

Great Project Leadership: Five Essentials
How Leadership and Ethics Sank Along With the Titanic
Michael O’Brochta, ACP, PMP
President, Zozer Inc.

Abstract

The journey to project management excellence continues beyond earning a PMP® to include practicing project leadership. However, even highly skilled project managers find success difficult to achieve until they can sift through the bewildering amount of leadership information and identify actions essential for them.

This is a how-to paper. It describes **how project managers can take specific leadership actions** that will contribute to project success. This paper defines project leadership; draws from the large body of PMI-sponsored and related project leadership research; draws from the fields of ethics, trust, and professional conduct; and gives emphasis to high performance teams. **Compelling lessons in project leadership from the Titanic** are used to illustrate key points. A list of **five essential project leader actions is included**.

A central theme is that project managers can reduce project risk and become successful project leaders by taking the actions identified. This paper was authored on behalf of the PMI Ethics Member Advisory Group, a global team of experienced volunteers who are committed to facilitate learning and discussion about ethics and professional conduct in project management.

Introduction

The Problem

A recently published book (Taylor, 2011, p. 1) begins with a sentence that states, “There are a lot of footprints in the snow when it comes to advice on leadership.” Indeed, there is a **bewildering amount of potential leadership advice** in written form available. This point can be illustrated by examining the book section found on Amazon.com: approximately sixty-eight thousand books are identified in response to the search term “leadership.” And, not all of the leadership advice is consistent; it certainly is not tailored to the needs of the project manager who is looking to move beyond the practices identified in the PMBOK Guide®. Without a doubt, the “footprints in the snow” are not all headed in the same direction. So, what is a project manager who is looking to advance to higher levels of success to do? Which leadership advice is most appropriate at this point in the project manager’s career progression? What is the impact of leadership and ethical decisions made, or not made, on the success of the project? This situation is illustrated in Exhibit 1 with the reference to the compelling disaster one hundred years ago, the sinking of the *Titanic*. That catastrophe can serve as an apt vehicle from which to explore essentials for success in today’s project environment.

“We have struck iceberg...sinking fast...come to our assistance.” Those words pierced the airwaves on a cold evening in 1912. Before they tapped the last bit of Morse Code, they became the epitaph for the lives of the 1,500 people lost that night on the *Titanic*. The ship was doomed and slowly sliding into its watery grave. Why did the largest, most advanced ship of the century sink?

Those of us who have studied the *Titanic* or at least have seen the movie may know. It wasn’t the iceberg that caused the disaster, but something else. Clear in our minds is the real reason that mighty ship went down – somewhere along the life cycle of the project to design, build, and operate the *Titanic*, leadership and ethics had failed.

The *Titanic* rests on the bottom of the ocean, but we can resurrect the truth. The lessons we learn can have a positive impact on our ability to lead others.

Exhibit 1 – The Problem

The Context

Project management is, for the most part, an activity undertaken with others. While we may refer to these others as team members, stakeholders, or coworkers, we, as project managers, depend on them for the success of our projects. And, the projects we are frequently trying to succeed at managing involve having these others do, or not do, just what is needed in an environment where we have far less authority than responsibility. This limitation of authority that characterizes the project manager's role propels the most successful project managers to demonstrate leadership (Juli, 2011, p. 11). Consequently, leadership is a key to unlocking the solution to motivating with limited authority; it is the currency that is spent achieving project success. And, central to leadership is trust (Covey, 2006, p. 3); without trust, there are no followers. Fortunately, the **speed of trust building in relationships can be accelerated through ethical behavior** (Hosmer, 1985, p. 379).

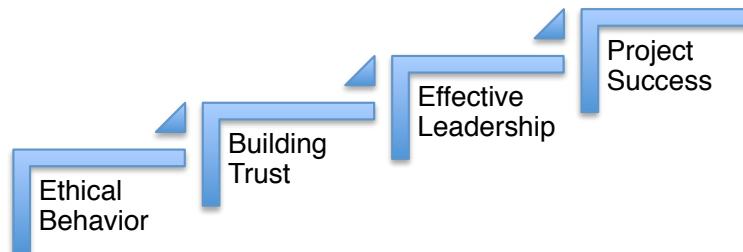


Exhibit 2 – Ethical Importance

This logical progression, which is depicted in Exhibit 2, draws a direct link between ethical behavior, leadership, and project success. The exhibit highlights the central role that ethical behavior plays in building the trust needed by project managers with limited authority to motivate team members and others to achieve project success.

The Leadership Challenge (Kouzes, 2008, p. 32), which continues to be a bestseller after four editions and twenty years in print, is the gold standard for research-based leadership and is the premier resource on becoming a leader. The text informs us that leadership requires trust:

It's clear that if people anywhere are to willingly follow someone - whether it be into battle or into the boardroom, the front office or the front lines - they first want to assure themselves that the person is worthy of their trust.

