Leadership competency profiles of successful project managers

This is the title of a paper by Ralf Muller and Rodney Turner that appeared earlier this year in the International Journal of Project Management (Volume 28 Issue 5 2010 p 437-448). It examines the leadership competency profiles of successful project managers in different types of project.

The APM Competency Framework groups 47 competence elements in three domains - technical, behavioural and contextual competences - contextual includes organisational elements such as HSE, governance.

This paper adopts the Dulewicz and Higgs classification of fifteen leadership dimensions clustered into three competences - intellectual(IQ), emotional (EQ) and managerial(MQ).

They developed three leadership profiles for different types of organizational change projects - goal oriented, involving and engaging. The profiles were built around their fifteen leadership dimensions.

- Goal oriented is focused on delivery of clearly understood results in a relatively stable context.
- Involving is a style for organisations which face significant but not radical change of their business model or way of work.
- Engaging is based on empowerment and involvement in a highly transformational context - radical change is produced through engagement and commitment.

This new research extends the work to look at leadership profiles for different applications.

The authors conclude that the practical implications of their work are:

- Leadership competencies should be taken into account when assigning project managers to projects.
- Project manager training and development should focus not only on technical and management skills but also on development of leadership competences.

Results indicate high expressions of one IQ sub-dimension (critical thinking) and three EQ sub-dimensions (influence, motivation and conscientiousness) in successful managers in all types of project. Expression of other sub-dimensions differ by project type.

The balance of competences differs between the three types of application studied - engineering & construction,information & telecommunication technology, Organizational change.

As an example, the competence "vision" was found to be low in engineering & construction, medium in information & telecommunication technology and high in organizational change.

Of particular interest is how this training of leadership competences should be carried out.
Another paper in the same issue of the journal tackles this problem (p 461-468). N Clarke looked at the impact of a training programme designed to target the emotional intelligence abilities of project managers.

Goleman has argued that to teach emotional competences through a traditional course is wrong. These training methods are based on cognitive learning which draws on different areas of the brain from emotional learning; cognitive learning is about enabling people to learn by using their reason, intuition and perception. Goleman reports that it takes at least two months to unlearn old behaviours and replace them with new ones.

So his approach is based on the self-directed learning of Boyzatis. 360-degree feedback is required to assess one's levels of emotional intelligence. A learning agenda is constructed to build on strengths and reduce deficiencies. The new behaviour has to be practised to develop new neural pathways - support is required perhaps through coaching.

After training, personal competences were shown to improve for 3 to 5 years after the course, whilst social competences improved in the first 1 to 2 years and then reduced.

Clarke reports the results of a two-day training programme. Data collected one month after after training showed no significant changes. Improvement in one of the emotional intelligence abilities was found 6 months post training. He suggests that training may provide an initial self-awareness of the importance of emotions, but the actual processes associated with the development of this emotional intelligence ability continued taking place after training had taken place, possibly through on-the-job learning mechanisms.

This and other research implies a new and different approach to this type of training.