

# PART III:

## ICCPM CPM International Facilitated Workshops – Global Feedback on Leadership for Complex Projects

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Analysis of the views of the participants in the CPM workshops held in Canberra, Washington and Ashridge identified the need for a richer set of competencies to lead complex projects than those identified in the current standard <sup>19</sup>.

The participants also expressed a concern that the culture surrounding complex project management is not fully supportive of the new kinds of leaders and required behaviour of teams to achieve success.

The workshop participants saw leadership as a fractal task. Leaders need to be both the co-inventors and the stewards of an emerging culture that enables leadership to flourish at all levels of an organization or project. They must establish the conditions for people to thrive and achieve business success in the midst of increasing complexity and rapid change.

An evolving set of rules is at play, which

invites new behaviours, many of which are far from instinctive for most traditional leaders. At this point in history, the new leadership capabilities, combined in one “package”, are rarely demonstrated by leaders in any field worldwide<sup>20</sup>.

How, then, might the ICCPM community begin to address the discrepancy between current reality and the desired outcomes for leadership and culture?

The intention of this working paper is not to make a full set of recommendations, but to point to some of the shifts in the pattern of capabilities, and how this might inform further development of the competencies standards and their actualization.

A list (*Figure 1*) of the desired leadership capabilities and the cultural components leading to the success or failure of projects was compiled largely verbatim from the workshop transcripts:

Desired Leadership Capabilities	What leads to success?	What leads to failure?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptability/agility <sup>22</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoidance of decision making</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional/Social Intelligence<sup>21</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No-blame culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear accountability</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure = learning/part of success <sup>23</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A culture that punishes failure</li> </ul>

**Figure 1:** *Desired leadership capabilities*

<sup>19</sup> We have identified several other competencies necessary to successful management of complex projects in the new environment of rapid change, including the ability to design and explore complex dilemmas with multiple cascading crises so people can practice their roles, and the design of thinking and decision methods on the fly.

<sup>20</sup> Rooke & Tobert, 2005

<sup>21</sup> Keegan, 1994

<sup>22</sup> Joiner & Josephs, 2007

<sup>23</sup> Kolb, 1984

Desired Leadership Capabilities	What leads to success?	What leads to failure?
• Self awareness <sup>24</sup>	• Conflict=learning curriculum	• Political, CYA behaviour
• Awareness of assumptions	• Clear accountability <sup>28</sup>	• Inability/unwillingness to listen to stakeholders
• Ability to follow as well as to lead	• Transparency/honesty/openness	• Win-lose attitude
• Global systems view	• Collaboration, not competition	• Loss of core values
• Ability to embrace/accept multiple viewpoints <sup>25</sup>	• Engagement, commitment, passion <sup>29</sup>	• Lack of communication/empathy from leaders
• Ability to express complex ideas simply <sup>26</sup>	• Openness to change (rather than fear) <sup>30</sup>	• Risk avoidance
• Ability to communicate to multiple levels of understanding and development (implies ability to transcend and include)	• Stakeholder understanding and inclusion	• Reliance on command and control, top down model of leadership
• Collaboration/cooperation	• Valuing diverse ideas/viewpoints <sup>31</sup>	• Failing to develop leadership skills resulting in “trial by fire”
• Remember “the forgotten art of following”	• Development of/respect for high performance teams/professional networks	• Poor expectations management
• Interdependent leaders	• Creating initial conditions for team success <sup>32</sup>	• Not telling the truth
• Empowering teams	• No CYA	• Having to know everything
• Ability to make decisions with partial knowledge	• Cross-team collaboration	
• Have the confidence to allow others to make decisions.	• Strong core values <sup>33</sup>	
• Understanding “butterfly effect”/multi-systems view - 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> order effects are important <sup>27</sup>	• Planning, preparing for risk <sup>34</sup>	
• Ability to communicate including listening!	• Understanding of multiple “lenses” <sup>35</sup>	