The establishment of a **direct linkage between leadership and trust** is based on the extensive studies of the characteristics of admired leaders; the characteristic “honest” scored first in each study (Kouzes, 2008, p. 25). Honesty and trust are considered synonymously shared characteristics by the author; over time, leaders and their followers tend to adopt similar and complementary characteristics. This trust-based view of leadership dovetails nicely with the four components of ethical leadership identified above (Johnson, 2003, p.1) as well as with the characterization “without trust, knowledge, and purpose, people are afraid to exercise their authority.” In a recent study conducted by the Vrije University Amsterdam the authors explored the expectations of followers (Akker, Heres, Lasthuizen, and Six, 2009, p. 1). They found that the “more a leader acts in a way that followers feel is the appropriate ethical leader behavior, the more a leader will be trusted.”

A Project Leadership Definition

Definitions of leadership are plentiful. Great minds and famous authors have enlightened and amused us for millennia with their characterizations of leadership. A **fascinating project leadership definition** comes from history that took place a century ago.

In 1914, Ernest Shackleton and his men survived the wreck of their ship, “*Endurance*,” which was crushed in the Antarctic ice; and, for the next two years, they were stranded 1,200 miles from civilization with no means of

communication and no hope of rescue (Morrell & Capparell, 2001, pp. 1-12). When the ice began to break up, Shackleton set out to save them all, undertaking a heroic 800-mile trip across the frigid South Atlantic in little more than a rowboat. Unlike other polar expeditions, every man survived - not only in good health, but also in good spirits - all due to Shackleton's leadership. Here then, we have a highly dramatic example of a classic failure of a project when measured by the "triple constraint" (completion of the project on time, within budget, and at an acceptable level of quality): the expedition never even reached Antarctica, much less crossed it, as had been its purpose; the trip had been scheduled to take months, not years; and losing the entire ship was certainly never a part of the planned costs. Yet in spite of the failure of the project itself, the expedition impressively demonstrates an important quality of a great project manager: project leadership. The journals of the men that Shackleton led on the fateful *Endurance* expedition contained numerous expressions of their inner thoughts and feelings, many of which included the sentiment that it was "the best time of their lives." That's right; in spite of unbelievable hardship, the men felt like it was the best time of their lives because of Shackleton's leadership. Business improvement writers and scholars have found Shackleton's story to be a valuable case study applicable to the office environment. In this example, we see project leadership being practiced with an eye constantly on the true criterion for project success; not on reaching the South Pole, but instead on **building the foundation for enduring future successes**.

We understand that project leadership is defined in terms of the enduring impact on the project team.

Related Leadership Work

Good News

We are beginning to see that the **odds of project success increase with the quality of the project leadership**. But what is the role of the project leader? What is the project leader's primary responsibility? In a notable new book about the leadership principles for project success (Juli, 2011, p. 11), the author's message to the project leader about his/her role is that "you have to ignite this fire of performance and you have to set boundaries within the team for it to function." In an equally notable, recently published book (Bull, 2011, p. 69), the author makes a similar point about the project leaders role by stating, "leaders must be able to demonstrate to their teams why they should be committed...best ways leaders can get commitment from their followers is by demonstrating a high level of commitment themselves."

Now, the question arises about how leadership can be practiced in the context of project management. The good news is that PMI and others have published some significant work relating projects and project leadership (O'Brochta, 2011). We can examine this body of work and extract leadership essentials for PMPs.

Servant Leadership

In Shackleton's story we witnessed **leadership practiced with constant attention to the needs of others** including to save the men, and we view what is referred to as "servant leadership" (Greenleaf, 1977). A servant leadership trend is well underway; thirty-five of *Fortune* magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" practice the principles of servant leadership (Hunter, 2004, p. 18). In servant leadership, the leader is a servant first. Servant leaders understand that they must meet the needs of their followers in order to enable them to reach their full potential. Servant leaders strive to respect and motivate their followers, using their influence to inspire followers to reach new heights. They lead from behind using empathetic listening skills, employing persuasion, and building community within the project team.

Servant leadership is particularly **relevant for project managers who find themselves in situations where they have limited authority** and control over the people they must rely on to accomplish the project work. These project managers recognize that their core and extended project teams and their key stakeholders have competing priorities for their time and talent. These project managers understand the limitations of trying to use autocratic and authoritarian leadership styles and are favorably disposed to adopting more effective leadership approaches.

Competency Framework

A framework for the definition, assessment, and development of project manager competence has been provided by PMI that presents an overall view of the skills and behaviors one would need to develop competence as a project manager (PMI, 2007). This document includes leading as a unit of competence (p. 28-29) to **guide, inspire, and motivate team members** and other project stakeholders to manage and effectively overcome issues to achieve project objectives. Elements are included to create a team environment that promotes high performance to build and maintain effective relationships, to motivate and mentor project team members, to take accountability for delivering the project, and to use influencing skills when required.

