

Quiet Leadership Tips for Project Success
How Leading Quietly Saved the Men of the Shipwrecked *Endurance*
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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 limited until they can establish a culture of quiet high performance leadership in a loud, “culture of personality” world.

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

A central theme is that project managers can reduce project risk and become successful project leaders by following the tips identified.

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** available in written form. 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 story of George, the project manager who is struggling to be heard over the din of louder voices from more experienced project managers. In that story,

George was thrilled at his recent assignment to manage one of his organization’s top priority projects; he viewed this new responsibility as evidence of just how highly his senior management thought of his new PMP® certification and related abilities. Further evidence came when some of the top-performing employees were matrixed to work on his project team. These were some of the same people who worked on other top priority projects; they were the best of the best.

Unfortunately, George’s thrill was short lived. In no time at all, he was trying to deal with the clamor from other, more experienced project managers, who were overriding his interests and sidetracking his matrixed project team members in order to address their top priority projects at the expense of his. They had learned that by following the “squeaky wheel gets the grease” idiom, their loud and forceful voices were being heard over his.

No matter the volume and intensity of his own voice, the organization and the top-performing employees he needed seemed to have deaf ears. George recognized that his newfound stature in the organization was insufficient to lead these top-performing employees toward serving his project needs.

Exhibit 1 – Problem

we learn that George is managing a project team comprised of competent and sought-after people who have multiple projects, besides his, that they can spend their time working on. We can surmise that the priority setting and resource allocation responsibilities of upper management may leave a bit to be desired; consequently, competition for resources may fall, out of necessity, to the project managers themselves. George understands that, given his relative inexperience compared to the other more seasoned project managers, it is a competition he cannot win. George needs to find a way to connect with his project team members and others, such that they will not be distracted by the loud and persistent voices and they will be responsive to his needs.

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. We are frequently managing projects in organizations with limited maturity where processes for prioritizing projects and resources are far from rational and repeatable; indeed, the average maturity of organizations, when assessed on a five-point scale is only about level two-and-a-half (PwC, 2004, p. 9). Organizations at this maturity level are characterized by informal processes that are not yet institutionalized, by a lack of adherence to standards, and by inattention to lessons learned; these are the types of organizations where the **culture of personality dominates**, where the loudest voice, the voice of the extrovert, frequently gets the attention as depicted in Exhibit 2. These organizations reflect a decades-long rise of the extrovert where value has been perceived not so much in what an employee knew or could do but on how gregarious they were (Cain, 2013, p. 28).



Exhibit 2 Context

The loudness of a voice can be characterized on a personality orientation scale; Myers-Briggs is perhaps the most cited scale of this kind (Myers-Briggs, 1980, p. 7). The authors of this scale state, “The introvert’s main interests are in the inner world of concepts and ideas, while the extrovert is more involved with the outer world of people and things. Therefore, when circumstances permit, the introvert concentrates perception and judgment upon ideas, while the extrovert likes to focus them on the outside environment.” This inward focus on the part of the introverts runs counter to the reality of the limited maturity organizations where inward focus seems to result in being ignored. Yet, about half of project managers surveyed are introverts (Cohen, 2013, p. 81). And for those project managers who enter the occupation by choice, not by happenstance, the predominance of introverts is even greater (Mullaly, 2006, p.4). That means that **half or more of the project managers have a tendency toward inward focus that runs counter to being heard in the typical organization where the loudest voice gets the attention.**

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 in a low maturity organization; it is the currency that is spent achieving project success. But not just any type of leadership will do, the leadership type must be authentic; it must be the type of leadership that is consistent with the personality orientation of the project leader (George, 2004, p. 12). Authentic leadership emphasizes building the leader’s legitimacy through honest relationships with followers who value their input and are built on an ethical foundation. Generally, authentic leaders are positive people with truthful self-concepts who promote openness. By building trust, acting ethically, and generating enthusiastic support from their subordinates, authentic leaders are able to improve individual and project team performance. And for the half or more of the project management population characterized as introverts, **authentic leadership equates to quiet leadership**. Boisterous directives telling project team members and others what they want or what to do, when coming from an introverted project manager, are anything but authentic; they are disingenuous at best and are likely counterproductive. Authentic leadership from introverted project managers is confidence in small and obscure deeds performed in support of project team members; it is quiet leadership.

