

# Incorporating Project Management Tools and Techniques to Manage Student Team Projects and the Influence of Leadership Styles

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## **Abstract**

We combine the cooperative learning environment methodologies with the project management knowledge areas, defined by the internationally recognized Guide to Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®), to provide a framework to understand the combined acquisition of sought after hard and soft skills in an effort to identify leadership opportunities. The paper further discusses the leadership constructs and its dimensionality using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5x-short) to rate 89 student responses regarding leadership behavior on project teams to understand the correlations between leaders' behaviors and the team dynamics of conflict and cohesion.

**Keywords:** Project Management; Team based learning, Leadership styles, Collaborative Learning.

## **1. Introduction**

Leading project teams successfully through the initiation to closing phases can be both an art and a science. There are, however, things that can be learned and incorporated into leadership behaviors that can help student team leaders through the leadership process. Student team projects are unique in that they are often small in size, fast-forming, short-duration in nature, and as such, can represent challenges for team leaders (Devine et al., 1999; Marks et al., 2001). This study examines the range of leadership styles, such as inspirational, charismatic and avoidant to name a few, using the PMBOK framework in an attempt to identify specific leadership behaviors that have both positive and negative correlations within the team dynamics of delivering a project that meets the Project Management Institute's (PMI) criteria of success, that is to say, a project that meets the requirements, schedule, budget and quality constraints.

Two dominate constructs in the MLQ stream of research are transformational and transactional leadership. These leadership constructs are important issues to address if teams are to realize growth, effectiveness and success. There is a link between leadership style and change, as Lussier (2004) states, "...the process of influencing leaders and followers to achieve organizational objectives through change" and can be viewed holistically as the ability to influence a group or team toward the attainment of some goal(s). The

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replication of the definitions and existing theories of leadership suggest further examination of three burgeoning leadership styles, most notably transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire.

Recent employer surveys show that college graduates lack the skills needed to thrive in the workplace (Johnson, 2011). While students obtain targeted training for various professions there is a skill deficiency in cross-functional attributes such as leadership, teamwork, analytical thinking, and time management, to name a few (BHEF, 1997). Higher education has a lot to gain by investing in reform efforts (aligning the standards, graduation requirements, assessments and accountability systems with the expectations of employers) including better instruction, improved student performance, higher graduation rates, as well as recognition for contributing to a policy agenda that has the potential to improve the long-term economic and social health of the country.

As luck would have it, the skills that are highly sought after in college graduates are the same skills that are practiced in the life cycle of managing a project. Students can have the opportunity to build and practice these skills by leading student team projects. Teamwork itself has become increasingly popular in industry (more than 80% of organizations employing 100 or more workers use teams (Gordon, 1992, Cohen and Bailey, 1997) and consequently, teachers are requiring students to work collaboratively in their courses.

We use student led projects to study leadership styles and behaviors that are linked to the skills that students need to manage successful projects, and address how these qualities align with the PMBOK standards. The framework used to apply project management principles to student team projects is derived from the PMBOK® guide, version 5, developed by PMI. The PMBOK® guide is an internationally recognized collection of processes and knowledge areas generally accepted as best practice within the project management field. The project management skills deemed necessary, according to PMBOK®, are leadership, oral communication, written communication, listening, organization, time management, planning, problem solving, consensus building, conflict resolution, negotiation, and team building (Heldman and Cram (2004)). Ironically, these are the same skills that employers have identified to be lacking in recent graduates.

The paper is organized as follow: In Section 2 we provide the literature review and in Section 3 we outline the skills that students need to manage successful projects and address how these qualities align with the PMBOK standards. We provide the methodology, MLQ results and discussion in Section 4 to study student leadership styles and behaviors that are linked to the soft skills that students obtain by leading student

projects. In Section 5 we conclude and provide discussion. To our knowledge this is the first research to integrate the framework of the PMBOK knowledge areas into the cooperative learning curriculum of higher education, using the team environment, to address the combined acquisition of sought after hard and soft skills in an effort to identify leadership opportunities.