While attention is paid in this framework document to the leader of a project team through all phases of the project life cycle, particular emphasis is provided for the aspects of the phases related to monitor and control. In these aspects the management of the project team explicitly includes team building, team satisfaction, and team performance. Here we see project manager actions being influenced, not only by the explicit project objectives, but also by the needs of the project team.

Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership approach, which has become one of the dominant theories of organizational leadership, has now been shown to correlate with project success (Dominick, 2007, p. 11-23). In this study published by PMI, we learn that all four of the **examined measures of project success were significantly more likely to occur when transformational leadership was used by the project manager**, the projects were more likely to be completed efficiently, projects were more likely to be completed effectively, the client was more likely to be satisfied, and the underlying business objectives were more likely to be achieved.

Transformational leadership behaviors are about **coping with and even inspiring change**; transformational leaders motivate followers by heightening their awareness of task outcomes, encouraging them to transcend self-interests for the good of the team (Bass, 1985, p. 23). Followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader. As a result, transformational leaders broaden and elevate followers' goals, providing them with confidence to go beyond minimally acceptable expectations. Transformational leadership also implies a more positive personal connection between leaders and followers. The study results suggest that project managers can sometimes compensate for a lack of formal authority by developing their transformational leadership skills.

Leadership Theory and Practice

Jeffery Pinto, who has studied and written about project leadership for many years, provides us with a comprehensive picture of the role that leadership plays in project management. In his book about project leadership theory and practice published by PMI (Pinto, 1998, p. 133), he writes that “the best scheduling techniques, risk management, scope development, project control, and resource provisions will not ensure project success in the face of poor project leadership.” And, the **number one key leadership point topping his list is to learn the team members' needs** (p. 134-135).

The objective of learning the needs of each individual team member is to understand what makes each person tick, what tasks each team member craves or loathes, and what motivates each team member. Armed with that level of understanding, the project leader can then match the work at hand with the team members' strengths and passions to help team members grow their skills. It is instructive to note that the project leader can also tailor the leadership style to the needs of each individual team member by being more directive in the early phases of a task by telling the team member what to do, and being more facilitative as the task gets underway when the team member is more comfortable with his/her assignment.

Situational Leadership

The value of adjusting the style of the leader to the individual and situation, as recommended by Pinto, is a well-established and accepted approach. Hersey and Blanchard, with their groundbreaking “Management of

Organizational Behavior” book, first published four decades ago, provide us with a powerful model for assessing the organizational state and applying a leadership style to fit the situation (Hersey, 2007). The fundamental underpinning of the situational leadership theory is there is no single "best" style of leadership. Effective leadership is task-relevant, and the **most successful leaders adapt their leadership style to the maturity of the individual or group** they are attempting to lead/influence. Situational leaders address different people and different situations in different ways; one size does not fit all.

In Exhibit 3, maturity is assessed using a four-point scale, ranging from a general lack of willingness and ability to a high level of willingness and ability.

- M1 - They generally lack the specific skills required for the job at hand and are unable and unwilling to do or to take responsibility for this job or task.
- M2 - They are still unable to take on responsibility for the task being done; however, they are willing to work at the task.
- M3 - They are experienced and able to do the task but lack the confidence to take on responsibility.
- M4 - They are experienced at the task and comfortable with their own ability to do it well. They are able and willing not only to do the task but to also take responsibility for the task.

The leadership styles are characterized according to their degree of supportive relationship behavior and degree of directive task behavior.

- S1: Telling – The relationship is characterized by one-way communication in which the leader defines the roles of the individual or group and provides the what, how, why, when, and where to do the task.
- S2: Selling - While the leader is still providing the direction, he or she is now using two-way communication and providing the socioemotional support that will allow the individual or group being influenced to buy into the process.
- S3: Participating - This decision making about aspects of how the task is accomplished is now shared; the leader is providing less task behavior while maintaining high relationship behavior.
- S4: Delegating - The leader is still involved in decisions; however, the process and responsibility has been passed to the individual or group. The leader stays involved to monitor progress.