Moreover, central to authentic quiet 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).

This logical progression, depicted in Exhibit 3, draws a direct link between ethical behavior, building trust, quiet leadership, and project success. The exhibit highlights the central role that ethical behavior plays in building the trust needed by introverted project managers with limited authority, in a culture where the loudest voice dominates, 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.”

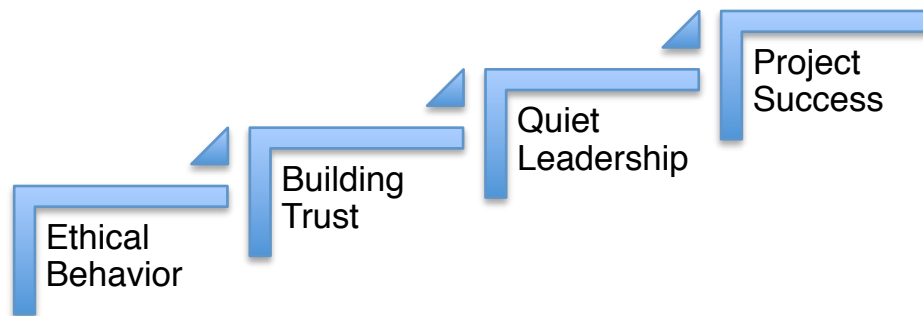


Exhibit 3 – Progression

The establishment of a **direct linkage between quiet 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, quiet leaders and their followers tend to adopt similar and complementary characteristics. This trust-based view of quiet leadership dovetails well 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, 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.”

Quiet Leadership Definition

Quiet leadership is described as more than a set of highly pragmatic tactics (Badaracco, 2002, p. 10). “It is a way of thinking about people, organizations, and effective action. It is a way of understanding the flow of events and discerning the best ways to make a difference. And, in a small way, quiet leadership is also an act of faith: an expression of confidence in the ultimate force of what [Albert] Schweitzer called ‘small and obscure deeds.’ In fact, this implicit faith is something quiet leaders share with great leaders and heroes – most of whom worked quietly and patiently, for years or decades, laying the groundwork for their celebrated achievements.” Quiet leadership is about leading from the back, leading with actions over words, listening, and forming relationships.

Interestingly, quiet leaders, introverts if you will, are responsible for remarkable achievements. In a recent *New York Times* best selling book titled *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking* (Cain, 2013, p. 5) we learn that without quiet introverts there would be no theory of relativity or gravity, no Charlie Brown, no Google, and no Harry Potter. A **fascinating quiet 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 year and a half, they were stranded 1,200 miles from civilization with no means of communication and no hope of rescue (Morrell, 2001, p. 1-12). “The temperatures were so low the men

could hear water freeze. They subsisted on a diet of penguins, dogs, and seals. 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 successful project manager: quiet 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 quiet leadership. He did not bark orders from the ship's helm; rather, he quietly performed his leadership one-on-one with each crewman. 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 quiet 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 one relationship at a time.**

Related Quiet Leadership Work

Good News

We are beginning to see that the **odds of project success increase with the quality of the project leadership.** Additionally we are beginning to understand how quiet leadership can be effective when it is authentically practiced by introverted project managers. 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 their 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 leader's 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."

The good news is that PMI and others have published some significant work relating projects and project leadership (O'Brochta, 2011). Quiet leadership is gaining considerable traction too. We can examine this body of work and extract quiet leadership tips for project success.

Servant Leadership

In Shackleton's story, we witnessed **quiet 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" practices 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 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.

