

# Section Six

## Learning Module E: Enhancing the Project

### 6.1 Module E: Objectives

At the conclusion of this module you will be able to:

- develop a personal leadership plan;
- explain the theory behind team development;
- work through a number of case studies on project management.

### 6.2 Content of Module

This module looks at issues that are important in enhancing the success of projects. You will explore the importance of project leadership as well as the dynamics of project teams. The section concludes with some case studies of teaching and learning projects that were conducted at UNE.

### 6.3 Overview

There are a number of fundamental skills involved in project management that really cut across many aspects of what we do in our work life. These include the effective use of communications, promoting a team, conducting meeting, resolving conflict and so on. It is a sad indictment on workplace attitudes that these skills are often referred to as ‘soft skills’. Yet the mastery of these so-called ‘soft skills’ often leads to hard results. This section is designed to discuss some of the issues that are important in ensuring that project teams work effectively.

As has already been stated, the ‘Enhancing Project Management’ program at UNE addressed many team issues through the action learning process. The common issues in teaching and learning projects that seemed to come up time and again at UNE were:

- dealing with conflict
- University politics
- time management
- communication problems
- the nature of influence and dealing with difficult people.

It is not our intention to provide a module covering these issues in detail as these skills are covered in many other forums. **The aim of this section is to provide an opportunity for you to think about the importance of these factors as they relate to your projects.**

## 6.4 The Project Manager and Leadership

The project manager (as was mentioned in Part 2.8 of Module A) has many responsibilities. This not only requires a thorough appreciation of the technical aspects of project management but also an understanding of leadership and team dynamics. Project Managers in many projects (if not all projects) must provide leadership. This notion of leadership extends beyond the ‘visible’ team and can include people who have only indirect or a marginal interest in the project as well as stakeholders such as department heads. All of these people have a vested interest in the project and may from time to time come under your influence in addition to the project team members.

We are not going to attempt a leadership course here, although we thoroughly recommend project leaders undertake some form of leadership training. The Paul Hersey Situational Leadership model (Hersey P., 1984) was used during the ‘Enhancing Project Management’ program to enhance the understanding of participant of leadership. What we want you to do here is to stop and think about how you would go about providing leadership in the academic environment.

In our workshops we asked a simple question of participants, namely “What is it that makes an effective project leader?” This often generated great debate amongst participants. More importantly, it forced people to think about the leadership issues that are important to them.



### Exercise Seven

You are asked to pause for a minute and consider what you believe makes an effective leader in your work environment. Write your answers in the space below.

*NB: This is a great exercise to do in a group*

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We could spend a considerable amount of time debating what makes an effective leader (in my leadership programs we often do!). The subject is worth a workshop in its own right. From our experience and research we [at least] attribute some or all the following factors with successful leaders:

- Vision
- Passion
- Integrity
- Curiosity
- effective communication skills
- pro-activity
- energy
- task competence
- confidence
- flexibility and
- assertiveness.

What a list! We are sure you can think of others. To make the list more useful we have distilled the above information into seven key responsibilities. From our experience in the conduct of teaching and learning projects we (humbly) offer the seven keys to successful project leadership.

## Successful Project Leadership

### **Generate Meaningful Direction**

A key function of leadership is to articulate the meaning and purpose of what the project is about. The successful project leader can clearly articulate this to the team. All individuals within the team understand and are working towards the same goal. Furthermore your project systems and structures support this alignment.

### **Generate Empowering Beliefs**

Team members feel a sense of belief in themselves and the project. This comes from your technical competence in the your area of expertise, your communication skills and your willingness to let your team get on and do the job.

### **Make it Happen**

Successful leaders have a capacity to get things done and follow through on required actions. They are action-oriented. Furthermore, they encourage this action-oriented approach in their team members through strong direction when required.

## Energy

Leaders have to be energetic. However, maximising energy is more than running fast. Anyone can work sixteen-hour days. The world is full of people who have mortgaged their future health against current work. The key to energy is to spend your time **effectively** and enthuse others.

