science and an art. The science part deals with processes and best practices. The art is where you learn how to deal with people and influence them to maximize their contribution to a cause. The successful

managers are those who know how to get other people to work for them, without even having to ask.

While all of us may not possess the same amount of emotional intelligence and charisma as top leaders, there are certainly behaviours, experiences and practices that you can bring to bear in order to achieve good results. Otherwise, while you may be professionally very good, you may still not achieve success as a manager.

1.9 References

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1.10 Author's biography

Sandeep Shouche is a Senior Manager – Product Development with BMC Software. He has over 17 years of rich experience in the IT industry, and a domain experience spanning Enterprise Systems Management, Telecom, eGovernance, Banking and Financial Services. His experience also spans across geographies, and services and product organizations.
Sandeep has a Masters degree in Chemical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai and a Masters degree in Finance. Sandeep has been a PMP (Project Management Professional) since 2003 and a PgMP Program Management Professional since 2008. He is also a Certified Scrum Master and is ITILV3 certified.Sandeep has been associated with the Project Management Institute (PMI) as a founder member and former Vice President of the Pune chapter. He is part of the global Ethics Appeals committee at the PMI. He has presented at the Global Congresses of PMI at Bangkok 2006, Sydney 2008 and featured in several articles at the professional publication PM Network.
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