Personality Orientation

In a study addressing project success rates as a function of Myers-Briggs project manager personality orientation (Cohen, 2013, p. 84), the researchers found an important discriminator that bodes well for the quiet leadership style. The project managers who demonstrated the Sensing-Feeling personality type experienced project success rates significantly higher than any other personality types. These project managers based decisions on facts with emphasis on the expected effect on others. These project managers moved beyond the task orientation of their peers to focus on relationships; relationships built on trust. In a similarly focused study (Mullaly, 2006, p.2), a greater percentage of project successes were correlated with project managers who demonstrated Introverted-Thinking and Introverted-Feeling personality types than any other types. These project managers tended to be detail oriented, analytical, and precise, while preferring to assist and support others. While personality orientation alone is likely not a strong predictor of project success, these studies have revealed that the odds of project success are raised if the project manager demonstrates quiet leadership characteristics.

Leading Quietly

Quiet leaders exhibit **moral courage** (Badaracco, 2002, p. 71-148). Because they care about resolving complicated situations, quiet leaders usually choose the more difficult option when faced with a dilemma, staying in their jobs and working on problems. When faced with a problem entwined with complexities, they work patiently and persistently to get a grasp of what they know, what they need to learn, and whose help they require. They **drill down** toward the root cause, and they approach what they find with the conviction that practical-minded **creativity** can almost always generate new possibilities for responsible action. That action will be taken through the implementation of a win-win workable **compromise**, one that leaves all parties inclined to work together again and again.

In a study conducted by a Wharton management professor (Grant, 2011, p. 539), one hundred sixty-three college students were divided into competing teams charged with folding as many T-shirts as possible in ten minutes. Unbeknownst to the participants, each team included two actors. In some teams, the two actors acted passively, following the leader's instructions. In other teams, one of the actors said, "I wonder if there is a more efficient way to do this." The results were striking as captured in Exhibit 4. The introverted leaders were twenty percent more likely to follow the suggestion – and the introvert-led teams had twenty-four percent better results than the teams of the extroverted leaders. One of the study conclusions was that "**introverts are uniquely good at leading initiative-takers.**"

Introvert-led teams had twenty-four percent better results than extrovert-led teams

Exhibit 4 – Benefit

Gandhi is considered the preeminent leader of Indian Nationalism. By employing nonviolent disobedience he led India to independence, galvanized civil rights and freedom across the world, and inspired historical greats Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr. He demonstrated what has more recently been described as soft power (Nye, 2004, p. 3-9). **Soft power** is about getting others to want the outcomes you want and co-opting them rather than coercing them toward those outcomes. After all, Gandhi had virtually no hard or positional power; his personality was shy and introverted, yet his form of leadership reshaped history. One of the essential attributes of soft power is quiet persistence, an attribute that is based on sustained attention and sustained accountability (Cain, 2013, p. 200-201).

We have noted aspects of leading quietly include moral courage, drilling down, creativity, compromise, and soft power. And we have noted a study that reports that in situations where initiative taking is desired, introverted leaders actually outperform extroverted leaders.

Quiet Project Leadership Tips

Synthesis

The progression in this paper is toward action. After exposure to and comprehension 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 maximize quiet leadership concepts and practices. This analysis can serve as the basis for a how-to list.

Alternately, consider the list shown in Exhibit 5 and described below. It is a synthesis of the information provided in this paper and is illustrated by episodes from Shackleton's historic Antarctic adventure. Note that this adventure has been expertly examined through the lens of leadership in *Shackleton's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer* (Morrell, 2001). This book contains fascinating insights that offer considerable breadth and depth beyond what is included in this paper.