## Flexibility and Openness to Learning

A project leader must be able to adapt to changing situations and circumstances.

## Integrity

Stand by your principles. In a University environment this can be difficult to do at times. However, your strength of character will generate respect amongst team members.

## Communicate Simply and Clearly

The quality of your communications will equal quality of your project. It's simple, it's obvious and most people take it for granted. Yet few people do it well. Successful leadership requires successful communications.



**Like any 'what should be done lists', identifying what needs to be done is the easy part. Transforming theoretical words on a page to practical implementation is the true challenge.**

## Your Leadership Approach

How do you rate yourself in the above areas? Can you think of any to add? The key here is for you to take the time to think about the leadership you provide and work out what works best for your team.



### Exercise Eight

To assist you with the process of identifying the gap between your existing leadership style and your desired style, we have provided a leadership strategy sheet. Simply work through the sheet below and answer the questions about your leadership approach. Hopefully by the end you will have clarified some of the behaviours that are necessary for you to be an effective leader.

## Your Leadership Recipe

### You



Question 1

What are your strengths as a leader?

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Question 2

What are your leadership weaknesses?

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### Culture



Question 3

How does the culture at your organisation impact on you and your team?

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Question 4

Describe the culture you desire in your project team

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## The General Work Environment



Question 5

What problems and what opportunity does your work environment provide? (For example, the fluid nature of academic work might provide you with an opportunity)

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## Team Members



Question 6

What are the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities associated with your team members? The team are your resources through which you influence, understand their needs and you will be able to provide effective leadership)

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## Communication Plan



Question 6

How can I ensure clear, open unambiguous team communications?

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## 6.5 The Nature of Project Teams

“When spiders webs unite, they can tie up a lion.”

(Ethiopian proverb)

Project team leaders, to be effective, need to understand the nature of team building. In workshops we often hear comments such as ‘teams are different at Universities’, ‘project teams are not really teams’ and many other ‘excuses’ as to why we shouldn’t focus on people issues. All these comments have some elements of truth in them which is why it is so important to focus on team development. Universities **are** unique; team member **usually** have many other responsibilities **and** we need to determine a strategy to enable our team members to work together effectively.

We have already suggested that any opportunity to develop teamwork should be taken. Producing the project definition is an obvious opportunity to get members working together, as is a joint brainstorming exercise to develop the WBS. The development of the project team should be part of your personal strategy as a project leader. Remember, the best way to resolve conflict, deal with difficult people and solve problems – is not to have them in the first place! The development of an effective, supportive team is your best bet for minimising people problems.

There are three aspects of teamwork we will consider here. Firstly, what is a high performing team? After all if we don’t know what it entails how do we know how to get there? Secondly, the group dynamics of a project team. Teams often progress through stages of development. By recognising these stages we are in a position to be able to manage them more effectively. Thirdly what are the skills necessary to achieve them?

### What Makes a High Performing Team?



It may seem obvious why we have teams. After all being in a team means not having to go it alone. We can use the talents of a diverse group of people and we can achieve far more with a team than we can with individuals. Yet while it may be obvious, people working well together, is not always common practice. The reason why it is not common practice is really quite simple - **it is hard work**. As Pat Riley, the famous American basketball coach observed:

“Teamwork isn’t simple. In fact, it can be a frustrating, elusive commodity...Teamwork doesn’t appear magically just because someone mouths the words [and] it doesn’t thrive just because of the presence of talent or ambition.”



We need to make teamwork happen. One of the keys to successful teamwork is to understand group dynamics and how people relate and work together. The members of a team are interdependent; they will "win" or "lose" only as a group. Communication amongst members is critical. It is essential for all members to understand the group goals, the procedures or processes to use in reaching them, and the roles they are to play. A project team's chances for success are best when each member's strengths are understood and used.

Ken Blanchard identified a number of characteristics of high performing teams. These characteristics are listed below. In our workshops we often get participants to rate their own teams on a scale of 1-5 in each of the areas below (5 being highly effective whereas 1 requires more work).

