SPECIFIC DIMENSIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT. The report focuses on some specific dimensions of leadership in project management. Consideration is given to a set of factors that influence effective leadership in the project team. It is pointed out that in an environment of uncertainty and complexity, more and more organizations are moving towards a team approach for implementing project activities, thus striving to overcome the challenges of the environment in which they operate. In project management, leadership must take into account the current situation of the organization implementing the project. The most important task of the leaders in the field of project management is to achieve results. Leadership in project management can also be seen as a function of circumstance and the result of the interaction between members of the team who appoint a representative to organise a project and achieve its objectives.

Key words: *leadership, project team, project management.*

Introduction

Under conditions of great uncertainty and complexity, organizations seek flexibility and thus they start to apply the team approach to project-related activities as a way of addressing business environment challenges. The existing knowledge of project leadership is relatively limited, mainly because of its novelty to researchers. The lack of accumulated empirical material more or less makes existent literature seem subjective. In addition, the different emphases in this area lead to a significant fragmentation of the skills and competences of the project manager.

The main subject of this paper is becoming more and more relevant because of the importance of achieving project objectives for a company. It is not only just project management that matters, it is the successful achievement of the planned results that also does. Leadership can modify them through the use of different approaches and methods, without being too complex and consuming human, financial and material resources. In project management, leadership must take into account the current situation of the organization implementing the project. It is particularly important to understand that a number of key issues related to professionalism, flexibility and employee commitment are identified during project implementation (Zlateva, 2014).

The purpose of this paper is to consider the set of factors that affect effective project leadership. Therefore, the following tasks have been formulated:

1. To study specific aspects of project management leadership.
2. To analyse the factors that affect effective leadership.
3. To examine the scope of leadership in the process of carrying out various project-related activities.

Scientific methods such as theory analysis and synthesis have been used in order to achieve these goals and to solve some research problems.

Theoretical part

On the one hand, leadership may be seen as a particular behaviour, and on the other - as an activity that takes into account not only the value system of each employee, but also their interests, while motivating them to perform their tasks in the best way, as well as developing their creativity and potential for the benefit of the organisation.

Leadership can also be seen as a function of circumstance. It is a group dynamics phenomenon, because it is the result of the interaction between members of a project team, who appoint one of them

to lead the group and to solve a specific task. To some extent, leadership is a form of control, but it is much more informal, unregulated and based on emotional attachment. Leaders should be aware that they cannot control people like they usually do with money, assets, time, etc. However, in the process of achieving company goals, they do have the ability to influence individuals by developing their potential and increasing their commitment. Leadership is a phenomenon of informal personal relationships, i.e. there are no formal procedures or administrative measures for the appointment of the leader. Group members accept leadership completely voluntarily, create their own attitude towards the leader and may at any time resign from that position without any fear of administrative penalties. Leadership is essentially a dynamic phenomenon, because the influence of the leader can vary according to circumstances. What is more, different situations require different leadership styles. The essence of leadership is in generating an idea, inspiring people to believe in it and in giving impetus to its realization (Avramov, 2003).

Leadership focuses on the behaviour of the leader (Behavioral Theory of Leadership). This theory studies the behaviour of successful leaders and serves as a basis for potential leadership training programs or helps people in their personal development as future leaders.

Generally speaking, leadership styles fall into two main categories: people-oriented and task-oriented. People-oriented leadership focuses on interpersonal relations, mutual respect, empathy, attentiveness, etc. Task-oriented leadership includes organizational structure, goals definition, clear expectations, performance evaluation, etc. Leaders whose approach is more people-oriented are said to achieve higher team satisfaction and productivity.

There are several types of leaders: born leaders, institutional leaders, prestigious leaders, professional leaders and voluntary leaders.

Born (natural) leaders are those who gain community trust with their common sense, honesty and concern for others. They do not pursue personal interests. Furthermore, they do not always have higher education, they are not expected to have public speaking skills, however, they know the community very well and are aware of all the problems in it.

