

Speak the Language of Leadership

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Abstract

Success as a project management professional requires a balance of subject matter competence, interpersonal skills, and conceptual abilities that produce an expected result. Business executive's expectations regarding a project management professional's competencies have evolved with increasing emphasis on leadership. Understanding the role of a leader and the importance of leadership communication skills are the prime factors for achieving the right organizational results. Unfortunately, most project management oriented publications do not explain interpersonal skill development with the same clarity used to describe project management processes. A leader's ability to influence, inspire, and motivate directly correlates to interpersonal skill proficiency. The first section of this paper presents the importance of leadership on achieving results and the difference between managers and leaders. The second section reviews situational leadership and emotional intelligence as frameworks for the language of leadership. The third section explores how leaders can develop influence skills using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Dominance, Influencing, Steadiness, Compliance (DISC) communication assessment, and their "Way of Being."

Introduction

With an expertise in the science of project management, a project manager (PM) communicates complex concepts using a highly defined, specialized language. Terms and acronyms such as work breakdown structure (WBS), charter, risk plan, responsibility assignment matrix (RAM), Earned Value (EV), and Budgeted Cost of Work Performed (BCWP) have specific meaning and help project management professional's converse concerning the technical aspects of a project. This specialized project management language assists a PM to understand then apply knowledge in a particular project. Just as the technical language for managing a project helps to define outcomes, the language of leadership assists a PM to understand and apply communication skills in a way, which creates trust, manages conflict, invites commitment, and embraces accountability while producing the right results. Successful PM's have both, project management and leadership skills.

Understanding both the role of a leader and the importance of leadership communication skills are the prime factors to achieve the right organizational results. Success as a project management professional requires a balance of subject matter competence, interpersonal skills, and conceptual abilities that produce an expected result (PMI, 2004). Project managers demonstrate their competence by "applying project management knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques" during all project phases to reach a desired outcome (PMI, 2004. p. 6). The interpersonal and conceptual skills are more difficult to demonstrate. In *The Speed of Trust* (2006) S. M. R. Covey poses a traditional formula for producing organizational results, "Strategy times Execution equals Results (S x E = R)" (p. 20).

Typically, project managers have little or no direct authority (PMI, 2004), consequently to create an effective team, a project manager needs to be credible and create a climate of mutual trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Trust is about the ability of a PM to influence, motivate, and inspire others to produce results while working with a diverse team (PMI, 2004). Leaders produce results in an unstructured environment by developing and sustaining trust-based relationships (Cleland & Kerzner, 1986). Succinctly stated by Lencioni (2002), “Trust lies at the heart of a functioning, cohesive team. Without it, team work is all but impossible” (p. 195). The combination of demonstrated competence and character is how a leader establishes trust (Potter & Hastings, 2004). A leader creates trust by demonstrating technical competence and acting with values-based integrity, being credible. Therefore, adding trust to Covey’s performance formula, the revised equation becomes, “Strategy times Execution multiplied by Trust equals Results ([S x E]T = R)” (p. 20). The PM’s technical competence delivers results and leadership competence establishes trust. Leaders form a trust-based culture by their communication and interaction with teammates and stakeholders. Lencioni (2002) ascertains the lack of trust creates the common team dysfunctions, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, accountability avoidance, and inattention to results. Separately, each dysfunction diminishes a team’s ability to deliver the right results and collectively creates complex leadership challenges.



Exhibit 1 - Five Team Dysfunctions (Lencioni, 2002)

How a PM speaks and interacts with others is a significant influence on eliminating team dysfunctions and delivering the right results.

Project Management - A Leadership Perspective

Understanding the differences between a manager and a leader is vital for a project manager. Fundamentally, a manager’s focus is on resource optimization and extracting the maximum yield from the allocated resources (Drucker, 1973) and a leader’s focus is on influencing others to produce the right results (PMI, 2004).