**Figure 1:** Desired leadership capabilities (continue)

<sup>24</sup> Keegan, 1994

<sup>25</sup> Torbert, 2004

<sup>26</sup> Cohen & Stewart, 1994

<sup>27</sup> Gilpin, 2008, Gleick, 1988, Kauffman, 1995

<sup>28</sup> Sull & Spinoso, 2007

<sup>29</sup> Loeher & Schwartz, 2003

<sup>30</sup> Keegan & Lahey, 2009

<sup>31</sup> Hofstede, 2001

<sup>32</sup> Losada, 1999, Cohen & Stewart, 1994

<sup>33</sup> Barrett, 2006

<sup>34</sup> Murphy & Gilpin, 2008

<sup>35</sup> Hofstede, 2001

Desired Leadership Capabilities	What leads to success?	What leads to failure?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to use “both/and” as well as “either/or” thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Culture of interdependence <sup>38</sup></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being able to tell the difference between technical and “adaptive” problems <sup>36</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Culture of trust <sup>39</sup></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good balance between relationship and results <sup>37</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free exchange of ideas</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistency arising from sound values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strength based culture/ approach</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to thrive in environment of uncertainty (“unflappable”)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Recognize, acknowledge, and fix issues early</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being willing not to know <sup>40</sup></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confident in the leadership of those around them</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Leader can choose to operate in a global way for the benefit of our entire colony”</li> </ul>		

Figure 1: Desired leadership capabilities (continue)

### Seven Ways of Leading <sup>41</sup>

The field of adult development provides a useful context in which to examine the changing roles and capabilities of leaders. According to one model, outlined below, there are seven different “action logics”, or ways of leading and ways in which leaders make sense of the world around them and react when their safety or power is challenged<sup>42</sup>. The least effective in today’s complex adaptive organizations is the Opportunist action logic, characterized by me-first/win-at-any-cost perspectives; the most effective is the Alchemist, the leader who fully integrates a win-win-win perspective and stewards transformation at interpersonal, organizational and societal levels.

The model of seven action logics<sup>43</sup> comprises:

**The Opportunist** (5% of leaders) who “wins anyway possible”, is “self orientated”, “manipulative”, “believes

‘might makes right’” and is “good in emergencies and sales opportunities”.

**The Diplomat** (12% of leaders) who “avoids overt conflict”, “wants to belong”, “obeys group norms”, “rarely rocks the boat”, is “good as supportive glue within an office” and “helps bring people together”.

**The Expert** (38% of leaders) who “rules by logic and expertise”, “seeks rational efficiency” and is “good as an individual contributor”.

**The Achiever** (30% of leaders) who ‘meets strategic goals’, “effectively achieves goals through teams”, “juggles managerial duties and market demands” and is well suited to managerial roles” that are “action and goal orientated”.

**The Individualist** (10% of leaders) who ‘interweaves competing personal

<sup>36</sup> Heifetz, 2007

<sup>37</sup> Heider, 1997

<sup>38</sup> Wheatley, 1999

<sup>39</sup> Luthans, et. al., 2007

<sup>40</sup> Heifetz, et. al., 2007

<sup>41</sup> Harvard Business School, Publishing Corporation, 2005

<sup>42</sup> Rooke & Tobert, 2005

<sup>43</sup> Rooke & Tobert, 2005

and company action logics”, “creates unique structures to resolve gaps between strategy and performance” and is “effective in venture and consultative roles”.

**The Strategist** (4% of leaders) who “generates organisational and personal transformations”, “exercises the power of mutual inquiry, vigilance and vulnerability for both the short and the long term” and is “effective as a transformational leader”.

**The Alchemist** (1% of leaders) “generates social transformations”, “integrates material, spiritual and societal transformation” and is “good at leading societal wide transformations.”

The most common action logic found among business leaders today is the Expert. These leaders make excellent contributions as individuals, being interested in perfecting their knowledge, continuous improvement and efficiency. What they have yet to develop, however, are many of the skills identified by ICCPM Roundtable participants as essential for the leadership of complex projects, including the ability to:

- Be self-aware and witness one’s own emotions and behaviours.
- Understand they are part of an interdependent system.
- Understand the process of managing complex projects as complex adaptive systems.
- Facilitate the integration of multiple and perhaps competing viewpoints.
- Understand and leverage “polarities”, interdependent pairs of values that need each other over time to sustain high performance.
- Participate in “triple-loop” learning; constantly question the mental models or theories in use.
- Steward the practice of “fractal leadership” where a fundamental set of leadership competencies is shared at every scale in the organization, not just within a part of the organization system.

- Communicate and interact effectively with people at different action logics.
- Transcend and include one’s previous levels of awareness and behaviour and integrate and work with different models of thinking and action, e.g. systems engineering and complex adaptive systems world-views.