Institutional leaders are associated with religious, educational, or political institutions. The institutional leader has power in the local church, school or local authorities. He has authority and the power to influence society. He may be appointed or elected to his post, and what he does not approve of will most likely also be rejected by the community.

The prestigious leader is wealthy and is of higher social status. He is also well-educated and has probably travelled a lot. Usually this type of a leader comes from an influential family. He is a good community leader.

Professional leaders are the ones the community turns to when there's a specific problem and seeks some quality advice. This type of leader has been successful in a particular area. And although he may have started with nothing, he has achieved a lot. This person has acquired skills and practical knowledge over the years. He took the risk to start his own business, but he succeeded eventually. Last but not least, such a leader is known for acting carefully and giving good advice.

Voluntary leaders are those who voluntarily sacrifice some of their energy and time to help community causes. The volunteer leader usually has specific ideas about what to do and how to do it. He is motivated and full of energy but most often does not have enough spare time to solve problems. He is usually the center of attention, because he is able to convince and has academic credentials. What is more, this type of leader is a good organizer and has public speaking skills (Asenov, Emilova. 2010).

It must be said that one of the most important achievements of modern leadership theories is the discovery that there are no universal leadership qualities or effective leadership styles. Many believe that today's leadership is situational. The main scientific problem facing the research community today is to identify critical, key factors, characteristics and parameters, as well as situations, that at some point in time determine the behavior of a leader. Taking this reality into account gives leadership a specific role in the creation and management of highly effective organisations.

Some of the existing leadership theories focus on the following (Zhelyazkova, 2004):

‒ Leadership qualities - as stated above, leadership is situational, it cannot be equivalent everywhere and in any situation, therefore there are no universal leadership qualities. However, there are numerous theories that explain leadership through human nature and behavioral traits.

‒ Leadership behaviors - in this approach scientists' efforts are mainly focused on studying the behaviour of leaders, with leadership efficiency being determined not so much by the personal qualities of the leader, as much as his behaviour towards his subordinates.
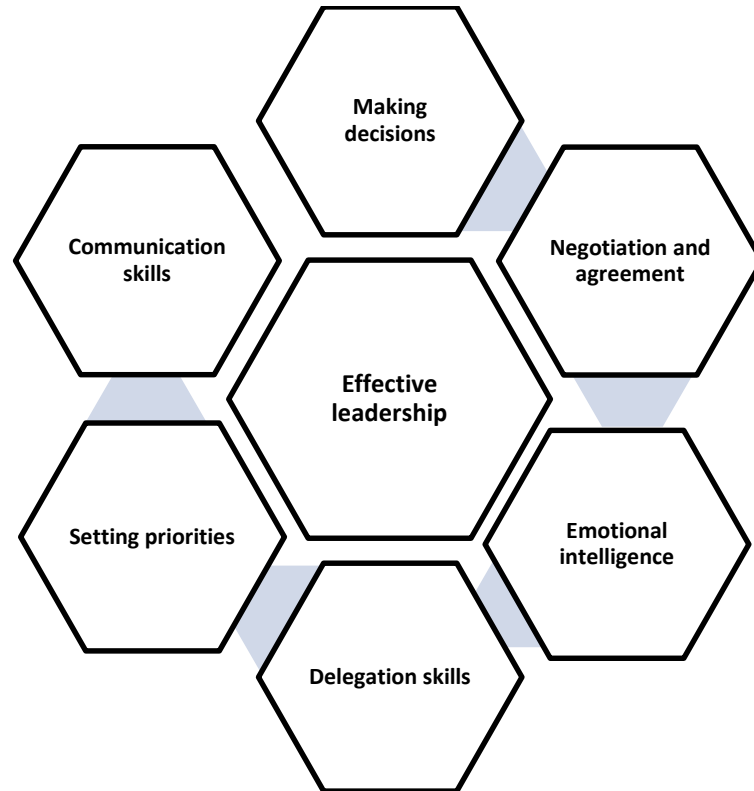
Source: Compiled by the authors.