Shackleton Background

Sir Ernest Shackleton was a polar explorer who led three British expeditions to the Antarctic and was one of the principal figures of the period known as the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration. After the race to the South Pole ended in December 1911 with Roald Amundsen's conquest, Shackleton turned his attention to what he said was the one remaining great object of Antarctic journeying: the crossing of the continent from sea to sea via the pole. To this end, he made preparations for what became the 1914–17 Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. Disaster struck this expedition when its ship, *Endurance*, became **trapped in pack ice and was slowly crushed** before the shore parties could be landed. There followed a sequence of exploits and an ultimate escape with no loss of human life, which would eventually assure Shackleton's heroic status.

Endurance departed with Shackleton as Captain and a crew of 27 men from South Georgia for the Weddell Sea on December 5, 1914, heading for Vahsel Bay. As the ship moved southward, early ice was encountered and slowed progress. Deep in the Weddell Sea, conditions gradually grew worse, and in January 1915 *Endurance* became frozen solid in an ice flow. A month later, realizing that the ship would be trapped until the following spring, Shackleton ordered the abandonment of ship's routine and her conversion to a winter station. She drifted slowly northward with the ice through the following months. When spring arrived in September, the breaking of the ice and its later movements put extreme pressures on the ship's hull. In October, with water pouring into the crushed hull, Shackleton gave the order to abandon ship. Provisions and equipment were transferred to camps on the ice where Shackleton and his party camped on a large flat flow, hoping that it would drift toward land. By March their ice camp was within 60 miles of land, but, separated by impassable ice ridges, they were unable to reach it. In April their ice flow began to break up, and they were forced into lifeboats. After five harrowing days at sea, the exhausted men landed their three lifeboats at Elephant Island, 350 miles from where the *Endurance* sank. This was the first time they had stood on solid ground for 15 months. Elephant Island was an inhospitable place, far from any shipping routes. Consequently, Shackleton decided to risk a journey with five of his crew in one of the lifeboats to the 800-mile distant South Georgia whaling station, where he knew help was available.

The lifeboat was launched in April 1916; during the next fifteen days, it sailed through the waters of the southern ocean, at the mercy of the stormy seas, in constant peril of capsizing. After landing on the unoccupied southern shore, and after a brief period of rest and recuperation, rather than risk putting to sea again to reach the whaling station on the northern coast, Shackleton decided to attempt a land crossing of this island. Shackleton and two of his crew travelled 32 miles over mountainous terrain to reach the whaling station. Shackleton immediately sent a boat to pick up the three men from the other side of South Georgia while he set to work to organize the rescue of the Elephant Island men. Finally, on August 30, 1916, **eighteen months after setting sail, Shackleton and all of his crew were safe.**



Exhibit 5 – Leadership Tips



Exhibit 6
Endurance

The sequence of events that occurred during the eighteen-month journey of the *Endurance* expedition included a seemingly unending string of brutal episodes. The conditions were the harshest imaginable with subzero temperatures, high winds, winter darkness, isolation, and no hope of rescue. Food was a challenge, and so was safety. And, so was boredom. What started out as a record-breaking first-of-its-kind adventure that would enhance the national standing of the United Kingdom, ended up being an episodic struggle for survival as depicted in Exhibit 6.

Fortunately, it also turned out to be a case study that resonates with project managers and others who are looking for quiet leadership tips. In *Shackleton's Way* (Morrell, 2001, p. 83), we learn that "At the start of an earlier expedition an inexperienced Shackleton bragged to his wife about his 'perfect' crew and provisions. He ended up disappointed in some key people, clashed with others, and was imperiled by some miscalculations in needed supplies. By the time *Endurance* sailed in 1914, Shackleton was forty years old and an experienced leader. He no longer had illusions about the perfection of men or supplies; he knew that the ice could destroy either and that success or failure of the venture rested with him. He had matured into a **more confident, shrewder, and much more decisive leader.**"

Own The Culture

Projects exist within their own culture. To be sure, the organizational culture in which the project resides does play an important role in project success (O'Brochta, 2006), but so too does the culture within the project itself. By culture, we are referring to the environment, norms, behaviors, and values that contribute to the unique social and psychological aspects of the project. The **project culture 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 culture impacts how committed team members are toward tasks and the project objectives.