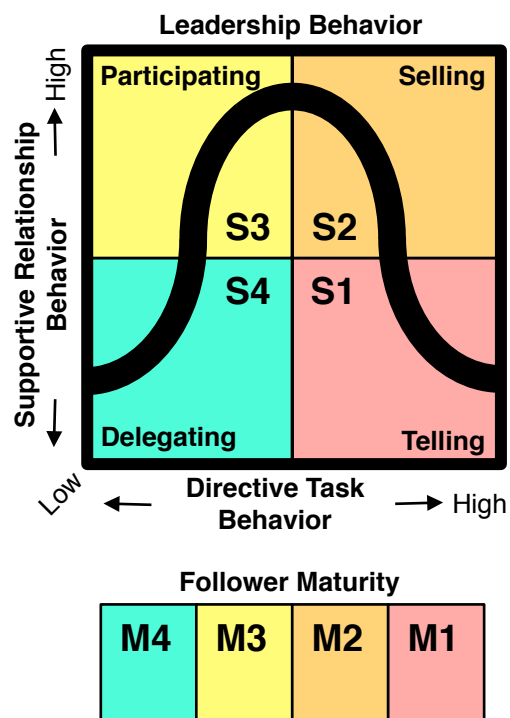


Exhibit 3 – Situational Leadership

High Performance Teams

Upon examination of the body of related leadership work, an important pattern emerges. Emphasis is given to the concept that projects succeed through the efforts of a team, that the role of the leader is to support the needs of the team members, and that the nature of the leadership support will vary as a function of the situation. Simply stated, servant leadership is integrated with situational leadership. In projects, one of the dominant situational variables is the stage of the development of the project team during the life cycle of the project. As projects advance through their initiating/planning/executing/closing phases in their life cycle, the project team members also advance through stages of team development. When groups of individuals initially gather to work on the early aspects of a project, they represent a situation that is much different from when an experienced team focuses on well-defined activities later in the life of a project.

In what has become a de facto standard for describing and understanding team development, psychologist Bruce Tuckman **formulated the forming, storming, norming, and performing concept for team development stages** (Tuckman, 1965, pp. 384-399). A summary of these four stages, together with the leadership role for each of these stages, is contained in Exhibit 4. As groups of individuals’ progress through the stages, they evolve into a team – occasionally into a high performance team.

High performance teams are highly focused on their goals. Their team members have **specific roles and complementary talents and skills aligned with and committed to a common purpose**; these team members consistently show high levels of collaboration and innovation that produce superior results (Wellins, 1991, pp. xxi). The high performance team is regarded as tight-knit, focused on their goal and nothing else. Team members are so devoted to their purpose that they will surmount any barrier to achieve the team's goals. Within the high performance team, people are highly skilled and are able to interchange their roles. Leadership within the team is not vested in a single individual. Instead, the leadership role is taken up by various team members, according to the need at that moment in time. High performance teams have robust methods of resolving conflict efficiently so that conflict does not become a roadblock to achieving the team's goals. There is a sense of clear focus and intense energy within a high performance team. Collectively, the team has its own consciousness indicating shared norms and values. The team feels a strong sense of accountability for achieving their goals. Team members display elevated levels of mutual trust towards each other.

Stages	Description	Leadership Role
Forming	<p>Group members are “polite,” testing boundaries, attempting to define their roles.</p> <p>Members are focused on getting to know one another and why they are on this team.</p>	<p>Director/Facilitator</p> <p>Works with team members to establish clear roles and expectations, encourages full participation, provides process, and addresses immediate needs of the team.</p>
Storming	<p>As team orients itself, differences arise around roles, task, personality styles, and other related issues.</p> <p>Conflict arises, and they learn to deal with conflict, as a group.</p> <p>Ground rules and a code of conduct is established; roles are more clearly defined.</p>	<p>Coordinator/Mediator</p> <p>Anticipates and addresses problems and conflicts, helps the team learn how to deal with conflict, surfaces key issues and helps the team work collaboratively to address them, and keeps team focused on the task.</p>
Norming	<p>Roles are clear; task, expectations, and goals are clarified.</p> <p>More cohesion forms among group members.</p> <p>Members are learning how to work together and be productive.</p>	<p>Coach/Advocate</p> <p>Exerts influence in and outside the team to acquire necessary resources, treats each member with empathy and respect, creates an arena to explore and reframe challenges and problems, and models and encourages self-leadership and learning.</p>
Performing	<p>The group is interdependent, and feedback systems are in place to improve the group’s performance.</p> <p>The goal is visible, and the group adopts a “can do” attitude.</p>	<p>Mentor/Advisor</p> <p>Acts as a resource and advisor to the team, shares observations and insights, and recognizes each team member for his/her unique talent and abilities.</p>

Exhibit 4 – Leadership Role On High Performance Team

Five Great Project Leadership Essentials

Synthesis

The progression in this paper is toward action. After exposure to and understanding of the body of related work presented in this paper, the project manager can analyze and synthesize the provided information and identify specific actions that can be taken to move closer to becoming the leader of a high performance project team. This analysis can serve as the basis for a how-to list.