Fig. 1. Leadership efficiency

Finding certain measures of leadership effectiveness based on separating influence in the leadership process is more serious than theoretical and pragmatic perspective problem. The difficulties involved in determining the effectiveness of leadership are embedded in its very essence.

The main leadership styles shall be defined on this basis. Experts divide these basic styles into three main characteristic groups: authoritarian, liberal and democratic. These styles can rarely be found in pure form, more frequently there is a combination of the three, depending on where and when they are applied.

Experts also believe that the work productivity of the subordinates does not always depend directly on the style of the leader. The problem is that the leader may not always be able to control his team members, who, in turn, have received a strong delegation of power and thus become no less a factor in the success of the company.

Effective leadership relates to the ability to assess risk – an important aspect of leadership which probably is the most misunderstood of all the essential elements of leadership. Many managers are willing to take any risk that is presented as a missed opportunity, but they do not take the time and effort to fully assess and explore the potential weaknesses of this new idea and therefore are unlikely to succeed. In the course of managing projects the leader will always face a series of issues and different situations that require immediate attention. He is obliged to make decisions and take decisive action. However, after careful consideration, there are quite many risks that are worth taking. At all times the project leader has to be a risk taker, otherwise he will not work at his full leadership capacity (Giuliani, Carson, 2003).

Effective leadership is the ability to embrace new ideas. High intelligence and proper education are not enough to become a good leader. A successful leader is not only wise, but also willing to learn and evolve. He has to be tolerant of other viewpoints. Complex and stressful situations require the leader to be emotionally resilient in order to be able to predict future trends.

Analytical part

Project management is the science and techniques that are applied in order to successfully reach the desired project goals. What distinguishes the project management and projects is the non- fixed template that can be applied to all kinds of projects, neither to a single project through its different phases. Which confirms the idea that the project is characterized by being unique and temporary based on a specified context; this gives the leadership a very important role in ensuring the success of the project. Also, it characterized the projects that the success factors lies in the people and the team more than they are in the machines and tools, and this also confirm the importance of leadership in the project management (Ebrahem, 2016).

The true team leader has to possess various personal qualities. He has to set goals for his team, set out the main guidelines for achieving them, streamline his team's work processes, give regular feedback and care about the personal development of his employees. If we assume that managers must have analytical thinking, excellent communication skills, expert knowledge and organisational skills, then leaders should possess skills for effective team management. Organisations that realise this are not only profitable in project management, but in many fields.

A project team is a temporary team created to deliver a project and it is a major factor in the successful completion of it. Team work has certain benefits that can be defined as:

- High spirits and increased motivation;
- Reduced employee turnover;
- Improved work efficiency and increased productivity;
- Increased job satisfaction;
- Enhanced problem solving skills.

According to J. Richard Hackman, there are three important factors for team success, related to the specific task, the interpersonal relationships and the individual (Giuliani, Carson, 2003).
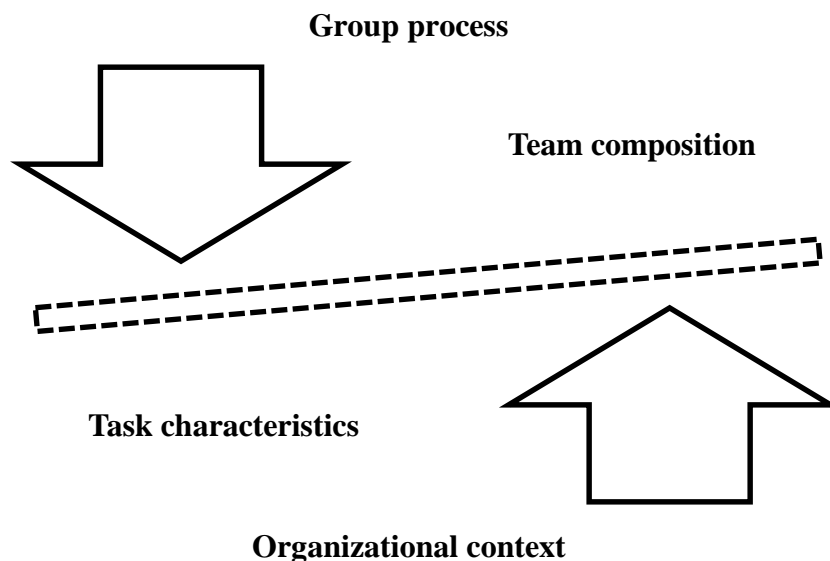
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Fig.2. Determinants of team success