## **Characteristics of a High Performing Team**

### **Purpose**

1. Members can describe and are committed to a common purpose
2. Goals are clear, challenging and relevant
3. Strategies for achieving goals are clear
4. individual roles are clear

### **Empowerment**

1. Members feel a personal and collective sense of power
2. Members have access to the necessary skills and resources
3. Policies and practices support team objectives
4. Mutual respect and willingness to help each other

### **Communications**

1. Members express themselves openly and honestly
2. Understanding within the team
3. Members actively listen to each other
4. Differences of opinion and perspective are valued

### **Flexibility**

1. Members perform different roles and functions as needed
2. Members share responsibility
3. Members are adaptable
4. Varying ideas and approaches are explored

### **Performance**

1. Output is high
2. Quality is excellent
3. Decision making effective
4. Clear problem solving process is apparent

## Recognition

1. Individual contributions are recognised by the leader and members
2. Team accomplishments are recognised by the members
3. Group members feel respected
4. Team contributions are valued

## Morale

1. Individuals feel good about their membership of the team
2. Individuals are confident and motivated
3. Members have a sense of pride and satisfaction in their work
4. There is a strong sense of cohesion and team spirit

(adapted from Carew D. et al, 1990)

## Stages of Team Development

The main issue for us is how do we get to the stage where we are comfortable with our team?

Numerous studies have highlighted that groups tend to progress through a number of stages of development. When a project team is first formed the roles and interactions within the team are not well established. Gradually a process of development occurs where members understand their roles and learn to work with others in the team. Many models describe this process. However, they all tend to divide the process into four stages. Understanding these stages may help you to clarify the interactive process that occurs when people come together to work as a project team and therefore be in a better position to manage the process.

You may have heard the old saying that teams work through the stages of ‘forming, storming, norming and performing’. Ken Blanchard further refined these stages. He called them: orientation, dissatisfaction, resolution and production. Each stage builds on the preceding one. The implication is that it is useful for teams to develop through this sequence if they are to become fully functioning. Furthermore, teams may cycle through these stages as new members join, problems arise and goals change.

### Stage 1: Orientation (Forming)

When a team is forming, members cautiously explore the boundaries of acceptable group behaviour. This is a transition from individual to team member. Productivity is usually low. This stage is characterised by:

- feeling moderately eager with high expectations;
- feeling some anxiety;
- testing the situation;
- depending on authority and hierarchy; and
- needing to find a place to establish oneself.

## **Stage 2: Dissatisfaction (Storming)**

This can be one of the most difficult stages. This stage is characterised by:

- experiencing a discrepancy between hopes and reality;
- feeling dissatisfied with dependence on authority;
- feeling frustrated;
- possible feelings of confusion;
- negative reaction to leaders and other members;
- competing for power and/or attention; and
- experiencing divergent views (polarities).

## **Stage 3: Resolution (Norming)**

By this stage members are reconciling competing loyalties. They have probably accepted team ground rules and their role in the team. Team members are usually supportive by this stage. It is characterised by:

- decreasing dissatisfaction;
- resolving discrepancies between realities and expectations;
- resolving polarities and animosities;
- developing harmony, trust, support and respect;
- developing self-esteem and confidence;
- developing more open approach;
- sharing responsibility and control; and
- using team language.

## **Stage 4: Production (Performing)**

The team by stage four has usually settled relationship issues. They can really begin performing - diagnosing and solving problems. The team is now an effective cohesive unit characterised by:

- feeling excited about participating in team activity;
- working interdependently;
- feeling team strength;
- showing high confidence in accomplishing tasks;
- sharing leadership;
- feeling positive about task; and
- performing at high levels.

The duration and intensity of these stages vary from team to team. Sometimes stage four is achieved in a meeting or two, other times it may take months. Understanding these stages of team development will keep you from overreacting to normal problems and setting unrealistic expectations of your teams.



Question 1

Where do you believe your project team is at the moment?

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Knowing about the stages a team may pass through should relieve stress and concern during the progress of a project.