Alternately, consider our list shown in Exhibit 5 and described below. It is a synthesis of the information provided in this paper and illustrated by episodes from the *Titanic* disaster. This disaster has been expertly examined through the lens of project management in *Project Management Blunders* (Kozak-Holland, 2012) and in *Titanic Lessons in Project Leadership* (Sidhu, 2012). Both of these books contain fascinating insights that offer considerable breadth and depth beyond what is included in this limited length paper.

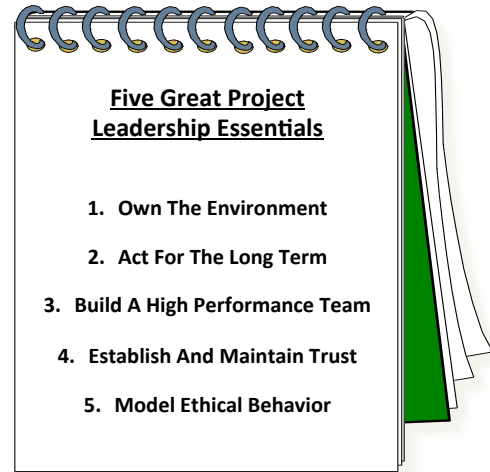


Exhibit 5 – Leadership Essentials

Titanic Background

The *Titanic* was a British passenger liner that sank in the North Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912 after colliding with an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton, UK to New York City, US. The sinking of *Titanic* caused the deaths of 1,500 people in one of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in modern history. The classic minute-by-minute account of the sinking of the *Titanic* is told in *A Night To Remember* first published almost sixty years ago (Lord, 1955), retold in James Cameron's 1997 *Titanic* smash movie hit, and factually summarized as follows (RMS Titanic, 2013, ¶1-5).

The RMS Titanic was the largest ship afloat at the time it entered service. Titanic was the second of three Olympic class ocean liners operated by the White Star Line, and was built by the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast with Thomas Andrews as her naval architect. Andrews was among those lost during the sinking. On her maiden voyage, she carried 2,224 passengers and crew.

Under the command of Edward Smith, the ship's passengers included some of the wealthiest people in the world, as well as hundreds of emigrants from Great Britain and Ireland, Scandinavia and elsewhere throughout Europe seeking a new life in North America. The ship was designed to be the last word in comfort and luxury, with an on-board gymnasium, swimming pool, libraries, high-class restaurants and opulent cabins. A wireless telegraph provided for the convenience of passengers as well as for operational use. Though Titanic had advanced safety features such as watertight compartments and remotely activated watertight doors, there were not enough lifeboats to accommodate all of those aboard. Titanic only carried enough lifeboats for slightly more than half of the number on board.

Four days into the crossing and about 375 miles south of Newfoundland, she hit an iceberg at 11:40 pm ship's time. The glancing collision caused Titanic's hull plates to buckle inwards along her starboard side and opened five of her sixteen watertight compartments to the sea; the ship gradually filled with water. Meanwhile, passengers and some crewmembers were evacuated in lifeboats, many of which were launched only partly loaded. A disproportionate number of men were left aboard because of a "women and children first" protocol followed by some of the officers loading the lifeboats. By 2:20 AM, she broke apart and foundered, with well over one thousand people still aboard. Just under two hours after Titanic foundered, the Cunard liner RMS Carpathia arrived on the scene of the sinking, where she brought aboard an estimated 705 survivors.

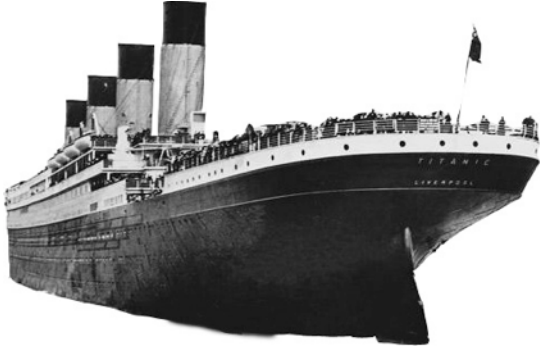


Exhibit 6 – Titanic

The disaster was greeted with worldwide shock and outrage at the huge loss of life and the operational failures that had led to it. Public inquiries in Britain and the United States led to major improvements in maritime safety. One of their most important legacies was the establishment in 1914 of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), which still governs maritime safety today. Many of the survivors lost all of their money and possessions and were left destitute; many families, particularly those of crewmembers from Southampton, lost their primary breadwinners. Some of the male survivors were accused of cowardice for leaving the ship while people were still on board; the White Star Line's chairman, Bruce Ismay, who boarded a lifeboat during the sinking, faced social ostracism for the rest of his life.

Own The Environment

Projects exist within their own environment. To be sure, the organizational environment in which the project resides does play an important role in project success (O'Brochta, 2006), but so too does the environment within the project itself. By environment, we are referring to the culture, norms, behaviors, and values that contribute to the unique social and psychological aspects of the project. The **project environment impacts** the way business is conducted, how team members are treated, the level of autonomy and accountability in decision making, the development of new ideas, how power and information flow, and the ethical and professional conduct of the team. The project environment impacts how committed team members are toward tasks and the project objectives.