Specific dimensions

In the process of carrying out specific activities and tasks, team members develop social skills and thus contribute to the stability of the team. By being part of the team, the individual also acquires new knowledge and develops himself. Group norms develop unconsciously and gradually over time.

They are created without any external pressure by mutual influence and develop through the interactions of group members. Group norms determine the behaviour of team members. Usually, group norms have positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, they allow fairer communication, maintain respect among team members and are a benefit to the internal workings of the group. However, strict norms also enforce conformity, which can be a problem from the organization's perspective (Landsberg, 2002).

The specificity of leadership in project management is part of the functional model of John Adair, a famous leadership theorist. He divides leadership functions into three categories:

- Task;
- Team;
- Individual.

The leader must focus on all three parts. John Adair's main contribution is not so much in defining these three parts, but in pointing out their interdependence. According to this model, it is impossible to finish a specific task without giving due consideration to the needs of the team and its members. Similarly, the needs of the team and the ones of the individuals are mutually related. The leader cannot work adequately with one of the three components and simply ignore the other two.
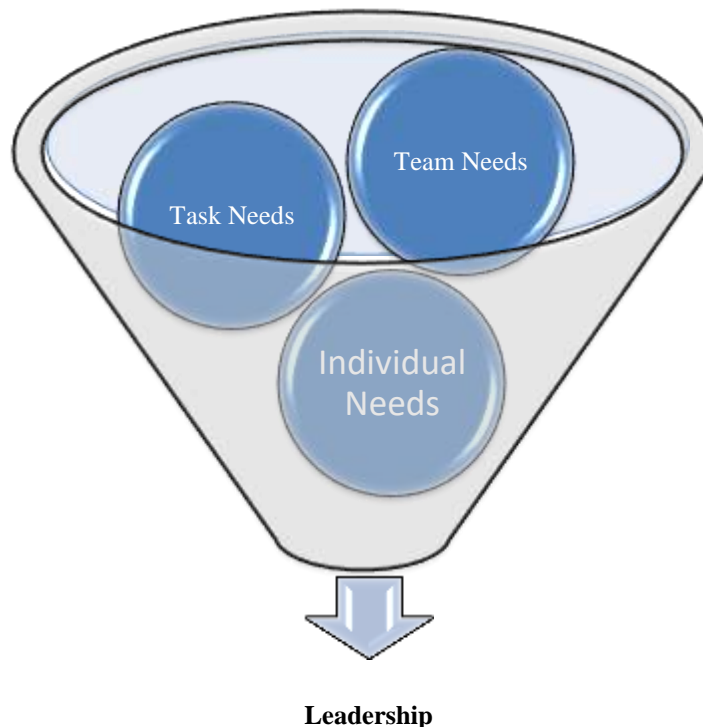
Leadership

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Fig.3. John Adair's leadership model

In project management leadership is also defined as a consistent, targeted and functional process, which comprises of the next few stages:

- Assessing the political, economic, socio-cultural or technological environment;

- Analysis of the present state;
- Planning future actions and forecasting possible outcomes;
- Implementation of the planned actions;
- Improving the results/achievements.

Some experts argue that leadership in project management means that the leader will invest 80% of his time in personal development, task structuring and strengthening relations with partners, customers and other people who are related to the project.