## 2. Literature Review

Many studies abound on leadership behaviors and leader styles, especially within organizations. We will focus on leadership styles, in terms of transactional (directive or task-oriented), transformational (participative or people-oriented), and passive\avoidant styles as identified in the social sciences field (Bass and Riggio, 2005). Research finding indicate that transformational leadership is an important factor in virtually every organization setting (Bass and Riggio, 2005). Hence this notion is the premise of this literature review and research.

James Macgregor Burns, a historian, political scientist and presidential biographer, introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his research on political leaders in 1978; nonetheless its usage has spread into organizational psychology and management with further modifications by B.M Bass and J.B Avolio (Jung & Sosik, 2002). Burns first coined the term “transforming leadership” to describe a relationship in which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation, morality, and to achieve extraordinary outcomes (Robbins and Coulter, 2007) . Such a leader is attentive to the needs and concerns of their followers; their goal is to change the followers’ sense of awareness by providing an alternative approach to existing challenges that is expressed in such an inspiring way that arouses excitement and creative innovation to meet the group’s goals. Additionally, transformational leadership balances the follower’s self-identity with the collective identity of the project and may, as required, serve as a role model inspiring followers to take calculated risk and a greater sense of ownership for their work (Warrilow, 2012, Harland et al., 2005). Transformational leadership model are comprised of five factors, as noted below (Bass & Avolio, 2004):

- Idealized Influence (Attributed)  
Charismatic leadership character that supports and instills a sense of pride in their followers by building trust and respect. These leaders tend to be self-confident with a sense of direction; self-interest is forsaken for the good of group.
- Idealized Influence (Behavior)  
Leader’s charismatic actions highlight the team’s purpose, their performance is accentuated by moral and ethics decision making.

- *Inspirational Motivation*  
Optimistic leaders that communicate their vision clearly with a spirit of certainty toward the future and meeting the team's goals.
- *Intellectual Stimulation*  
Leaders who arouse a sense of logic and inquiry in their followers to creatively address problems-solving challenges.
- *Individualized Consideration*  
Leaders who nurture the individual talents and needs of follower by advising, encouraging, teaching, coaching, and paying attention to the individual rather than the team.

The focus of transactional leadership, or managerial leadership, is primarily on the role of supervision and team performance and the leader encourages compliance of his followers through a rewards/punishments system. Unlike transformational leadership, leaders using the transactional approach are more interested in short term gains with an unwillingness to change the future, and they promote status quo. According to Bass and Avolio (2004), there are three factors of transactional leadership: Contingent Reward, Management-by-exception, and Laissez-faire leadership styles.

- *Contingent reward*  
*Leaders give followers tasks in order to be rewarded emphasizing expectation and recognition of accomplishments via rewards.*
- *Management-by-exception*  
*Leaders take on a passive and corrective role with followers, intervening only if followers are noncompliance with standards or expectations. The focus is on mistakes and deviations from standards and taking immediate actions when the aberrations occurred.*
- *Laissez-faire*  
*The absence of leadership, avoiding decisions making, abdicating responsibility, and authority.*

Proponents of teamwork claim that it is a harbinger for critical thinking, promotes the student to take more responsibility for their own learning, and that of their peers, and provides the best means to knowledge building, as Michaelsen et al. (1989) found that, "the worst team typically outperforms the best student in the class!". There is a plethora of literature on teamwork as it is one of the most complex studied phenomenons in pedagogy. The two main concepts to help understand the underlying nature of interactive learning are team-based learning (TBL), which falls under the broad definition of cooperative learning (St. Claire and Chihara, 2012), and collaborative learning (Brody, 1995). Both theories use groups, assign specific tasks, and have the groups share and compare their procedures and conclusions (Rockwood, 1995a, 1995b). The major difference lies in the fact that collaboration is a student-centered philosophy of

interaction and dealing with other people, highlighting individual group members' abilities and contributions, whereas cooperation is a teacher-centered structure of interaction designed to facilitate the accomplishment of an end product or goal (Verkroost et al., 2008). We use cooperative learning and team-based learning to focus on characteristics that are critical for the success of groups, notably, the structure of activities, relationships, and accountability of group members (Michaelsen, 2002; Grant-Vallone, 2011).