### Exercise Nine

Developing a strategy to assist teams in working through the different stages of development can make an enormous difference to the success of a project. Consider the description of the stages of team development described in the previous pages. For each stage, identify what you believe should be the key strategy that will encourage the team to progress to the next stage.

*For example, it would not be unreasonable to assume that a project manager would be more directive during the initial forming of the team and far less directive once the team are performing well.*

### Forming

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### Storming

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## Norming

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## Performing

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## Progressing Through the Four Stages

In the **forming** stage productivity is usually low and relationships are still developing and can often be guarded. It may be useful for project leaders to focus on sharing information, encourage dialogue, ensure they are open to generate trust amongst the team, provide structure and to be directive if necessary.

**Storming** is an important stage in project team development. The key here is for the project manager and the team to ensure the conflict is ultimately positive and does not become destructive. Here project managers must ensure the team discuss and debate issues, clarify individual roles within the team, encourage two-way communication, support collaborative efforts and keep the team progressing forward.

During the **norming** stage productivity is increasing as the team settles down to the task. It is important to talk openly about concerns and issues, give positive and constructive feedback and delegate to team members. Finally it is worth noting that some teams never get past this stage. Yet the rewards of being part of a performing team make the extra effort worth it.

When a team is **performing** it usually has a strong sense of identity. Team members by now should be committed to the project. The project leader should be in a more supportive role at this stage. For the leader it is the encouragement phase.

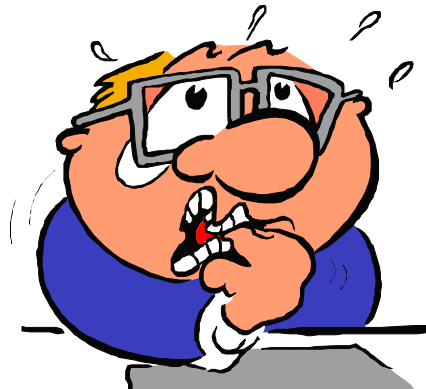
## Team Communication

If there is one word that summarises the fundamental issue in project team development it is the word 'communication'. During the Enhancing Project Management program at UNE, the project management workshops gave participants structure to manage their projects BUT it was the action learning that provided a forum to explore the nature of communication. Communication effectiveness in a team can only be developed over a period of time.

Effective team communication requires encouragement from the project manager but is the responsibility all team members. Here are a few questions you should ask about the communication processes in your team (adapted from Kaye, M 1997, p8).

## 6.6 Important Communications Questions

- Is my understanding of the project goal clear enough that I know what I need to do to achieve it?
- What are my roles and responsibilities within the project team?
- Have I communicated honestly and openly to others in the team and do they understand my role?
- Do others in the team give me feedback on my performance?
- Do I take notice of this feedback and modify my actions as a result?
- Do I understand the roles and the needs of others in the team.



**We recommend you use a communication plan to assist in the communication process. A communication plan identifies the key roles of the team members (it builds on the initial project definition form) and lists their respective communication responsibilities. A team communication format is provided on the next page.**



## Team Communication Plan

<u>Team member</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Preferred method of communication</u>	<u>email /phone</u>
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**Responsibilities**

**Meeting times (electronic/in person)**

**Potential communication issues**

## 6.7 Case Studies

During the course of the Enhancing Project Management program we learnt much from the issues and problems that arose during the program. Some of the lessons are represented in the case studies below. We have purposely not identified specific projects and have instead chosen to simply identify a particular project problem. This approach obviously retains anonymity for project participants. More importantly, it distils the main issue into chunks small enough that someone might actually bother to read them. You may wish to consider whether you have had similar experiences in your projects.

### **Case Study One: Project Team Selection**

We have already included this case study in the text of the workbook. We called it the 'last person standing in the tea room' method of project allocation.

The Head of Department announced to colleagues at morning tea that he had decided a research unit was required. All the experienced staff disappeared immediately and the last staff member still in the room was given the job of project managing this unit development project. Needless to say this person lacked commitment and time to give the project the attention it deserved, consequently it did not progress well.