Manager Perspective

According to Kotter (1997), “Management is about coping with complexity. . . . Without good management, complex enterprises tend to become chaotic. Good management brings a degree of order and consistency to key dimensions like the quality and profitability of products” (p. 25). Managers have a continuing job within the functional hierarchy of an organization and generally have subordinate resources to manage. Typically, the organization structure has a well-defined chain-of-command and authority stems from organizational position and title (Drucker, 1973). Drucker further elaborates, managers with a positional authority mind-set optimize production by telling subordinates working for them what work to accomplish. In this transactional management style, the basis for manager compensation is sustaining a consistent productivity level in which subordinates routinely perform assigned tasks for a reward or punishment (Van Seters & Fields, 1997). Zaleznik (2004) describes the managers mindset is oriented toward rationality and control, manifesting stability to avoid conflict. Self-appointed as the conservator of the status quo, a manager’s self-esteem is sustained by strengthening the existing way of working.

Leader Perspective

Hunter (2004) states, leaders motivate and inspire others because of personal influence. Personal influence stemming from a leader’s character is the core for relationships and interactions with others. This charismatic or transformational model is largely voluntary with no formal authoritarian control; consequently, leaders usually do not have organizational subordinates. In addition to embracing sound processes, transformational leaders must be able to define and articulate a vision. Followers produce results because of leader credibility. Zaleznik (2004) describes leaders as more tolerant of chaos and ambiguity. In the same article, Zaleznik describes managers as risk-cautious and leaders as more calculating risk-seekers. When working, leaders consider it natural to encounter challenges and obstacles. During his research, Zaleznik discovered leaders frequently had to overcome difficult life-challenges reinforcing an independent mind and a strong will. These difficulties created a strong self-sense that supports risk-taking and not being overly concerned about the opinion of others. Bennis (2009) summarizes the difference between these viewpoints; manager’s do things right and leaders do the right thing; Exhibit 2 provides additional details.

Managers:	Leaders:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • administer • ask how and when • focus on systems • do things right • maintain • rely on control • have a short-term perspective • accept the status-quo • have an eye on the bottom line • imitate • emulate the classic good soldier • copy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innovate • ask what and why • focus on people • do the right things • develop • inspire trust • have a longer-term perspective • challenge the status-quo • have an eye on the horizon • originate • are their own person • show originality

Exhibit 2 - On Becoming a Leader (Bennis, 2009)

Fundamentally, a manager's point of reference is process and resource allocation oriented and leadership is a human interaction oriented (Bennis, 2009). The differences become clearer when examining both roles at peripheral boundaries; a poor leader becomes a tyrant and poor manager is a bureaucrat (Bennis & Goldsmith, 2010). Succinctly stated by Maxwell (2005), "managers work with processes - leaders work with people. Both are necessary" (p. 112).

Historical Perspective

According to McLaurin and Bushanaian, "leadership is a dynamic relationship based on mutual influence between leader and follower..."(2008, p. 15). Although the term leadership has been in existence from the late 1700s, research on the subject did not begin until the 20th century (Van Seters & Field, 1990). Van Seters postulates that leadership has evolved through nine eras beginning with the personality era and the current transformational era (Van Seters & Field, 1990). Each of these eras represent transitions in leadership theory, moving from a focus on the traits of the leader, to the behaviors, to recognizing the importance of group influences, to role differentiation and social interaction, to creating visions of opportunities and instilling commitment to change (Van Seters & Field, 1990). Of these leadership theories, the transactional and the transformation are the most ubiquitous in the project management environment today.

The transactional model remains prevalent in the business world as well as in the project management circles (Davis, 2008). The assumptions of transactional leadership are 1) rewards and punishments motivate; 2) a clear chain of command creates the best organizational structure; 3) the leader clarifies performance-based expectations and goals (Transaction Leadership, 2010); and 4) the leader links achievement of goals to rewards (Smith, 2004). Transactional leadership has a focus affecting the economic performance of an organization through the interchange of performance for rewards, management-by-exception, monitoring, and correcting mistakes (Davis, 2008). The transformational model is gaining acceptance in the business world and in project management (Davis, 2008). According to Tracey and Hinkin (1998), transformational leadership is a process of influencing through clarifying, inspiring, supporting, and team building. The assumptions of transformational leadership are 1) teams follow leaders who

inspire them; 2) enthusiasm and energy is the way to accomplish goals; 3) a leader with vision and passion can achieve superior results (Transformational Leadership, 2010); and 4) leaders support optimism, mobilize commitment and focus on the followers' need for growth (Smith, 2004). In the transformational model, successful leaders create a balance between producing results and sustaining relationships while interacting with team members, stakeholders, and customers (Davis, 2008).