### 3. Hard and Soft Skills Mapping Across PMBOK Knowledge Areas

This paper will address the fundamental needs to foster team-based learning as affected by leadership styles using a framework based in project management principles. By nature, project management involves the management of a team which can allow students to learn and practice those skills desired in industry and facilitate student learning that reflects the reality of the workplace. We combine the hard skills (technical and incorporate tools and templates) and soft skills (intangible and interpersonal) involved in team-based learning and project management (refer to Table 1), specifically, in a student project environment. Soft skills include, for example, managing expectations, leading, decision-making, influencing, negotiations, resolving conflicts, motivating, and communicating. Hard skills include scheduling, work breakdown structures, critical path diagrams, variance analysis, metrics, earned value, budgets, dashboards, and risk management (Marando, 2012).

Knowledge Area	Soft skill	Hard skill (tool/techniques)
<b>Integration</b>	Leadership Planning Problem-solving Decision-making Critical thinking Influencing Motivation Critical thinking skills Analytical Directing Monitoring	
<b>Cost</b>	Analytical Estimating Ability to measure. Use of calculators Math skills Ability to measure	Variance analysis Earned Value Budgets Analogous Estimating Bottom-up Estimating Parametric Estimating Vendor Bid Analysis Reserve Analysis Expert Judgment PM estimating software EVM Measurement Forecasting

<b>Time</b>	Scheduling Cooperation Adaptability	Performance Reviews Gantt chart Critical Path Diagram Decomposition Rolling wave planning Expert Judgment Template, forms, standards Dependency Determination Leads ,Lags and Floats Analogous Estimating Parametric Estimating Three point Estimates Resource Leveling Critical Chain Method
<b>Communication</b>	Oral communication Written communication Ability to listen and document Basic spelling and grammar Team skills Eye contact	Stakeholder analysis matrix Communication Management Plan Performance Reports Change Requests
<b>Scope</b>	Organization Flexibility Adaptability Willingness to learn	Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) Requirements Matrix Interviews Focus Groups Facilitated Workshops Group Creativity Technique Group decision making techniques Questionnaires and Surveys Observation(Job Shadowing) Prototypes
<b>Quality</b>	Honesty Ability to follow regulations Willingness to be accountable Personal integrity Wanting to do a good job	Metrics Control charts Pareto Chart Cause and Effect Diagram Scatter Diagram Run Chart Flowcharting Histogram Statistical Sampling Inspection Quality Audits – internal/external Quality Planning Process analysis
<b>Risk</b>	Analytical Reasoning Common sense Awareness of how business work	SWOT analysis Assumptions analysis Checklist analysis (RBS) Diagramming techniques(Ishikawa or Flowcharts) Expert Judgment Risk reassessment Variance and trend analysis Reserve analysis Risk Audits Status meetings

<b>Procurement</b>	Negotiation Cooperation Follow rules Caring about seeing the company succeed	Make or Buy Analysis Expert judgment Contract Types Bidder conference Proposal evaluation techniques Independent estimates Advertising Internet search Procurement negotiations
<b>Human Resources</b>	Team building Listening Consensus building Conflict resolution Courtesy Interpersonal skills Motivational skills Good attitude	Networking Organization Charts and Positions Descriptions Organizational Theory Training Team Building Activities Ground rules Co-location Recognition and Awards
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Managing expectations Flexibility Team skills Eye contact Personal chemistry Ability to listen and document what you have heard	Stakeholder analysis Stakeholder register Communications Requirements Analysis Communications technology Communication methods Communication models