#### **Lesson**

One issue that came up constantly in the 'Enhancing Project Management Program' was the issue of project ownership. In this example, the project experienced a number of problems because no individual had responsibility for the project. At the time of producing this workbook this particular project had still not commenced.

The project definition phase is an ideal opportunity to clarify roles within the project. Also, a project instigator or stakeholder does not cease involvement once the project has been allocated. A project stakeholder (such as a faculty head) should continue involvement and act as a mentor to the project team.

### **Case Study Two: Project Leadership**

A common issue that arises in projects is the dichotomy of responsibility. In teaching and learning projects at UNE there was often confusion as to who was the project manager. Was it the particular academic responsible for a particular course or unit or was it the allocated Instructional Designer (ID) from the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC)?

In a number of instances the ID assumed responsibility for the project. This tended to suit the TLC as they could then ensure the project was managed effectively. It often suited the academic responsible as they had less work to do. It also ultimately caused tension and created communication problems in the projects.

#### **Lesson**

It is most desirable for the person responsible for a particular project to be the project manager. In teaching and learning projects this is normally the academic responsible for the course or unit. The project manager may choose to delegate some of the management responsibilities BUT should retain overall project leadership.



### **Case Study Three: Project Member Roles**

In a particular project at UNE there were three senior academics involved in an exciting initiative to produce an interactive CD-ROM for a cross discipline program. Initially there was much confusion as to who was responsible for what part of the project.

The project manager was the most junior member of the project team. The other two academic team members were Professors and in charge of their respective departments. The two senior members did not really want to get involved in the detail of the project as they were 'too busy'. This caused friction between project team members.

#### **Lesson**

It is common to have unrealistic expectations at the commencement of a project. Again the key here is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of people in the project team. It is not uncommon to have external and internal team members. In this particular case, the professors became external team members with specific inputs and responsibilities. The project manager became the main internal team member. Once the roles and work commitments were clarified the project progressed well.

### **Case Study Four: Team Workload and Expectations**

An energetic and popular academic was responsible for the establishment of a new program. Because of her popularity and the high esteem in which she was held amongst colleagues, there was no shortage of volunteers to be involved in the project.

The project commenced with much enthusiasm. Unfortunately as it progressed, and the workload grew, the less experienced members (generally new associate lecturers) started to miss project meetings and deadlines. Their initial enthusiasm gave way to lack of interest as other priorities tended to take over.

This created enormous pressure for the project manager as her workload kept increasing. Furthermore, her initial popularity gave way to resentment as she attempted to keep the team members focused.

#### **Lesson**

This is a classic tracking and control problem. How do we maintain enthusiasm amongst academic staff? Whilst the project manager was senior in rank, as we know, it doesn't tend to mean much in an academic environment. The project manager initially did some of the extra work herself. However, after a number of stressful and tense project meetings she got the team together and gained agreement for a continuation of work.

There are two things she could have done. Firstly, ensured that project team members understood the workload commitments early on in the project, secondly managed with a more directive style early on in the project. It is much easier to start with solid direction and ease off later in the project than it is to try and 'tighten up' work practices once the project is underway.

## **Case Study Five: Unrealistic Time Expectations**

In this case, an enthusiastic academic committed her project team to a very tight deadline, based on her assumptions of how the work would progress. Whilst team members expressed concern at the deadlines, they all agreed in the early project meetings that the workload was achievable.

One of the project team members became pregnant and later in the year embarked on maternity leave. Another team member took study leave. By the end of the year the project was only fifty percent complete. So reluctantly, the project manager sought and received an extension of time. She claimed unforeseen events had impacted on her original plan.

### **Lesson**

There are numerous lessons to emerge from this case. Firstly, set realistic deadlines! Just because the project manager is capable of undertaking a task in a certain timeframe, does not mean that less experienced team members can achieve in the same time frame. Refer to the section on rational estimation and be sure to set realistic deadlines. Secondly, an effective project definition process would not only avoid unrealistic estimation of duration but also flag the potential problems such as study leave. The study leave should have been listed as a constraint in the project definition process. Finally, there will always be unforeseen situations arise (such as team members going on maternity leave). Potential absenteeism from the project should be flagged in the project definition phase.