The most important task of the leaders in the field of project management is to achieve results. But they cannot simply achieve them on their own. They need other people to help them do this. What makes people achieve results is motivation, not orders. However, many leaders do not succeed in motivating their employees, because they misunderstand the concept and application of motivation. The motivation of team members for successful project management is a complex process. It is usually influenced by a number of social processes. There is currently no unified system for motivating project teams. Organisations must find an individual approach to project team members and take into account the unique combination of qualities that each person possesses (Zlateva, 2014).

Scientific literature describes the good leader as a person who has the following qualities (Landsberg, 2002):

Enthusiasm – the enthusiasm of a leader, the efforts he makes to ensure successful project completion, to improve the results, to achieve the goals of the organization – it will be noticed by his colleagues. A true leader inspires and motivates his team members. In addition to the implementation of the project, the leader also promotes team development.

Excellent communication skills – leaders should be motivators, who teach and discipline the people they work with. None of these can be achieved if the communication skills of the leader are not good enough. In other words, poor communication leads to poor results. If the leader constantly issues orders and instructions, then he makes team communication one-sided. And it is extremely important that he does not allow this to happen. Team communication should be two-sided. Regardless of whether the feedback is bad or good, the successful leader should be open-minded and acceptive of suggestions. Leaders who lack these skills are often perceived as weak leaders.

Loyalty – true leaders establish mutual loyalty within their team. They express their team loyalty in various ways that benefit all team members. True loyalty guarantees that each team member has the skills and resources needed to do their job. The leader should stand by his team in moments of crisis. Last but not least, loyalty is a key competence that leaders should possess, as team members are much more likely to show their loyalty when they notice that their leader is loyal as well.

Decisiveness – a leader should be seen as a strong and decisive decision maker. He is not empowered to make decisions only because of his higher level of authority. He has to be ready to take the risk of making these decisions. And in case of misfortune, , he will be held responsible. A leader should be proactive as much as he can and when he is faced with a critical situation, he should be able to offer a quick solution to it. Those leaders who are indecisive in many cases are quite ineffective. Spending too much time and efforts on making a decision can have a negative effect. Instead of making a decision, many leaders conduct a debate the result of which is a partial solution to the problem that satisfies no one.

Managerial competence – many organizations are taking the wrong approach. They appoint people who are good at their job for project leaders. In many cases, those people have excellent qualities. They are familiar with the organization's products and services and understand the company's business goals and work procedures. This is very important, however, on the other hand, being good at your job does not always mean that you have all the competencies necessary to become a successful project leader.

Charisma – people are more likely to follow the guidance of those they like. The best leaders are great public speakers. Furthermore, they are welcoming, kind and showing genuine concern for others.

Conclusions

1. There is more overlap between Project management and leadership than there is separation. Project management is a multidisciplinary skill, involving the practice of abilities in a wide variety of areas. The consistently effective project manager, need to also master the skills involved in leadership and Project management. Project management skills should be updated regularly in order to stay actuality. Continuing education, training and development should focus on the skills of management and leadership.
2. Leaders need to monitor the specifics of the particular context in order to apply the most appropriate management techniques and tools. If the working group is to function effectively, by enhancing its individual contribution, the leader must adhere to delegation and decision-making in accordance with traditional management. In case the situation requires a team approach, the leader must improvise and change the standards of development guidelines, resource allocation and individual competence.
3. The strong commitment of the leader to the team goals, the agreed deliverables and the trust in the team members are the necessary conditions for achieving competitive advantage in an environment with a high degree of uncertainty.
4. Leadership in project management is related to changing the mindset of the team, bringing project execution to a higher level, building of a leader's personality beyond its limitations. This type of leadership may also be seen as a function of circumstance. It is the result of the interaction between members of the team who appoint a representative to organise a project and achieve its objectives.
5. Leadership in project management requires that the specifications of each project are met and thus the most appropriate management methods and tools are implemented. In the light of the significant role of project management, researchers have come to the conclusion that its theoretical foundations are underdeveloped and far behind the needs of practice, which needs extensive research on a global scale in the context of project management.

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