**Table 1 - Mapping Soft/Hard Skills to Knowledge Areas**

#### 4. Methodology and Findings

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) has been used extensively by researchers (Avolio & Bass, 1994a) and is arguably the most validated and efficient measure of leadership styles and behaviors. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire was distributed by Mind Garden Inc. on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 to 89 undergraduate business students at Texas Wesleyan University that participated in team projects. The MLQ contains 45 items that identify and measure key leadership and effectiveness behaviors (see Table 2 for results), shown in prior research to be strongly linked with both individual and organizational success in team project-based environments (Mind Garden, 2011; Bass & Avolio, 1994a). There is strong evidence for validity (construct validity has been explained with factor analyses) and reliability (scores for the MLQ subscales ranged from moderate to good) of the MLQ instrument to measure multidimensional leadership constructs (Avolio and Bass, 1991). In addition, a study conducted by Antonakis et al. (2003), supported the nine-factor leadership model and its stability in homogeneous situations.

#### Identification of student leadership styles

We found that students identified as more laissez-faire and transactional than the norm (using MLQ normative information), with the exception of contingent reward (rewards are connected to the performance) and show less extra effort than the norm (see Table 3). Laissez fair leadership, MBE-Active,

and MBE-Passive, have all shown significant negative correlation with motivation toward extra effort, as is consistent with our results. Conversely, contingent reward has shown a positive significant relationship with motivation (Webb, 2003) and the students are identified as showing lower levels of contingent reward than the norm.

Leadership Assessment	Mean	SD	Norm	Δ
Idealized Influence (Attributes) n=55	2.80	0.74	3.00	-6.6%
Idealized Influence (Behaviors) n=84	2.84	0.69	2.75	3.2%
Inspirational Motivation n=84	2.97	0.76	3.00	-1.0%
Intellectual Stimulation n=84	2.94	0.79	2.75	6.9%
Individual Consideration n=83	2.79	0.8	2.82	-1.0%
Contingent Reward n=84	2.73	0.8	2.82	-3.1%
Management by Exception: Active n=83	2.56	0.66	1.67	53.2%
Management by Exception: Passive n=84	1.84	1.04	1.00	83.8%
Laissez-Faire n=84	1.28	0.92	0.50	155.7%
Extra Effort n=82	2.21	1.18	2.74	-19.2%
Effectiveness n=84	2.91	0.85	3.07	-5.2%
Satisfaction with the leadership n=83	3.07	0.79	3.00	2.4%

Table 3: Overall Leadership Assessment

**Hypothesis: There is a difference in student leadership styles across gender**

We study the impact of gender on leadership styles and find a correlation between gender and the following leadership constructs (see Table 4): Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individual consideration, contingent reward, effectiveness, and satisfaction with leadership. The average female response is significantly higher for those constructs associated with the transformational leadership style and consistently rank not only higher than their male counterparts, but also higher than the norm, both results which are opposite from the male responses.

There is no statistical difference in male and female response in regards to the transactional leadership style except in regards to contingent rewards. There is a statistical difference between the contingent reward related to gender, for instance males rank lower and females rank higher. These student results are consistent with the meta-analysis study by Eagly et al. (2003) that “female leaders were more transformational than male leaders and also engaged in more of the contingent reward behaviors that are a component of transactional leadership. Male leaders were generally more likely to manifest the other aspects of transactional leadership (active and passive management by exception) and laissez-faire leadership. Although these differences between male and female readers were small, the implications of these findings are encouraging for female leadership because other research has established that all of the aspects of leadership style on which women exceeded men relate positively to leaders' effectiveness whereas all of the aspects on which men exceeded women have negative or null relations to effectiveness.”