The Language of Leadership: Frameworks and Skills

Traditional Approach

A project manager's ability to communicate requires oral and writing skills, and process knowledge. *The Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK, 2004), chapter on *Project Communications Management* (p. 243), details the communication process, tools, and techniques specifying what actions and deliverables PM's use to manage communications. The PMBOK Appendix G further develops the importance of interpersonal skills such as building trust, resolving conflict, and active listening in the various leadership contexts of a project. Unfortunately, most project management oriented publications do not explain interpersonal skill development with the same clarity used to describe project processes. A leader's ability to influence, inspire, and motivate directly correlates to communication skill proficiency. Leaders establish and sustain relationships by how they communicate. Oral and nonverbal communications are a significant aspect of a project manager's interpersonal skills foundation.

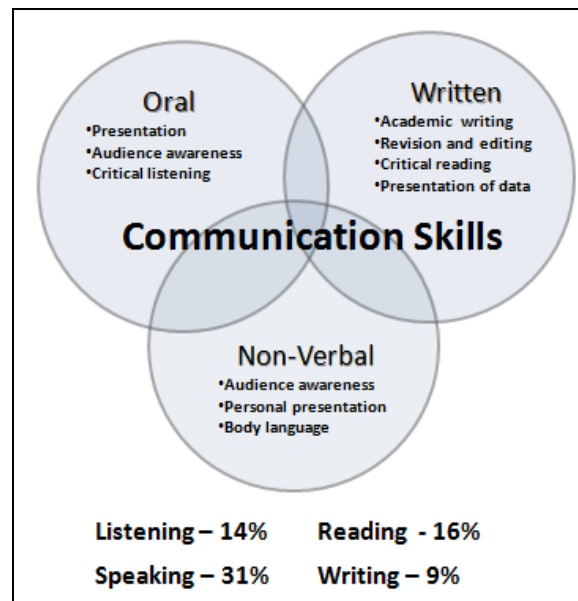


Exhibit 3 - Rufino (2007)

Kerzner (2009) states to be effective, a PM should be aware of communication styles of others. Additionally, developing communication proficiencies, which apply to various project situations, enhances a PM's interpersonal skills and ability to influence. Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and

Switzler (2002) incorporate fundamental abilities such as active listening and paraphrasing into their tools for crucial conversations. In *Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling* (Kerzner, 2009) acknowledges Hersey’s situational leadership model relevancy to project management. Hersey’s model helps a PM create a framework to form tailored communication strategy based on the willingness and readiness of a team member to complete a specific assignment. Successful application of the Hersey diagram (Exhibit 4) requires a PM to focus on the behaviors of a team member and use the model to develop an appropriate communication approach.

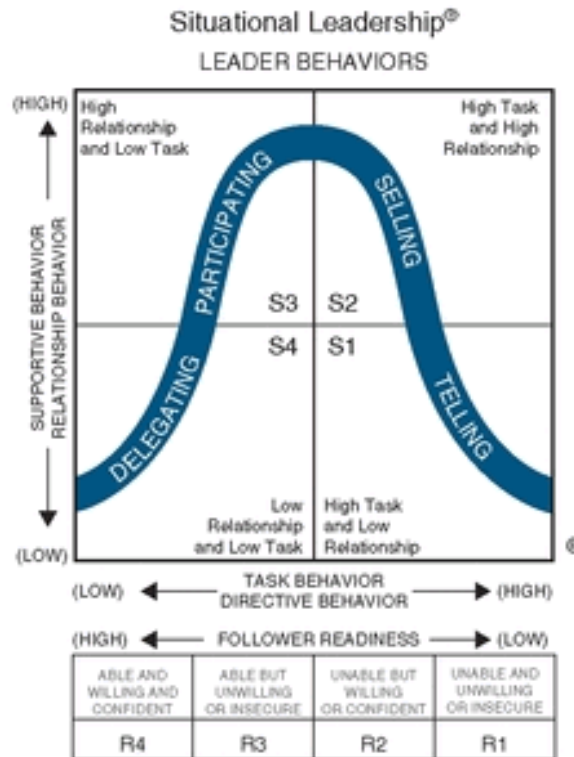


Exhibit 4 – Situational Leadership (Kerzner, 2009)