We have seen that even in harsh external environments, such as being stranded for a long period of time in dangerous conditions, as was the case for Shackleton's crew, **the environment within the project team can be quite positive**. An effective project leader, such as Shackleton, can be responsible for establishing and maintaining a project team environment described by team members as "the best time of their lives." This demonstration of servant leadership was practiced with constant attention to the needs of the project team. In servant leadership decisions are made and actions taken based on the needs of the members of the project team; this enables them to focus and be successful on their project task responsibilities.

We have also seen that in harsh external environments, such as the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*, that disaster can occur when leadership creates a toxic environment within the project team. Even though the *Titanic* was equipped with a wireless telegraph, the environment created for its operators was such that they came to understand that priority was to be given to the convenience messages from the paying passengers over the operational messages essential for the safe operation of the ship. In the hours leading up to the *Titanic's* collision with an iceberg, the wireless operators received multiple ice warning messages from other ships; however, the backlog of passenger traffic that existed at the time was given priority over these warning messages; at one point the *Titanic* senior wireless operator Jack Phillips responded to a warning from the freighter Californian with the reply, "Shut up!" This environmental pressure to compromise safety in favor of luxury and convenience began long before the ship went to sea. The *Titanic* ship designers were employed by Harland and Wolff and were some of the best in the business; they had significant experience with large oceangoing ships. Even with that experience they encountered an environment under White Star Line's chairman, Bruce Ismay that encouraged them to reduce the number and location of lifeboat stations in favor of panoramic views for the first-class passengers, to reduce the height of the bulkhead walls to near the waterline in favor of an expansive dining room, and to lower the double hull to below waterline in favor of interior space. Even the sea trial was compromised; only one day was spent compared to the four-week common practice at that time.

The environment, which can make (Shackleton) or break (*Titanic*) a project team, **is influenced less by circumstance and more by leadership actions and behaviors**. Successful project leaders employ the principles of servant leadership and are characterized by a focus on the needs of the team members.

Act For The Long Term

Although projects, by definition, are temporary endeavors, leadership and ethics are not. For project managers looking to expand their definition of success beyond the immediate boundaries of a specific project, giving **consideration to the long-term impact of their actions and decisions is essential**. This type of leadership inspires followers to be innovative and foster change to transform the workplace. The *Titanic* project actually seemed to get off to a strong start in this regard when White Star Line's chairman cleverly positioned the strategy for the *Titanic*. He understood that his major competitor, the Cunard Line, was building two superliners that would offer unparalleled speed. Rather than compete on speed, Ismay focused the *Titanic* on luxury and capacity. In this way, a clear vision was established, a good start for any project and one that no doubt helped gain full support and funding from J. P. Morgan, the richest man in the world.

However effective this strategy appeared to be, it had one major shortcoming. It focused narrowly on the short term marketing needs of the project to the point of excluding long-term attention to important design related aspects voiced by the project team. As described, leadership theory and practice must be focused on the project team members' needs (Pinto, 1998, p. 134-135). This lack of attention to the *Titanic* project team members was evidenced during the design phase. Although the team had specifications for features such as the three-story staircase and the swimming pool, which contributed to the luxury experience, they were left to make educated guesses about what the luxurious experience really meant and about what other design features could be reduced in order to achieve luxury. This ultimately led to pressure to make design decisions to reduce the use of the double hull, reduce the size of some bulkheads, and reduce the number of lifeboats - factors related to the safety of the passengers. This focus away from the long term needs of the project team was also evidenced during the testing phase when the schedule for the sea trials was compressed to one day instead of the common practice of four weeks – further compromising the safety of the passengers.

In contrast, Shackleton was so focused on the long-term needs of his team that when he formed an expedition several years after the fateful ship *Endurance* was crushed in the Antarctic one third of his crew returned (Huntford, 1985, p. 684). They did this because they knew that Shackleton was in it for more than the short-term objectives of the particular expedition. They had seen this long-term focus demonstrated repeatedly by Shackleton in the Antarctic when the ship first became trapped in the expanding pack ice and the expedition focus shifted from its original purpose of traversing Antarctica by way of the South Pole to having the crew survive the winter. He continued to maintain this long-term focus on the well being of his crew when the ice flow they camped on after the ship was crushed melted in the spring thaw, when their row boats stranded on a barren rock outcropping 800 miles from the nearest civilization, and when hiking the final miles across incredibly mountainous terrain toward an outpost and rescue.

