



QUESTION

If leadership is
a thinking skill

What are
the most
effective
project
leaders
thinking?

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the International Project Leadership Academy

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

The Project Leader's Mindset

Leadership is a 'critical thinking' skill and to excel in a project leadership role you need to think like a leader. While a lucky few are naturals, most of us have to learn. The starting point for that journey lies in understanding how effective leaders think. How do they perceive their role? What are they conscious of that others are not? What's important to them and what is the intent behind their actions?

RESEARCH APPROACH

Because actions reveal thoughts, priorities and values, research focused on the question – What are effective leaders physically doing that their less effective peers are not? The results surfaced eight 'thoughts strands' that frame the way capable leaders think. Entwined and connected the strands provide substance, direction and intent to the decisions leaders make, the actions they take, the timing of those actions and the words they choose to use [1].

RESEARCH FINDINGS – THE EIGHT 'THOUGHT STRANDS'

Themes in the thinking of highly capable Project Leaders – The intent behind their actions

1. BUILD A POSITIVE WORK CULTURE

Influence positive behaviors in order to create a productive and collaborative team dynamic.

2. FOCUS THE DECISION-MAKING

Recognize when a decision is needed, articulate the question and focus the team on finding the optimal choice.

3. KEEP THE GOAL ALIVE

Crystallize the project's goal and focus people on the desired outcome. Maintain the team's alignment to the objective.

4. SHARPEN STRATEGY AND PROCESS

Ensure there is a clear (but simple and effective) plan for how to achieve the project's objectives.

5. ENERGIZE STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT

Connect with people and build positive relationships so they want to be a part of, or support, the endeavor.

6. CREATE CLARITY

Strive for clarity in all communications and ensure the team maintains situational awareness at all times.

7. MAINTAIN MOMENTUM AND CONTROL

Ensure that the things that should be happening, are happening. Delegate responsibilities, but verify performance.

8. MAXIMIZE PRODUCTIVITY AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Ensure resources are used to their maximum potential. Encourage creativity and a shared sense of ownership. Remove roadblocks and inefficiencies.

[1] Research used a comparative approach in which the actions of effective leaders (those who both achieved results and earned the respect of their teams) were compared to the behaviors of less effectual leaders. Research included raw observations of Project Leaders and teams in real projects, interviews with leaders and teams, plus field reports from working professionals attending IPLA classes. The research included leaders working in governmental, non-profit and commercial organizations. Calteam and IPLA thank the more than 500 people who participated in the research.

THOUGHT STRAND	ACTIONS MOST OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH CAPABLE LEADERS	BEHAVIORS MOST OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH A LACK OF LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY
1. BUILD A POSITIVE WORK CULTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicating their “values” Setting behavioral expectations / norms Giving feedback (positive & negative as needed) Maintaining separation (friendly, not friends) Consistency in style, thinking & approach Leading by example 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignoring damaging dysfunctions Being capricious Playing favorites
2. FOCUS THE DECISION-MAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framing decisions Using participatory decision-making Evaluating multiple options Reading body language (for confusion, doubt or consensus) Guiding discussion towards conclusion Clarifying or restating final outcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing conversation to circle (failure to guide towards a conclusion) Being vague Snap judgments Indecision or flip-flopping Autocratic decision making
3. KEEP THE GOAL ALIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting with “what are we trying to achieve?” Encapsulating vision into catchphrases, slogans or taglines Longer term thinking (strategic thinking) Linking actions & decisions to the project’s vision (keeping the vision alive) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starting with “what do we need to deliver?” Making decisions without linking to rationale Shorter term thinking
4. SHARPEN STRATEGY & PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing the team on planning Prioritization Visually depicting workflows, processes & timelines Keeping plans as simple as possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting lost in the details Being disorganized Disdain for discussions about process or efficiency Unnecessary bureaucracy
5. ENERGIZE STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thinking from the stakeholder’s perspective Listening to stakeholders Maintaining communications with them Being appreciative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on “transactional issues” rather than “relationship building” Being self-centered
6. CREATE CLARITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being organized Talking with purpose and consistency Talking more slowly and with pauses Structuring data & information Regular & consistent reinforcement of messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Triggering chaos Talking rapidly Continually switching topic Failure to follow through & inconsistency Lack of documentation or communication
7. MAINTAIN MOMENTUM AND CONTROL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular interactions to validate progress Use of appropriate governance / oversight techniques Use of collaboration tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegating without verifying performance Impatience and failure to ensure delegate understands or is prepared Lack of follow-ups
8. MAXIMIZE PRODUCTIVITY AND CONTRIBUTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging all to contribute Dealing with non-performance Streamlining or removing bureaucracy Surfacing & addressing issues early 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trying to do everything themselves Failure to solicit ideas of others Responding to suggestions with ‘no’ Ignoring issues until they become fires

Footnotes

1. Different leaders had very different styles and approaches. Successful styles ranged from robust and direct to more subtle and relaxed. Although styles varied the thought strands remained the same.
2. In effective teams, leadership type actions were witnessed not only in the formally appointed Project Leader, but throughout the team. Effective Project Leaders encouraged leadership type behaviors from those they work with.



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The International Project Leadership Academy is a division of Calleam Consulting Ltd. As a provider of online training the academy focuses on helping the worldwide community of Project Managers and Project Leaders develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in project leadership type roles.

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