We have learned 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 culture 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 culture described by team members in their journals 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 to be successful on their project task responsibilities. Shackleton is quoted by one of his crewman as saying, "There are lots of good things in the world, but I am not sure that comradeship is not the best of them all." Additionally, Shackleton established and maintained comradeship, the company and friendship of others with a common aim, in an intentional way. He observed before he acted and acted only to make improvements; and he solicited and responded to improvement ideas from his crew. He established order and routine and broke down traditional hierarchies by rotating work assignments so that each man worked alongside all the others, blurring divisions. Crewmen continually changed work partners and established the habit of helping each other without being ordered. It mattered not if you were a captain, seaman, scientist, cook, or carpenter; all learned to perform and respect each other's contribution to the project goals. On a daily basis, Shackleton would briefly chat with each individual crewman to inquire about their well-being and to ask if they needed anything in support of the duties he had assigned them. These were personal conversations more between equals rather than between the boss and subordinate. On one occasion, shortly after the *Endurance* became ice bound, one of the crew wrote in his journal, "We seem to be a wonderfully happy family but I think Sir Ernest [Shackleton] is the real secret of our unanimity. Considering our divergent aims and our differences of station, it is surprising how few differences of opinion occur." This team-based culture, which placed the needs of others and the needs of the team ahead of an individual's needs, downplayed individualism and enabled all to pull together through the harsh conditions.

The culture, which can make or break a project team, **is influenced less by circumstance and more by quiet leadership actions and behaviors**. Successful quiet 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**. Project team members, project stakeholders, and project sponsors will make decisions about follow-on projects and assignments; the legacy from each single project carries forward. The choices made by the project manager will live on well beyond the end of a particular project schedule or deliverable. The quiet project leader balances tasks and relationships, balances short-term actions against long-term impact, and balances their needs with the needs of the team. This type of leadership inspires committed followers.

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 on which they camped 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.

Shackleton led the men to **let go of the past and focus on the long-term future**. About a month after the *Endurance* became ice bound, Shackleton, while out for a walk on the ice flow, noted a sudden and jarring movement of the ship. Although ice bound, the ship, had served as a storage depot for the tons of food and supplies. Shackleton yelled out to his men and everyone turned out to watch the ship from a distance, as it broke apart. It must have been heartbreaking; for more than a year it had been home, and it had been their last link to civilization. One of the crew wrote, "As always with him [Shackleton], what had happened had happened; it was in the past and he looked to the future... Without emotion, melodrama or excitement he said, 'Ship and stores have gone, so now we'll go home.'" Shackleton demonstrated the moral courage associated with quiet leaders because he cared about resolving the long-term problem, the problem of survival. Earlier goals of a transcontinental crossing via the South Pole and of riding out the winter in the ship awaiting spring thaw were easily supplanted. This approach stood in stark contrast with other polar expedition leaders of that time who focused on short-term goals of discovery at the expense of their men; for some, expeditions became a death march. Robert Scott's ill-fated attempt to reach the South Pole in 1912 left him and all four of his men frozen to death; historians have attributed this failure to his emphasis on driving himself and his men toward the pole no matter the cost (Huntford, 1985, p. 527).

Shackleton's quiet long-term focus on the needs of his men, rather than the particular task at hand, was accompanied by the practice of insuring that **everyone was contributing in a meaningful way** toward the long-term goal. After it appeared certain that riding out the moving ice flow would not eventually float Shackleton and his crew to land, he engaged every man in the process of dragging two of the heavily-laden life boats across the bucked ridges of the ice flow. It was exhausting work; progress toward the goal sixty miles away was only two miles a day. Shackleton wrote about the march (Shackleton, 1919, p. 98), "There is a psychological aspect to the question also. It will be much better for the men in general to feel that even though progress is slow they are on their way to land than it will be simply to sit down and wait for the tardy north-westerly drift to take us out of this cruel waste of ice. We will make an attempt to move."