Emerging Approach

The ability of a PM to evaluate objectively and differentiate team member and stakeholder types of behaviors is essential for building trust-based relationships and establishing personal credibility (Mersino, 2007). Goleman’s *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998) establishes a framework for understanding emotions and behaviors centered on personal, self-oriented, competence and social, other-oriented, competence. Goleman (2006) states each competence orientation is two-tiered. The first level is the ability to recognize emotions and second the ability to manage emotions. A project manager’s personal competence is the ability to be self-aware of emotions and related behaviors and then self-manage. Self-management allows a PM to remain resourceful and sustain trust-based relationships. The social competence viewpoint invites a PM to focus attention on the emotions of team members and stakeholders and highlights the importance of managing relationships. Mersino (2007) merges the PMBOK interpersonal skill contexts into Goleman’s framework (Exhibit 5).

	Self (Personal Competence)	Other (Social Competence)
Recognition	Self-Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional self-awareness • Accurate self-assessment • Self-confidence 	Social Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Organizational awareness • Service
Regulation	Self-Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional self-control • Transparency • Adaptability • Achievement • Initiative • Optimism 	Relationship Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspirational leadership • Influence • Developing others • Change catalyst • Conflict management • Building bonds • Teamwork and collaboration

Exhibit 5 - Goleman’s Framework of Emotional Competencies (Mersino, 2007; Figure 2-3)

Developing Influence

The American Heritage Dictionary defines influence as “the power to sway or affect based on prestige, wealth, ability, or position.” Maxwell (2005) refines the definition saying, “Leadership is influence” (p. 73). To become the kind of leader others will follow, PMs need enhanced frameworks and skills to develop their ability to influence (Maxwell, 2005). Just as the understanding about leadership has evolved, awareness about the source of influence has also progressed.

Sources of Influence

A leader uses and exercises power to influence behavior (Michelson, 2010). Yuki (1981) studied leadership and formulated five bases of power: 1) reward power (granting favors or rewards), 2) coercive power (threats or punishment), 3) legitimate power (given by the job description), 4) expert power (knowledge or skill), and (5) referent power (respect or charisma). Northouse (1997) simplifies Yuki’s approach by combining legitimate, reward, and coercive power into power derived from position and joining referent and expert power into personal power. Beyond professional competence, Maxwell articulates a leader’s source of influence stating, “The whole secret to leadership is to think influence, not position” (p. 73). Goleman’s (1998) EI framework helps define the process for developing enhanced influence ability, first self-awareness, and then other-awareness. Three primary approaches for influence development are Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), DISC, and “Way of Being.” Each of these approaches has a specialized language, which facilitates understanding.

NLP

Richard Bandler, Ph.D. and John Grinder, Ph.D. developed Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in the early 1970s (Bandler, 1975). In their studies, Bandler and Grinder began to codify a body of knowledge that was to become a powerful tool for understanding and influencing behavior. During its early years, Bandler and Grinder applied NLP primarily in therapeutic settings (Grinder, 1976). Because of its effectiveness in influencing behavior, McMaster introduced direct applications successfully into the business world (McMaster, 1994). Business leaders could apply the concepts of NLP to develop personal competence, social competence, and organizational effectiveness. NLP had become the influence connection. Bandler and Grinder created certain fundamentals of NLP based on the observations made in the early years. These were 1) developing rapport, 2) calibration (noticing and responding effectively to subtle changes in behavior), 3) using eye accessing cues, and 4) understanding how individuals make sense out of their world (modalities: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, gustatory and olfactory) (O'Connor, 1990). They recognized that every individual has a primary and secondary modality, called sensory orientation. Although some individuals are primarily visual, others are primarily auditory, primarily kinesthetic, or auditory digital (Losier, 2009). The gustatory and olfactory modalities provide powerful anchors of memories and are usually not organizers of thought and behavior.

An individual's sensory orientation is a filter of communication. A visual person has a visual language and will use words like "see," "picture," or "visualize." An auditory person will use words like "tell," "listen," or "resonate." The kinesthetic person will say, "It doesn't feel right." The use of verbs is an indication of one's sensory orientation. Research has demonstrated that communication is more effective when done in the way that matches the other person's sensory orientation (Losier, 2009). The implications in a project management setting are profound. By knowing a project team member's sensory orientation, the project manager can be aware that information presented in a way that does not match this orientation may result in miscommunication. In like manner, a project manager increases influence and effectiveness by communicating to a member of the team by using language that matches that team member's sensory orientation. This is one of the patterns of communication. The other patterns include eye accessing cues and nonverbal cues.