## **Case Study Six: University Power Politics**

Problems with organisational politics are not limited to universities. This particular incident we have seen enacted across many organisations. An academic and her team had developed a particular program, investing a substantial amount of time and effort on the course. A senior colleague, then took the program, modified it for overseas consumption and assumed responsibility for the project.

The impact of this was that the project team became extremely de-motivated and disillusioned. As the project was just about over this had little impact on the project outcome. However, it had a significant impact on future projects. This was because a negative climate had been created that discouraged participation in projects.

### **Lesson**

Recognition is a fundamental motivational issue. Not to recognise effort is a serious failing in leadership. Alternatively, recognition of effort is a simple yet powerful motivational tool. A famous example of this is the project team involved in the original Macintosh computer. They were recognised by having their names on the inside of every [early] Macintosh produced. An extremely powerful motivator, which no doubt contributed to even greater productivity in the future!

The other issue is that of culture. Culture is a powerful force. Once negative thinking (such as in the example above) has been created it is very hard to fight. Effort should be expended in creating a positive supportive culture in the first place.

## 6.8 Putting It All Together

From the outset of this program we have emphasised the practical nature of project management. This workbook has hopefully provided you with some valuable tools and a few good ideas to assist you in your projects. If you have diligently progressed through this workbook you now have enough of an understanding of the principles and techniques of project management to effectively define, plan and conduct a project.

All the techniques covered in this course can be undertaken manually. We have provided a set of planning sheets for just that purpose. However, to plan a project manually is a bit like going back to writing an academic paper without a word processor. We have emphasised throughout this program the value of project planning software. The one we use at UNE is MS-Project. However, there are many available and they are all capable of assisting you in project planning.

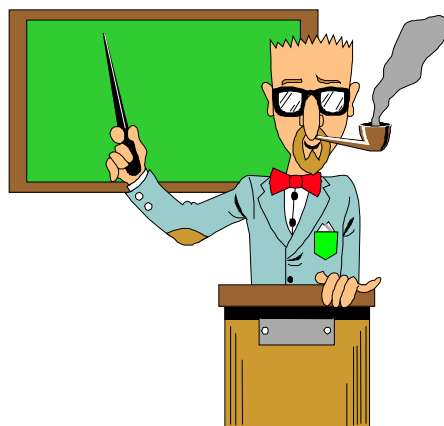
Once you (and your team/stakeholders) have identified the objectives, tasks, durations, predecessors, resources and costs, project-planning software will facilitate the documentation and production of a plan. Software can produce task, resource and cost schedules; reports and forecasts. Once your project has been documented and approved, software will then assist you with monitoring and control.

Of course, all the planning systems and software programs in the world will not work if you are unable to provide effective leadership to your project team. We have emphasised the systems in this workshop because that is essentially what this program is about. However, the systems will not work without the people! So your project planning must include team and communication development.

Finally, project management is nothing more than systems and processes that make it is easy for you to get on with what you do best. In teaching and learning projects sometimes we get so caught up in the detail of what we do that we fail to manage our projects effectively. Use the systems covered in this workbook so you can get on and enjoy your work.



**We are often asked for a quick list for successful project management. Whilst there is not such thing as a quick fix, the list on the next page is our recipe of project success.**



Good luck with your projects.

### **A Recipe for Project Success**

- **Clear goals/outcomes**
- **User-friendly system support**
  - **MS-Project**
  - **Useable Gantt**
- **Clear roles within the team**
- **Clarity and openness in communications**
- **Positive team culture/behaviour**
- **All team members contribute**

This workbook is a first draft (hence Version 1 at the bottom of the page). After it has been out 'on the streets' for a few months we intend to review it and make any changes that people may feel necessary. So please send your comments on the usefulness of the material to [pharrell@metz.une.edu.au](mailto:pharrell@metz.une.edu.au). Version 2 will encompass suggestions from users and be available before the end of 2001.