These skills begin to appear in the Achiever and are more fully realized in the Individualist, Strategist and Alchemist action logics.

Leaders at these levels of development are facilitators, connectors, orchestrators and sources of inspiration. Beyond possessing the requisite technical knowledge, they are comfortable as the hubs of networks of knowledge and meaning and derive their power from their ability to orchestrate webs of interconnectivity<sup>44</sup>. They seek power with, as distinct from power over and the power to connect rather than control. Their networks are united by a common vision, shared accountability and commitment to principles, not least that all voices are relevant. Motivation is intrinsic rather than extrinsic, and one of the primary functions of the leader at the hub is to monitor these factors and assist in removing barriers to full engagement. These leaders also understand the importance of establishing and promulgating “boundary conditions”, a concept from complexity theory, which in social systems terms are the interaction processes and behaviours that all members of a community adopt in order for a desired culture to emerge.

### Leaders as interactors

There is a stark contrast to the leadership traits that have been admired in traditional command and control cultures and the emerging cultures of shared leadership and interconnectivity. Perhaps more importantly, leadership in the emerging culture is no longer defined in terms of “traits” but thought of as a set of relationships<sup>45</sup>.

Leaders engaged with the emerging culture of complex adaptive systems must have the capacity to comprehend and participate effectively in evolving relationships between people, behaviours

<sup>44</sup> Godin, 2009

and organisation systems via double and triple-loop perspectives.

These perspectives can be understood using the simple analogy of following a map on journey: Single loop learning will tell you whether you're on course, double loop learning will tell you if it's the right course and triple loop learning will enable you to consider whether you're on the correct journey to begin with<sup>46</sup>.

This awareness of multiple levels of systems and multiple perspectives within each level allows leaders to engage in "dynamic steering" necessary to "control" organizations as complex adaptive systems where agility is paramount and rapid change makes outcomes a moving target.

### Leading through paradox

One of overarching themes in the ICCPM discussions and a key skill enabling leaders to steer complex projects through ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty is the ability to deal with paradox, dilemmas or "wicked problems", which continue unresolved despite concerted attempts to "solve" them. A fruitful context in which to view these tensions is to see them as "polarities to manage" rather than "problems to solve".

Polarities are interdependent pairs of values that need each other over time to realize sustained high performance including:

- Focus on Vision AND Focus on Current Reality
- Big Picture Thinking AND Detail Thinking
- Preserve the Core/Continuity AND Innovate/Change
- Centralization AND Decentralization
- Focus on Price AND Focus on Quality
- Structure AND Flexibility
- No-blame Culture AND a Culture of Clear Accountability

Focusing on one value pole to the neglect of the other causes us to experience the "downside" of that pole, e.g. focusing on

details to the exclusion of the big picture may cause us to lose our strategic direction, while focus on the big picture to the exclusion of details will result in delays and sub-standard work.

These dynamic tensions are a fact of life, like inhaling and exhaling. They depend on each other. The energy in the systems they create can be tapped by understanding the whole system and taking action to reap the benefits of both poles while minimizing the downsides. Research has clearly shown that companies that leverage polarities well over time far outperform those that don't<sup>47</sup>. Project leaders who can differentiate between problems to solve and polarities to manage - and who apply both appropriately - are much more likely to facilitate the outcomes they desire.

An essential skill for leaders at every level of development is the ability to deal with such paradox, to "transcend and include" earlier models, theories, methods and ways of interacting, weaving the useful aspects of previous experience into a more robust and complex understanding and set of capabilities. So too, is the ability to co-invent new possibilities and to live with the uncertainties of the Johari window – a window that opens on what we don't know we don't know.

### Conclusion

The competencies for complex project managers needs to be further developed and refined. A central skill will almost certainly be awareness of the "action logics" of different stages of leadership capacity in order to understand where skill development is necessary, or to support others in acquiring the skills necessary to effectively promote the emergence of desirable outcomes for both the people and their organizations.

Complexity theory, the mathematics of fractals, network theory and neuroscience are opening up new windows of awareness about how organizations function as complex adaptive systems and how this shift in perspective may help us think (and act) differently about leadership in the future.

<sup>45</sup> Robertson, 2007

<sup>46</sup> Torbert, 2004

<sup>47</sup> Collins, 2001