An individual's eye movements provide valuable information about whether this person is thinking in pictures, sounds, feelings or engaging in internal dialogue (O'Connor, 1990, p. 51). In other words, information about their sensory orientation facilitates communication. The eye chart (Exhibit 6) indicates a typical configuration for the majority of right handed individuals and reverse the configuration for left-handed individuals. A project manager can determine an individual's eye accessing cues by asking questions and calibrating (noticing) the darting eyes (Losier, 2009). This further adds to the project manager's understanding of how a team receives and responds to communication.

A project manager can use the tools of NLP to develop both personal and social competence. Becoming self-aware and self-regulating are outcomes that increase personal competence. Leaders enhance their social competence by becoming aware of team members patterns, then matching sensory orientation will facilitate rapport and the relationship management. According

to Dilts, managing the relationship and rapport between group members is the critical element in the team's creative process (Dilts, 1993, p. 359).

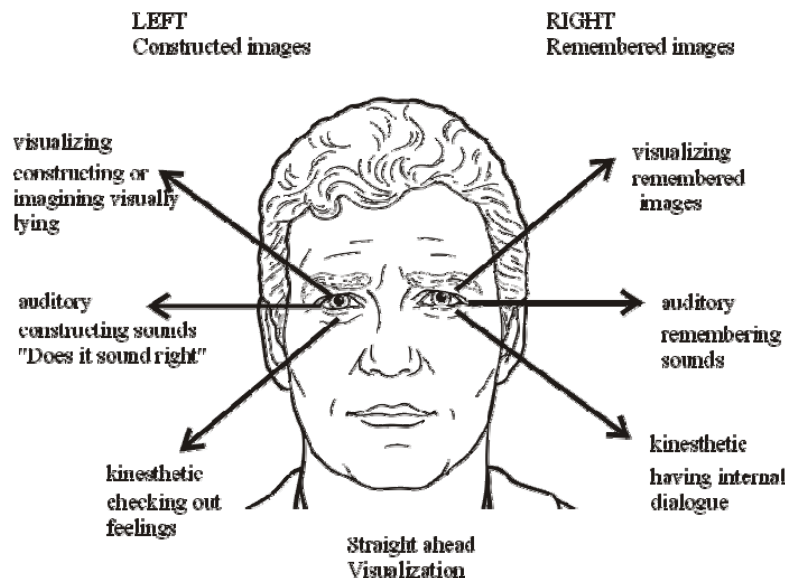


Exhibit 6 - Eye Positions As Looking At Another Person (Bauer, 2010)

The concept of calibration (noticing) applies to language and nonverbal communication. Grinder and Bandler noticed people delete, distort, and generalize in their language (Knight, 1995). For example, when asked the reason a time line was not met, a project team member responds, "They did not give the data I needed." According to Knight, this is a deletion and a way of avoiding responsibility (Knight, 1995, p. 47). Who is "they?" "The direction of the project de-motivates me" is an example of distortion (Knight, 1995, p. 52). "No one provides direction for our project" is an example of a generalization (Knight, 1995, p. 50). The project manager can re-direct this communication by asking explicit, powerful questions requiring specificity. The project manager also manages the relationships of his team by calibrating the nonverbal behavior of his team members.

Dilts recognized the importance of physiology, simple and complex behavioral cues, in modeling leadership skills and creativity (Dilts, 1998). These nonverbal cues are also potential indicators of internal processes. Joe Navarro adds additional calibration tools for nonverbal behavior (gestures, facial expressions, and physical movements) as a means of transmitting information about a person's thoughts (Navarro, 2008). The project manager who becomes proficient and aware of these nonverbal cues has additional tools for managing the relationships and time line of the project. This awareness is part of the project manager's communication tools.

According to Francis Kay, most projects go wrong because of inadequate communication between, the plan sponsors, the project teams, and the plan implementation groups (Kay, 2009, p. 146). Recognizing this potential problem, project managers can hone skills in listening, decision-making, influencing and managing the relationships of the team. NLP is an integral component in these skill development areas (Basu, 2009). Basu has documented effective

persuasion skills for the leader based on NLP technology and he emphasized the importance of values and ethics in the use of these skills (Basu, 2009, p. 1).