survey question no.	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Self Form	average response
1	I provide others with assistance in exchange for their efforts.	3.06
2	I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate.	2.95
3	I fail to interfere until problems become serious.	1.87
4	I focus attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards.	1.91
5	I avoid getting involved when important issues arise.	1.80
6	I talk about my most important values and beliefs.	1.94
7	I am absent when needed.	1.56
8	I seek differing perspectives when solving problems.	2.10
9	I talk optimistically about the future.	3.09
10	I instill pride in others for being associated with me.	3.02
11	I discuss in specific terms who is responsible for achieving performance targets.	2.57
12	I wait for things to go wrong before taking action.	1.45
13	I talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished.	1.95
14	I specify the importance of having a strong sense of purpose.	2.91
15	I spend time teaching and coaching.	2.56
16	I make clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved.	2.59
17	I show that I am a firm believer in "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."	2.25
18	I go beyond self-interest for the good of the group.	2.56
19	I treat others as individuals rather than just as members of the group.	2.73
20	I demonstrate that problems must become chronic before I take action.	1.80
21	I act in ways that build others' respect for me.	2.29
22	I concentrate my full attention on dealing with mistakes, complaints, and failures	2.66
23	I consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions.	2.84
24	I keep track of all mistakes.	2.83
25	I display a sense of power and confidence.	2.70
26	I articulate a compelling vision of the future.	3.06
27	I direct my attention toward failures to meet standards.	2.40
28	I avoid making decisions.	1.88
29	I consider each individual as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others.	2.35
30	I get others to look at problems from many different angles.	2.83
31	I help others to develop their strengths.	2.72
32	I suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments.	2.92
33	I delay responding to urgent questions.	2.01
34	I emphasize the importance of having a collective sense of mission.	2.38
35	I express satisfaction when others meet expectations.	2.90
36	I express confidence that goals will be achieved.	3.00
37	I am effective in meeting others' job-related needs.	3.00
38	I use methods of leadership that are satisfying.	2.92
39	I get others to do more than they expected to do.	2.66
40	I am effective in representing my group to higher authority.	2.84
41	I work with others in a satisfactory way.	3.16
42	I heighten others' desire to succeed.	3.08
43	I am effective in meeting organizational requirements.	3.10
44	I increase others' willingness to try harder.	3.19
45	I lead a group that is effective.	2.88

\*0=Not at all, 1=Once in a while, 2=Sometimes, 3=Fairly often, 4=Frequently, if not always

Table 2: Overall MLQ results

Leadership Assessment	Significance	Female	SD	Norm	Female Δ	Male	SD	Male Δ
Idealized Influence (Attributes) n=55	0.007	3.31	0.51	3.00	10.3%	2.66	0.75	-11.3%
Inspirational Motivation n=84	0.014	3.34	0.58	3.00	11.4%	2.84	0.77	-5.3%
Individual Consideration n=83	0.025	3.17	0.79	2.82	12.2%	2.68	0.78	-5.0%
Contingent Reward n=84	0.004	3.19	0.56	2.82	13.0%	2.58	0.81	-8.5%
Effectiveness n=84	0.009	3.38	0.6	3.07	10.0%	2.78	0.86	-9.4%
Satisfaction with the leadership n=83	0.039	3.40	0.49	3.00	13.3%	2.96	0.83	-1.3%

Table 4: Significance of Gender and Leadership Assessment

The findings of this study suggest that, for student led team project using the PMBOK's framework, the dominant leadership style was laissez-faire and transactional with transactional management styles ostensibly not playing an important role for male respondents. Interestingly, the average female response is considerably higher for those constructs associated with the transformational leadership style and consistently rank not only higher than their male counterparts, but also higher than the norm, both results which are opposite from the male respondents. With respect to the gender factor, there appears to be a gender influence on leadership styles. This finding, although specific to the student population, is consistent with other research that reports different leadership styles based on gender (Druskat, 1994; Rosener, 1990).

