

A black banner for the PMPC 2018 conference. It features the PMI Bangalore India Chapter logo in the top left, a glowing image of the NIMHANS Convention Centre in the center, and the PMPC 2018 logo in the top right. The text on the banner reads: "Project Management Practitioners' Conference 2018", "ARCHITECTING PROJECT MANAGEMENT for Value Creation", "July 12th – 14th, 2018", and "NIMHANS CONVENTION CENTRE, BENGALURU".

PMI
BANGALORE INDIA CHAPTER

PMPC 2018

Project Management Practitioners' Conference 2018

ARCHITECTING PROJECT MANAGEMENT for Value Creation

July 12th – 14th, 2018

NIMHANS CONVENTION CENTRE, BENGALURU

Project Manager as an enabler for high-performance teams

Smart Practices

PMIBC-18-4-010

By Prashanth Thimmavajjala, Mindtree

CONTENTS

Abstract.....	3
Introduction	3
Details of the paper.....	5
Conclusion	9
References	9

ABSTRACT

High Performance teams are characterized by self-motivated team members with high calibre and abilities to work and complete any task at hand. They are distinguished from the regular teams by their ability to quickly adapt to changes, assess the situation at hand and fast turnaround in arriving at solutions that create value. The self-directing ability of such teams towards creating value makes it difficult to define the role of the project manager. Project managers of such high performance teams need to play various roles. They do not need to be very directive with the team at the same time they need to ensure that the team stays on course of the overall project plan and creates value. Team dynamics in such teams are also difficult to handle as every team member is a high performer with no concerns to be raised on their effectiveness which needs to project manager to decide and use the different types of motivation effectively with the team to ensure team integrity and morale levels. This paper tries to explore and expand on the concept of how a project manager needs to be more an enabler in such teams to prevent impediments from hampering team progress in their journey of creating value. The paper also tries to discuss on various ways by which the project manager can motivate, guide and support the team without being very directive and how the project manager's role evolves and changes to be more supportive than being directive.

INTRODUCTION

High Performance Teams for a critical backbone to any organization. These are teams that organizations can rely on for working on anything like an emerging technology upto even troubleshooting and turning around an initiative that is in crisis. They are teams that are a fall back option to many projects and being a project manager of such teams makes it challenging and interesting as the project manager is expected to play multiple roles and ensure the high performance team continues to exhibit high performance.

High Performance teams are typically characterized by the below behaviours that they exhibit [1] (Figure 1):

- **Effective working procedures:** Members of the team have clearly defined working procedures that help in forming the team, obtain information, and boost creativity, innovation and risk-taking.
- **Shared Vision:** High performance teams work closely towards a common goal that they want to achieve. They exhibit stronger traits of having a shared goal, vision, objectives and values.
- **Shared leadership:** Team members are self-driven and take initiatives to achieve the goal at hand. There are leadership traits in every member of the team and members take up the leadership role based on the complexity of the task at hand and their relevant expertise in them.

- **Complementary abilities:** Members of the team come from various backgrounds and are skilled with various abilities that are complementary in nature. Team members collaborate effectively to use their skills in cohesion to arrive at the final solution.
- **Trust and mutual respect:** High Performance teams have members who are strongly connected both professionally and personally and are highly collaborative and respect each other skills and potential really well.
- **Adaptability to changes:** High Performance teams love to work in dynamic situations where there is a lot of uncertainty and drastic changes. Members of such teams feel more energized and motivated to work in such challenging situations, adapt quickly to them and strive hard to succeed.
- **Constant learning and improving:** Team members love to experiment and explore new areas. They are constantly learning, implementing, making mistakes and learning, thus enhancing their skills to a great level.
- **Regular result evaluation:** High performance teams are self-evaluating and constantly seek for ways to improve and work through the impediments that are blocking them from success.
- **Open communication:** Team members are constantly communicating and discussing ideas and approaches to find effective solution to the problem at hand. Healthy discussions helps the team to get a varied perspective from all members and to arrive at the right approach to be taken.