Shackleton's crew was comprised of initiative takers; he hired them for this and other qualities. He wanted men who would respond to his long-term forward direction, men who would drag lifeboats across pressure ridges when they believed that was the path to rescue. These kind of men responded particularly well to Shackleton's introverted quiet leadership.

Build A High-Performance Team

Projects succeed through the combined efforts of the project team members. Shackleton and his crew are shown in Exhibit 7. Quiet project leaders create a **culture 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, p. 384-399). High-performance teams spend more time in the *performing* stage, and when confronted with a challenge, they spend less time recovering from the *storming* stage and returning 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. Shackleton asked individuals, 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 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**.



Exhibit 7 – Endurance Crew

While training the men to do the ship’s work, Shackleton was observing everyone’s personality. He strived to **assign each individual member of the team to a long-term role that he enjoyed and for which he was best suited**. Shackleton reinforced team development by matching personality types with work responsibilities. One of the crewmen earned the reputation for being a pack rat; others knew that if anything were missing on the ship it would likely be under his pillow or bed. Shackleton made this hoarder the storekeeper. To some, it seemed like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse, but Shackleton knew this job would allay the hoarder’s anxieties and prevent other possible problems down the road. The hoarder was delighted, “It is most awfully fortunate for me that Sir Ernest [Shackleton] should have put me on to this work which is so especially congenial to me.” Shackleton sought similar win-win workable compromises with other crew assignments as well.

Even when crewman and task were well matched, Shackleton provided constant feedback, praising efforts and correcting shortcomings. **Accountability was crucial** to the self-esteem of individual crewman, for the entire high-performance crew, and for Shackleton’s quiet leadership style. When one of the crew had unlashed a drum stored on the ship’s deck and was opening it, Shackleton intervened to, “give a much needed lesson in common-sense sailorizing.” Shackleton told him (Marr, 1923, p. 53), “Don’t try to do too many things on your own until you’ve got the hang of them. If any accident happened and that drum fetched away, the boatswain would be blamed, because safe storage is his job. When you mix in with another man’s job, always remember that he might have to take the blame that’s rightly due you.” Shackleton proceeded to lash up the drum while explaining, “You’ve put on a slippery hitch. Here’s the right way, and it’s the right way that counts at sea.” The crewman later wrote, “With all the weight of responsibility he carried on his shoulders, and all his worries – for he had many – he still found time to interest himself in an obscure Scout.”

Use Soft Power

Project leaders have at their disposal an extremely effective tool for working within an organization to build a high-performance project team. Once the project leader has taken ownership for the culture for the long-term, and for building a high-performance team, then this tool can be used toward those ends. This tool is power. It is **through project leadership power that actions can be taken**. Power refers to the ability of the project leader to influence others to act for the benefit of the project; it is a resource that enables compliance or commitment from others (Pinto, 1998, p. 43). A number of well-established models for power within an organizational setting have been developed, Exhibit 8 depicts one of the classic models (French, 1959, p. 150-167).

- Positional power: Also called "legitimate power," it is the power of an individual because of the relative position and duties of the holder of the position within an organization. Legitimate power is formal authority delegated to the holder of the position. It is usually accompanied by various attributes of power such as uniforms, offices, etc. This is the most obvious, and also the most important, kind of power.
- Referent power: The power or ability of individuals to attract others and build loyalty. It's based on the charisma and interpersonal skills of the power holder. A person may be admired because of specific personal traits, and this admiration creates the opportunity for interpersonal influence. The person under power desires to identify with these personal qualities and gains satisfaction from being an accepted follower.
- Expert power: An individual's power deriving from the skills or expertise of the person and the organization's needs for those skills and expertise. Unlike the others, this type of power is usually highly specific and limited to the particular area in which the expert is trained and qualified.
- Reward power: This power refers to the degree to which the individual can give others a reward of some kind, such as benefits, time off, desired gifts, promotions or increases in pay or responsibility. It depends on the ability of the power wielder to confer valued material rewards. This power is obvious, but also ineffective, if abused.
- Coercive power: This type refers to the application of negative influences. It includes the ability to demote or to withhold other rewards. The desire for valued rewards or the fear of having them withheld ensures the obedience of those under power. Coercive power tends to be the most obvious, but least effective, form of power as it builds resentment and resistance from the people who experience it.