	Inspirational Motivation	Contingent Reward	Management by Exception: Active	Extra Effort
Significance	0.01	0.04	0.04	0.02
Freshman (SD)	2.69 (.84)	2.49 (.85)	2.64 (.62)	2.12 (1.15)
Sophomore (SD)	2.97 (.57)	2.72 (.84)	2.51 (.68)	1.76 (1.20)
Junior (SD)	3.46 (.56)	3.25 (.45)	2.78 (.66)	3.34 (.93)
Senior (SD)	3.22 (.56)	2.91 (.66)	2.19 (.66)	2.51 (1.09)
Norm	3.00	2.82	1.67	2.74
Freshman Δ	-10.3%	-11.7%	58.1%	-22.6%
Sophomore Δ	-1.0%	-3.5%	50.3%	-35.8%
Junior Δ	15.3%	15.2%	66.5%	21.9%
Senior Δ	7.3%	3.2%	31.1%	-8.4%

Table 5: Significance of Class and Leadership Assessment

### Hypothesis: There is a difference in leadership styles for students at different academic levels

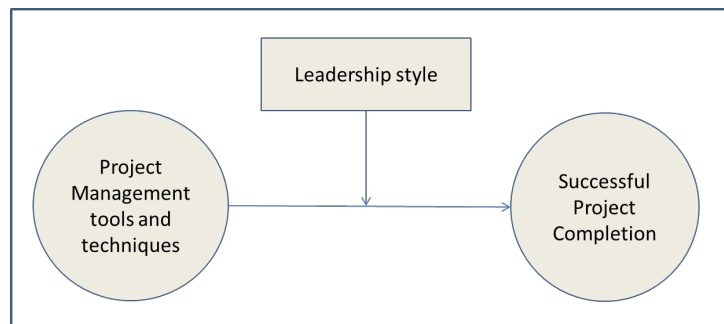
Interestingly, there is a significant difference between class rank (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior) and the following leadership constructs (see Table 5): Inspirational motivation, contingent reward, MBE-active, and extra effort. The Junior class is higher than the norm as well as other classes on the constructs associated with transactional leadership (contingent reward and MBE-active) and displays above average

extra effort. As students advance through their academic career, they obtain more of the highly desired transformational leadership skills.

### 5. Practical Implications and Areas for Future Research

The influence of situational variables on leadership outcomes within the context of both leadership styles should not go unnoticed. Student-led team project assignments are challenged, like most projects, by the constraints of scope, time, cost and quality issues. This paper is the first attempt to understand leadership styles as it relates to student projects and the influence that those leadership styles have on the ability to execute successful projects using project management tools and techniques (see Figure 1).

According to Bass’s (1994b) and Yang et al. (2011), transformational leadership styles are the most effective on productivity and performances while laissez-faire has the lowest ranking. Since transformational leaders are more likely to be viewed as effective leaders by their followers than transactional or laissez-faire leaders, teachers can help students learn to become transformational leaders by means of, for example, role playing and training exercises. This is particularly important for male students as well as students in the early years of their academic career. Leaders of successful projects are required, according to Bojeun (2013), to learn how to “modify their style from one based on personal choice to one that can overcome the challenges faced from individual team members...to ensure that the team continues to be driven toward success through the employment of competitive spirit, cooperation, and mutual respect for each other”.



**Figure 1: Research Model**

Project management principles can be applied to the team-based learning environment to ensure successful team projects, positive group experiences, and learning project management principles and skills that can be used in the future. The skills and techniques learned in project management are portable and adaptable in that they can be applied to professional and leadership positions as well as in the general workplace. In the process to manage a team project and the project management knowledge areas, students develop

hard and soft skills in leadership, negotiation, motivation, creative thinking, communication, conflict resolution, and deadline-driven teamwork.

This is the first attempt to understand student leadership styles in the context of project management principles and theories. For future research we suggest a strategy for testing the effectiveness of the ideas presented in this paper to positively cultivate skills in students. We propose a controlled study to collect evaluative information with pre- and post-tests. From the analyses of the two leadership models, it appears more empirical research is warranted to gain a clearer understanding of these two concepts on team projects and the gender differences.

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