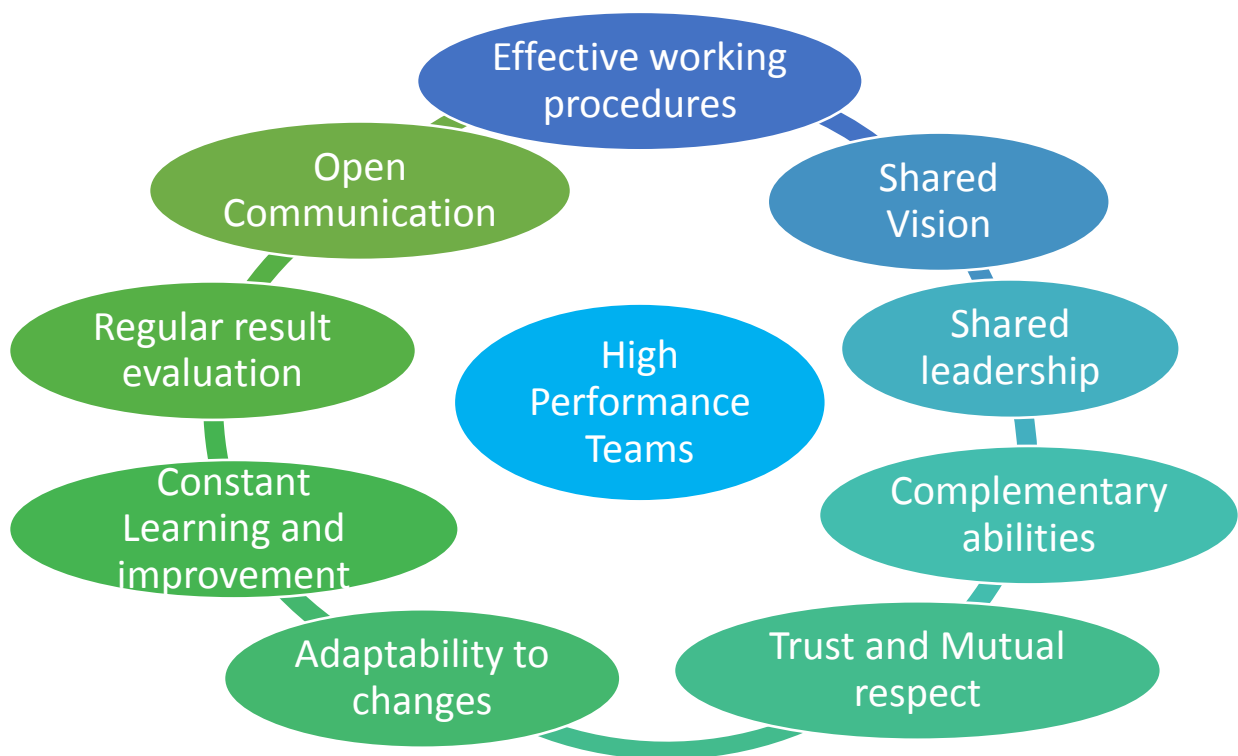


Figure 1: Characteristics of high performance teams

Given the self-driven and highly motivated nature of the high performance team, the role of the project manager is beyond traditional project manager to a more evolving role of removing impediments to the team, managing a team of high performers and become more of an enabler and mentor. This paper tries to explore the various roles that the project manager of such teams needs to play through the various phases of the team using the Tuckman's ladder of team development.[6]

DETAILS OF THE PAPER

TUCKMAN'S LADDER OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Team formation generally follow the Tuckman's ladder of team development going through multiple stages as described in the Develop Project Team process in the PMBOK Guide (Figure 2). High performance teams go through these stages more rapidly due to the nature of the individuals and the criticality of the tasks that they manage. The project manager needs to play different roles in each of the stages to ensure goal accomplishment which is discussed in further sections of this paper.

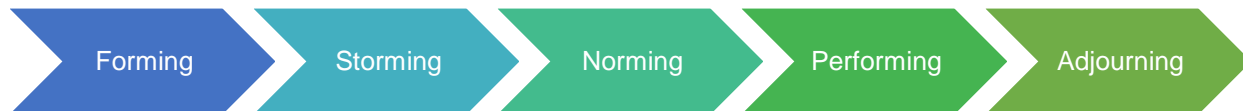


Figure 2: Tuckman's ladder of team development

FORMING – PROJECT MANAGER AS A VISIONARY

During the team formation, the project manager needs to act as a visionary and ensure that the team that is being formed will be able to exhibit characteristics of a high performance team and also accomplish the goals. This applies to creating a new team as well as additions to the existing team. The project manager needs to clearly pick the members of the team in such a way that there is the right mix and variety of skills available in the team to complement and support each other towards the solution and also have the optimal number of people. Project manager should ensure that the selected members have the right attitude and skills for working in a high performance team and are able to handle uncertainty and work fast towards the solution. This phase is very critical for the high performance team as having an improper mix of people can be detrimental to the purpose of having the team. [1,5]

STORMING – PROJECT MANAGER AS A FACILITATOR

During this stage the team starts to involve in decision making discussions and also work on overall project management approach. Since the members of the team are from diverse skills and background, the decision

making will be more collaborative, faster and better. The quality of the decisions made with diverse inputs of the team members will be high.