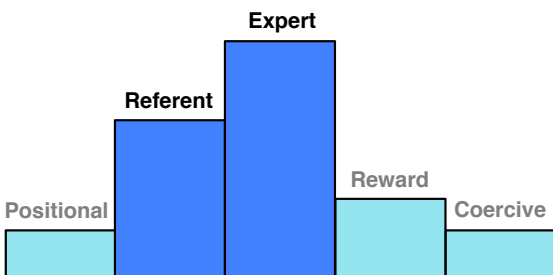


Exhibit 8 – Project Leader Power

We can recognize that as quiet project leaders we rarely have significant amounts of positional power; our formal authority is usually quite limited within the organization. Likewise, project managers rarely have much reward and coercive power. However, we do have opportunities to develop and use sources of power that others don't. Specifically, **we are the experts; no one knows more about our project or portion of our project than we do**. This knowledge can serve as the basis for opinions, decisions, and actions that are rational and well supported. Through communication early and often with key stakeholders about the project and tailoring that information to the specific needs of each stakeholder, quiet

project leaders can establish themselves as experts about the subject they know best – their projects. Over time the recognition of their expertise will grow and so will the dependence by key stakeholders on this expertise; this represents a growth in the quiet project leader's expert power. At some point, this power will have grown to the point where the quiet project leader is called upon to provide expertise about a topic that is less related to their actual project; this is the point in time where their power has grown so significantly that they can begin using their power to accomplish quiet project leadership actions. A second source of power at the quiet project leader's disposal is their **perceived association with others who are influential: referent power**. Successful quiet project leaders develop and cultivate relationships with a vast array of stakeholders that extend far beyond the immediate bounds of their project. The fact that so many projects are managed in matrix organizations further enhances this effect. The

expert and referent sources of power, which are based on one-on-one relationships, can be referred to as soft power. The use of soft power, particularly for a quiet project leader, can distinguish their actions from the blur of other activity in the organization.

Drawing from his expert soft power Shackleton developed expertise in virtually all tasks about ship; he accomplished this feat in such a way as to foster deep and respectful relationships with the crew. He lent a hand with even the most menial tasks when he was needed. If anyone were ill or injured, he'd be the likely one to take his place. He helped with the heavy lifting, the cleaning, and even laid linoleum. One of the crew remarked that, "He had cleaned up the wardroom far better than the majority of night watchmen." Shackleton's constant presence in the work areas allowed him to show by example how he expected things to be done, it gave him a better understanding of the effort involved in each task, it helped him evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each man, it gave a certain dignity to all of the jobs on board, and it enhanced his standing with the crew. Most of all, it allowed him to bond with his men. Through this bonding, through this soft power, came loyalty and trust.

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 9, 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 but "as the best time of their lives."

Shackleton was on the constant lookout for opportunities to build and strengthen his trust-based relationship with each crewman; he wanted his men to like and respect him as well as to honor his position. His conversations never seemed contrived or staged to the men. He preferred one-on-one, face-to-face dealings with his men; no praise or condemnation was ever done through a middleman or in a circuitous way. Shackleton spoke with the highest and lowest of his crew, finding some common ground on which to meet. On one occasion as the polar winter was drawing near and the sun was setting for four months of grim darkness, Shackleton took pains to put his men in the proper frame of mind to get through it. One crewman noted that when Shackleton came across a crewman walking alone on the ice, "He would get into conversation and talk to you in an intimate sort of way, asking you little things about yourself – how you were getting on, how you liked it, what particular side of the work you were enjoying most – all that sort of thing... This communicativeness in Shackleton was one of the things his men valued in him; it was also, of course, a most effective way of establishing good relations with very mixed company."