Behavior

Understanding communication preferences based on observable behavior patterns is a powerful tool for increasing communication effectiveness (Bonnsetter & Suiter, 2004; p. 7). William M. Marston’s book, *The Emotions of Normal People*, established the prevalent framework for relating communications styles and behaviors using Dominance, Inducement, Steadiness, and Compliance (DISC). Even though communication styles are usually a blend, each individual uses a primary style consistently (Alessandra & O’Connor, 1996). Each person has preferred style adapted for work and a natural or instinctive style away from work (Bonnsetter & Suiter, 2004). Under stress, individuals will communicate using their natural style. *In the Universal Language – DISC* (Bonnsetter & Suiter, 2004) state, a leader knowing their own style can become more credible by wisely using communication style strengths and develop strategies to better self-manage weaknesses. A leader’s ability to identify and calibrate to the preferred communication style of another coupled with the flexibility to adapt to the other persons style is the most effective way to establish trust (Bonnsetter & Suiter, 2004). Understanding the similarities and differences between style preferences can help team effectiveness by preventing or defusing conflict. “If you honor their individuality, their differences, they will feel like a winning team” (Alessandra & O’Connor, 1996). Exhibit 7 is a summary of communication style preferences.

Tendencies:	DRIVER (D) Direct	SOCIALIZER (I) Friendly	RELATER (S) Cooperative	THINKER (C) Analytical
Primary Orientation:	Results		Quality	
Looking for:	Results	The Experience	Harmony and Security	Information
Typically:	Likes their own way; decisive & strong opinion	Gets excited; optimistic	Likes to be helpful; team oriented	Seeks data, asks many question; methodical, systematic, process oriented
Questions:	What?... a results oriented question	Who?... a person oriented question	Why?... a personal non-goal question	How?... a technical or analytical question
Dislikes:	Someone wasting their time; trying to decide for them	Boring explanations; wasting time with too many facts	Rejection; Being treated impersonally	Making an error; being unprepared; spontaneity
Reacts to Stress By:	Taking charge; taking more control	"Selling" their ideas; argumentative	Becoming silent, withdraws, introspective	Seeking more data or information
Recognizing				
Tone of Voice:	Strong, clear, confident, fast paced	Animated, friendly, rambling explanations	Low-voice tone, warm, detailed oriented	Monotone, precise, cool, aloof
Volume of Voice:	Loudest, forceful	Fairly loud, casual	Soft volume, methodical	Quiet volume, deliberate
Tempo of Voice:	Rapid pace, limited emotion	Rapid pace, friendly	Slower pace, warm	Slow pace, Competent
Body Language	Uses direct eye contact, points finger, leans toward you	Smiles a lot, uses expressive gestures	Small hand gestures, relaxed, non-emotional	Very few if any hand gestures, direct eye contact, controlled

Exhibit 7 - Communication Preference Table

Bonnsetter & Suiter, 2004; Alessandra & O’Connor, 1990; Alessandra & O’Connor, 1996

“Way of Being”

A project manager’s knowledge and experience determine what actions to take when creating a project plan, constructing a schedule, or facilitating a meeting. How a PM communicates and interacts with others is an important aspect of project life. Arbinger in *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting out of the Box*, states that a leader’s actions and behaviors, a way of “doing” achieves results in a variety of ways and “There is something deeper than behavior that [ultimately] determines influence” (Arbinger, 2002, p. 48). How a leader interacts and treats others, a “Way of Being”, happens in two manners, one way recognizes people as people and the other way is to see people as objects, either obstacles, vehicles, or irrelevancies. “This ‘Way of Being’ [ultimately] determines influence” (Arbinger, 1998; p. 10). Understanding the distinction between behaviors, the doing, and our “Way of Being” is important

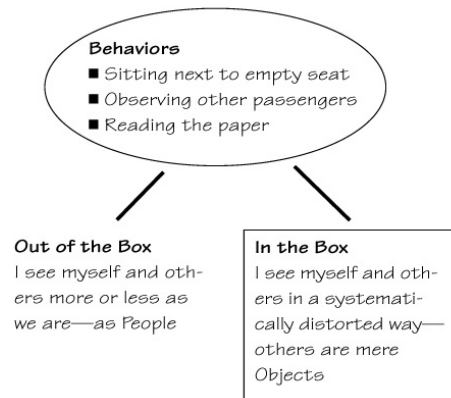


Exhibit 8 (Arbinger, 2002; p. 35)