The project manager needs to act as a facilitator to ensure an environment of openness to let the creative ideas from all the team members flow into the discussion, encourage out-of-the box thinking, include every member in the team to contribute towards decision making and ensure healthy discussions happen towards the goal. The project manager needs to take sufficient measures to ensure that there are no biases in the decisions. High performance teams with their diverse skills avoid group-think to make better decisions, however the project manager needs to ensure that there are no signs of group-think. [7]

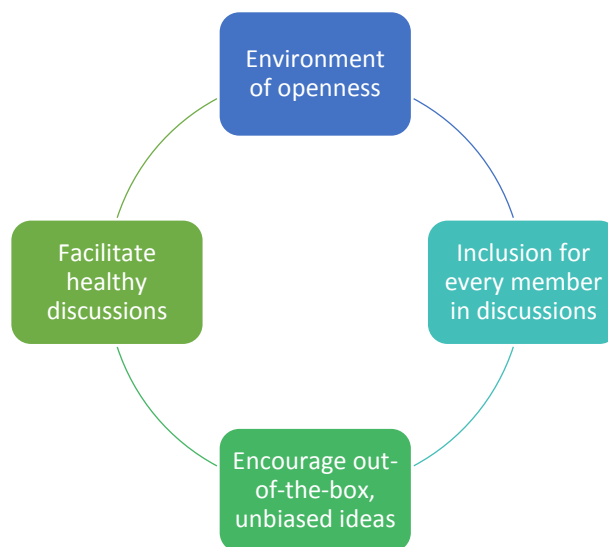


Figure 3: Project manager as a facilitator

Due to the diverse nature of skills and the self-driven nature of each of the individuals, there are high chances of encountering conflict situations with differences of opinion between multiple team members towards the decisions being taken. The project manager needs to take an unbiased view at the situation, ensure that every opinion is heard and ensure the conflict is handled with effective reasoning to each member of the team having the conflict, on why a particular decision needs to be made and also see if there is a mutually agreeable approach that can be pursued. [7]

NORMING – PROJECT MANAGER AS A GUIDE

Team members begin to work together in this stage. High Performance teams are self-directing and self-driven and hence the members would mostly choose and pick tasks that they want to work on which is referred to as collective-leadership. The Project manager must oversee to ensure that all the diverse skills of the team are utilized and the tasks are distributed based on that. The project manager should ensure that members with complementary skills work together towards the solution being designed. Ensuring that there are no biases in the

task choice or allocation also needs to be taken care of by the project manager along with them being in line with the overall plan since the team has high tendency to autonomously choose their tasks. The project manager should ensure that the team is being guided towards the project goal and every team member is equally committed to it.[2,6]

PERFORMING – PROJECT MANAGER AS A SUPPORT

In this stage, team members begin to work together towards achieving the project goals. They start working together in an interdependent manner and help each other in resolving issues. In this phase, the project manager should be more as a guide and mentor rather than being very directive. The manager should ensure that the team is working in harmony towards the planned goal, this is needed because members of high performance teams tend to autonomously decide what they would want to work on and pursue that, which may not be in line with the overall project goal. The manager is expected to do oversee the activities and do the required course correction wherever needed. Ensuring that there is a clear balance between the creativity of the individuals and the discipline required to achieve the project goal needs to be handled by the project manager [2]

As the work progresses, team members might encounter some impediments. High performance team members are mostly self-solvers and try their best to overcome the impediments without reaching out to the manager. The manager should try to get involved only if they are unable to do it on their own and get them the help needed to overcome the roadblock.

High performance team members thrive on independent decision making and freedom in working on the tasks at hand. The project manager should refrain from micro managing the team and give the freedom to team members to decide and work on the approach and techniques used for task accomplishment. The manager should at a high level validate if it is optimal and provide the necessary suggestions. The focus for the manager should be more on the task accomplishment rather than the minute details of it. [2,6]

High performance team members have a strong sense of belonging and work together to improve and coach each other in the course of the project. They encourage and complement each other's strengths and work collectively towards the goal with a lot of open and transparent communication. The project manager needs to ensure that an open and supportive environment is provided for all team members to discuss, debate and work together towards the goal. [3]

Members of such teams tend to be self-motivated and self-driven. This is both good and bad to the team. There could be instances where team members run into conflicts because of multiple members wanting to pursue different ideas on their own and there could also be conflicts due to areas of overlap in the work with each member trying to prove to be superior to the other. The project manager should quickly notice such situations and take the necessary corrective actions to resolve them amicably listening and mentoring each member who is part of the conflict. Members of such team are already high on ego and self-esteem because of their notion of being special

and a class apart from the rest of the organization, which can cause a lot of conflicts within the team and the manager needs to strike a balance between the goals of the project and the goals of the individuals in the team and ensure that the conflicts are handled and the goal of the project is accomplished. Ensuring a healthy environment with all high performers will be the goal for the project manager. [4,5]