While we cannot be certain that Ismay's luxury vision for the short-term at the expense of the longer-term design related aspects voiced by the project team doomed the *Titanic*, we can be certain that it contributed to the social ostracism he faced during the rest of his life. Furthermore, we can understand that Shackleton's transformational actions for the long term are behind the heroic stature he has today.

Build A High Performance Team

Projects succeed through the combined efforts of the project team members. Great project leadership creates an **environment where team members achieve together to outperform** other teams and to outperform expectations. Although individual talent levels may be elevated in a high performance team, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Tuckman, 1965, pp. 384-399). High performance teams spend more time in the *performing* stage, and when confronted with a challenge, they spend less time recovering to return to the *performing* stage.

In the Antarctic on the ship *Endurance*, Shackleton promoted team development by cross training all of the crew; for months they rotated jobs so that each man could understand, if not become proficient in, the duties performed by others. The ship physicians, scientists, seamen, and carpenters all swapped duties. Individuals were asked by Shackleton, during frequent one-on-one discussions, for their opinions. Strong bonds were built to each other, to their common purpose, and to Shackleton. Under harsh conditions, such as when their frozen wooden

hulled ship was crushed by the expanding Artic pack ice, the men responded as one to unload only the bare essentials for an encampment on the ice. Months later, when spring melted the ice beneath their encampments, the men again acted as one and took to rowboats. This “can do” attitude is identified as a characteristic of the most mature and advanced stage of team development.

In stark contrast we see an “every man for himself” attitude on the *Titanic*. During the sinking, the wireless operators actually beat a crewmember to death who was trying to secure one of their life vests. Likewise, crewmembers, and even Bruce Ismay, saved themselves at the expense of others by securing space in the limited number of lifeboats. Even the ships lookouts suffered because of this type of attitude; they were refused any of the binoculars afforded the officers even through they had none to use while performing their official duties to be on the lookout for ice. It seems as if time and effort for team building were in short supply. There were about 900 crew on the *Titanic* voyage, of which only 83 were mariners capable of sailing the vessel. Most of the crew were hired just before sailing and did not benefit from any land-based preparation, nor did they receive much benefit during the one-day sea trials. Consequently, roles and responsibilities, processes, and working relationships were lacking – characteristics necessary even for modest stages of team development.

Lord Pirrie, chairman of the Harland and Wolff ship design firm and Bruce Ismay, chairman of the White Star Line, the company that owned the *Titanic*, were both strong characters and strong leaders. They both employed a clear hierarchical structure, with top-down command and control type leadership. Under this directive style of leadership, the people at the top set the direction and those below followed orders; decisions were rarely challenged largely for fear of reprisal. Employees were organized into groups and were motivated to follow orders, even when those orders conflicted with their own views. An “us versus them” attitude prevailed – just the opposite of what is needed for a high performance team.

Establish And Maintain Trust

Central to leadership is trust (Covey, 2006, p. 3); **without trust, there are no followers**. The direct linkage between leadership and trust enables projects to benefit from the full commitment and abilities of the team members. Since project tasks require much more than assembly line proficiency, they succeed or fail as a function of the relationship between the project leader and team member; they require judgment and decision-making by the team members. If this relationship is **built and carried out based on mutual trust**, the full potential will exist for successful judgments and decisions.

Shackleton’s men trusted him with their lives. When they signed on in response to the notice depicted in Exhibit 7, when they set sail bound for Antarctica to accomplish the first traverse of that continent in history, when they regrouped into lifeboats after their ship was crushed by pack ice, when they split into two teams with one left behind and the other rowing 800 hundred miles across frigid open waters, they trusted him. And he trusted them. During their eighteen-month ordeal under the harshest and most death defying conditions, trust sustained them to the point where their situation was viewed not as hardship bust “as the best time of their lives.”

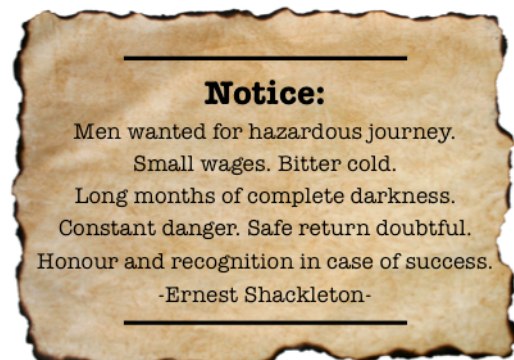


Exhibit 7 – Notice

On the *Titanic*, trust was in shorter supply than lifeboats. One of the *Titanic*’s passengers noticed a mariner filling a bucket with tap water and asked why he was doing that. The mariner explained that he was supposed to take the seawater’s temperature to assess the likelihood of it freezing into icebergs; since the rope was not long enough to reach the sea, he was filling the bucket with the only water to which he had access! The ice detection test was worthless. This mariner could communicate what he was doing and why to the passenger, yet he didn’t think he could tell his senior officers because he feared a reprimand; no trust. This lack of trust existed not only among the mariners but with the officers as well. Captain Smith, who would normally command full authority for all decisions aboard the ship, found himself in quite a different situation when he learned that Bruce Ismay would be on the maiden voyage. While the close association of a key sponsor can be a huge benefit on a project, it had just the opposite effect on the *Titanic*; it changed the power dynamic on the ship. Ismay was a very influential character who wielded much power and who did not withhold using it. Consequently,