During a project review session, a schedule analysis is what a PM does to evaluate completion timeliness and budget status. When a deliverable is significantly late, the PM has a choice at the “Way of Being” level, seeing team members as objects or seeing them as people. A leader who sees people as objects may feel resentful or frustrated when they have not kept to the schedule, become anxious about informing management, or even impatient with the seemingly slow response of the team to make adjustments. A leader who sees others as people will suspend judgment and invite the team to take action. A leader will encourage the team to develop a solution by asking what barriers hinder performance, commit to remove the barrier, and keep stakeholders informed. Seeing others as people the PM “is” different. By treating people as objects, PMs form a “box” around themselves creating relationship barriers. Leaders being resistant to the needs of others are operating from within a box and betraying their deepest sense about the right way to treat people (Arbinger, 2002). This self-betrayal produces justifications placing blame on others when something goes wrong. Self-betrayal radically degrades working relationships; leaders find reason to blame, and team members are provoked into unproductive behaviors. Collusion, a blame-response cycle, escalates and becomes divisive as a leader and team members enlist allies to support their respective viewpoint (Arbinger, 2002). Intense collusive behavior overrides the sense of helping others, then relationship quality diminishes and inattention to results soon follows.

Indicators of being in the box are trying to change others, resigning simply to muddle through with others, or ignoring the situation by walking away altogether. PMs can use the “Leadership Pyramid” (Exhibit 9) as a guide to helping things go right. Beginning at the apex, when deviations occur, a PM may need to clarify standards and expectations. The foundation, however, for making things go right is a leader’s “Way of Being.” If situations still require correction, then explore the appropriate lower levels, teach and communicate, listen and learn, build relationships, and build relationships with others who have influence.

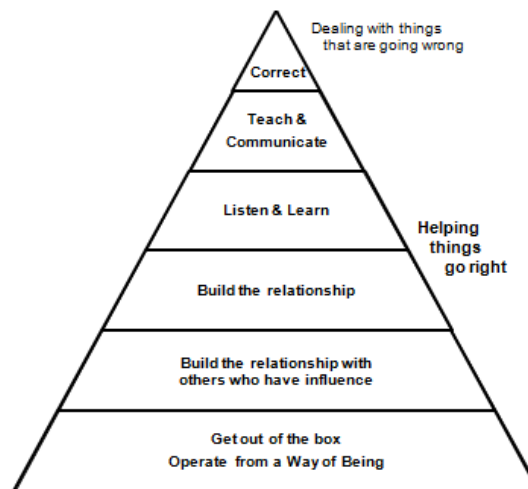


Exhibit 9, Leadership Pyramid
Adapted from Arbinger (2006; p. 211)

Leaders significantly improve project results and trust by seeing people as people as shown in Exhibit 10.

- Project managers short guide to the “Way of Being”:
- Have a focus on the right results and the needs of the team, not your own needs
 - Be responsive to improvement suggestions, not resistant to correction
 - Be personally accountable for results, not shift responsibility when things go wrong
 - Try to learn, then help and teach others, not withhold information or skills
 - Seek answers, not take perverse delight in problems
 - Be the type of leader whom people trust, not a person engaging in collusion

Exhibit 10 - Project Managers “Way of Being” Guide
Adapted from Arbinger (2002)

Final Thoughts

Executives expect project managers to achieve results using their competence and interpersonal skills. NLP and DISC are communication frameworks, which invite a project manager to understand their personal styles, and then to pay exquisite attention to others. When used

appropriately, style awareness and communication style flexibility builds trust. Likewise, using NLP and DISC with disregard for others will create relationship barriers and degrade team collaboration. Similarly, a project plan or schedule are management tools that help team performance or can become a weapon used to treat others poorly. When project managers choose to respect the humanity of each individual on the team, a PM creates a responsive way of interaction, when they choose not to do so, they engage in self-betrayal (The Arbinger Institute, 2002). Self-betrayal is an act contrary to what the leader should do for another and leads to self-justification (The Arbinger Institute, 2004; p. 71). Respecting the humanity of others is the "Way of Being" that builds and sustains trusting relationships.

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