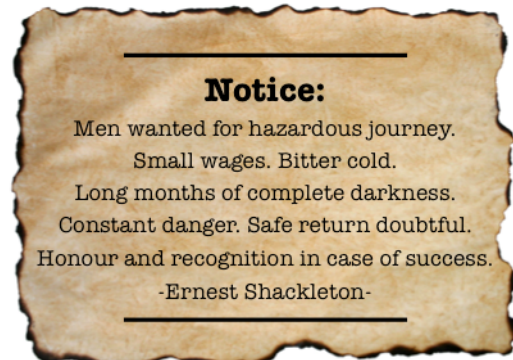


Exhibit 9 – Notice

Shackleton also built and maintained trust with the crew as a whole. On the occasion of addressing them regarding his decision to move away from the crushed ship and strike out over the ice flow one crewman wrote, "There was nothing of the nature of a set speech. He spoke to us in a group, telling us he intended to march the party across the [ice] to the west... I can't remember the matter being discussed or argued in any way." The men placed their complete trust and lives in Shackleton.

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.

The ethical code maintained by Shackleton and his crew also included honesty; he made sure his men had a realistic notion of their plight. This honesty extended beyond saying and repeating the truth; at times it also included demonstrations and examples to insure that his men fully grasped the seriousness of a situation. Just after abandoning the ice-bound ship, Shackleton overheard two of his men ordering tea from the cook; one asked for strong and the other weak. According to Shackleton (Shackleton, 1919, p. 78), "It occurred to me at the time that the incident had psychological interest. Here were men, their home crushed, the camp pitched on unstable floes, and their chance of reaching safety apparently remote, calmly attending to the details of existence and giving their attention to such trifles as the strength of a brew of tea." Despite his sympathetic tone, Shackleton was concerned about the men's unrealistic attitude about their circumstances – they were not being honest with themselves. He immediately ordered the daily food allowance cut to 1,500 calories per day, not much for a bunch of cold men. He enforced the cutback for a few days, but it drove the point home.

In Shackleton's code of ethics (Shackleton, 1919, p. 210) loyalty was paramount, "The loyalty of your men is a sacred trust you carry. It is something which must never be betrayed, something you must live up to." He expected it of himself, and he expected it from his men. One crewman wrote that, "[Shackleton] had a way of compelling loyalty... We would have gone anywhere without question on his order." Another wrote, "One way in which Shackleton encouraged loyalty was by keeping his men united in purpose... The reason Shackleton's men felt so strongly about him was that he led from his heart and his spirit; he was firm in his purpose, but he was always kind and always resourceful in finding ways to alleviate the hardships in the pursuit of their goals." Shackleton was just as insistent in addressing loyalty breaches as he was in building and maintaining loyalty. Indeed, after the expedition, he withheld the recommendation of the prestigious Polar Medal from four of his crew for lapses in loyalty: one for his mutinous protest at a crucial moment and the other for pilfering items everyone had been ordered to discard. Shackleton judged his men's performance on two levels: doing the job well and providing loyalty. Loyalty by far was the more important.

PMI members commit to act ethically and professionally when they become members and when they 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 that 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 quiet 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 quiet project leadership**, they are motivated to identify and adopt key quiet project leadership techniques. These techniques, summarized in this paper, are largely focused on serving the long-term needs of the project team.

This paper presents the compelling story of the Shackleton expedition to draw attention to six quiet project leadership tips. These tips are **ownership of the project culture, focus on acting for the long term, building a high-performance team, use of soft power, establishing and maintaining trust, and modeling ethical behavior**. A direct linkage has been shown to exist between project success, effective quiet leadership, building trust, and ethical behavior.

Progress, when it comes to quiet 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. It certainly does not come loudly or forcefully. 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 quiet project leadership action are enduring.

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