Captain Smith's legitimate positional authority was undercut. Just before the *Titanic* sailed, Ismay placed a shipping announcement in the *New York Times* that stated the ship would complete its maiden voyage crossing the Atlantic one day earlier than the published schedule. Since he did this without consulting with or notifying the captain, the officers on the ship lost trust in Captain Smith and the chain of command. The loss of trust on the *Titanic* led to the loss of leadership.

Model Ethical Behavior

Ethical behavior and professional conduct are the foundation upon which trust, leadership, and project success are built (Hosmer, 1985, p. 329). Acting unethically or unprofessionally causes the foundation to weaken and crumble. Projects inevitably involve decisions and actions by all participants. Without a system of moral/ethical principles and professional practices, behavior can and will result in decisions and actions counter to project success.

The freezing conditions experienced by Shackleton and his men at the bottom of the world near Antarctica when combined with the long-term lack of food were ingredients for illness and death. Indeed, other explorations of the time were routinely marked by death (Huntford, 1985, p. 545). Yet, incredibly, not only did no one on Shackleton's expedition die, all survived in relatively good health. They survived because Shackleton and his men cared for one another with the same attention that ill and wounded people merited back home. If someone shivered uncontrollably, they massaged him to warmth; they dressed each other's wounds; food was scrupulously measured, rationed, and equally divided regardless of rank or status, down to the smallest scraps of meat, pinches of salt, and lumps of fat. Their ethical code of mutual concern and respect and their professionalism required them to do no less.

Ethical transgressions abounded on the *Titanic*. During the foreshortened sea trials, the Board of Trade inspectors allowed shortcuts in the final safety inspections. As part of the final readiness check, a lifeboat drill was carried out in front of the inspectors. During the drill, only two of the twenty lifeboats were lowered, and they did not reach the water, so the test was never fully completed. The drill outlined that it took eight to ten well-trained men to prepare and lower one lifeboat, but they did not consider what would be required if all the lifeboats had to be launched at once. At sea, the ethical transgressions continued to the point where during the emergency caused by the collision with an iceberg Bruce Ismay was so keen to get the *Titanic* moving again that he discounted the opportunity to send a distress call. From Ismay's perspective, a distress call would pose a real problem, as it would shatter the marketing hype about the invincibility of the ship. For him, a far better option was to return to port where he could contain the news story so it would be reported only as a minor incident. This situation presented yet another ethical dilemma where business considerations were weighed against the safety of passengers and crew. Ismay was so focused on saving White Star's and his own reputation, that it blinded him from sensibly exploring all options.

PMI members commit to act ethically and professionally when they become and renew their membership (PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, 2006). They must **meet the mandatory elements within the Code** to demonstrate responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty, and are strongly encouraged to adhere to the aspirational sections of that document as well. PMI members also have a five-step Ethical Decision-Making Framework (EDMF) they can use to **guide them when confronted with an ethical dilemma** (PMI Ethical Decision-Making Framework, 2012). The EDMF can help to frame problems, clarify goals, examine assumptions and options, discern hidden values, evaluate evidence, and assess conclusions.

Conclusion

Progress Is Incremental And Cumulative

Project managers who would like to continue their journey beyond earning a PMP® to include practicing project leadership have a bewildering amount of leadership information to sift through to identify actions essential for them at this point in their careers. Since they understand the **linkage between project success and project leadership**, they are motivated to identify and adopt key project leadership techniques. These techniques, which have been summarized in this paper, are situational and transformational and are largely focused on serving the long-term needs of the project team.

This paper presents the compelling story of the sinking of the *Titanic* contrasted with the Shackleton expedition to draw attention to five great project leadership essentials. These essentials are: **ownership of the project environment, focus on acting for the long term, building a high performance team, establishing and maintaining trust, and modeling ethical behavior**. A direct linkage has been shown to exist between project success, effective leadership, building trust, and ethical behavior.

Progress, when it comes to great project leadership, is incremental and cumulative. It does not come all at once, and it does not occur in all elements of the job or in all individuals at the same pace. Since, by definition, we are dealing with behavior and change, we must recognize that we are involved with what is usually a slow evolution rather than a sudden revolution. Individuals have spent years becoming who they are. The good news is that the cumulative effects of modestly paced, genuine project leadership action are enduring.

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