High performance teams consists of self-motivated individuals and individuals who like to work on challenging tasks. The project manager needs to ensure that team members are motivated enough by ensuring that they are constantly provided with challenging tasks and being recognized every time they complete a significant task or milestone. Recognize the team members well to make them feel special over the rest [2] (Figure 4)

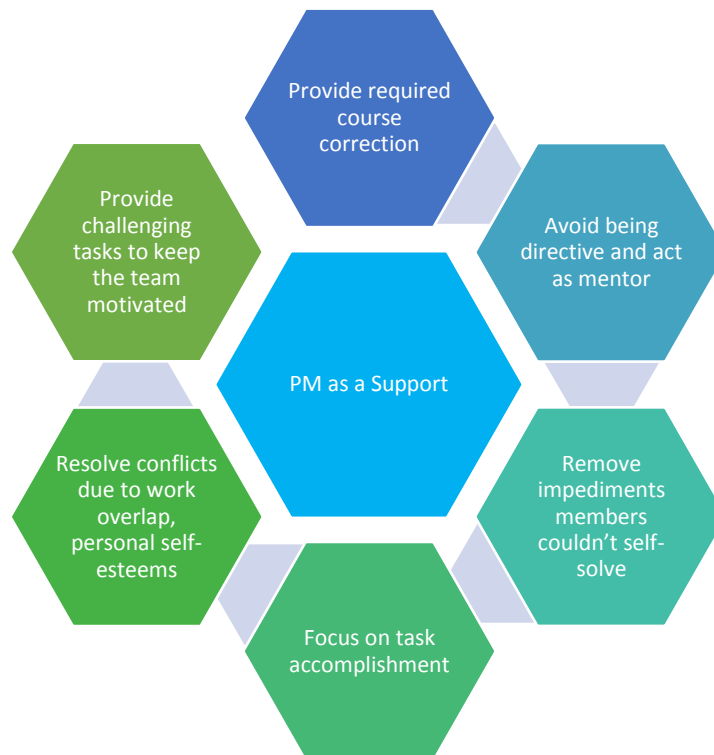


Figure 4: Project manager as a support

ADJOURNING – PROJECT MANAGER AS A MENTOR

This is the stage of closure of the project where the team completes the project and moves on to the next one. Project manager should ensure that the knowledge gained by each team member is shared across the team and to other teams. Team members might have done a lot of self-learning, prototypes and research during the course of the project to accomplish the challenging tasks, the manager should ensure that it is propagated to other

members in the team and to other teams as well. The Project manager should act as a mentor and provide his feedback to each member of the team on what they did well and what they could have improved upon so that they can take care of it in the future projects.

CONCLUSION

Project managers of high performance teams need to be part of the collective leadership of the high performance teams and must be less directive and more of an enabler. During the various phases of the team development, the project manager needs to play various roles of being a visionary, facilitator, guide, support and mentor as the team evolves. The project manager needs to provide enough space and necessary support as an enabler throughout these various roles to the team members to unleash their creativity and work together to be a high performance team forever.

REFERENCES

- [1] Moga, Branislav, *High Performing Teams: What Are They and How Do I Build One?*:
<https://activecollab.com/blog/collaboration/high-performing-teams>
- [2] Baldoni, John, *How to Manage your High-Performing team*, Harvard Business Review August 03,2009
<https://hbr.org/2009/08/how-to-manage-your-high-perfor>
- [3] Webster, Martin, *5 tips for leading high performance team*: <https://www.leadershipthoughts.com/5-tips-for-leading-high-performance-teams/>
- [4] Folkman, Joseph, *5 ways to build a high performance team*:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joefolkman/2016/04/13/are-you-on-the-team-from-hell-5-ways-to-create-a-high-performance-team/#720832c67ee2>
- [5] Keller, Scott and Meaney, Mary: *High-Performing teams: A timeless leadership topic*:
<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/high-performing-teams-a-timeless-leadership-topic>
- [6] Society for Human resource management: *Developing and sustaining High-Performance Work Teams*:
<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/developingandsustaininghigh-performanceworkteams.aspx>
- [7] Thimmavajjala, Prashanth: *Bridging the Intra-Millennial skill gap using Inclusive Project Management*, PMI National Conference 2017: <https://www.pmi.org.in/conference2017/pdfs/papers-pdfs/theme-4-harmony-in-diversity/6-Bridging-the-Intra-Millennial-skill-gap.pdf>