

# A Switch in Time Saves Nine

## Summary

“Switch leadership : the conscious ability to manoeuvre from one leadership style to another to enhance performance in a project situation”.

A Switch in Time Saves Nine... this paper examines how a project manager's leadership actions could improve his team's ability to reach the desired goal in the nine knowledge areas in project management; scope, management of integration, time, cost, quality, human resources, communication, risk and procurement.

This research study suggests that adaptive changes in the situational leadership style adopted by the project manager towards his team during different sub-phases within the implementation phase in a project life cycle could enhance overall project performance by up to 17%. These changes are necessitated by the timing element which plays a vital role in a given project situation making the need to switch.

Whilst project management research has already highlighted leadership styles with respect to individual performance levels, group and task needs, this research is based on the assumptions that leadership demands are far more dependent on the project life cycle and, more precisely, on the sub-phases than previously discussed.

There is a clear, overriding element of the set timescale in a project leadership situation. This temporal aspect gives researchers a natural, fixed starting point from which to develop a project management leadership model and this was the angle taken for this research study.

‘Switch’ refers to a period of time in which one style of leadership is used during a project and indicates that there was a different leadership style immediately preceding or following it.

The data collection was done via questionnaire sent to 250 experienced project managers from a wide cross-section of industries in several countries.

Investigation was carried out into why the project manager exercised switch leadership: did this come from team dynamics? Or was it time pressures? Or task demands? Was the project leader's natural leadership orientation the same as his situational approach?

The result of the test of hypotheses shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between switches in leadership style and a high success level on a project. This suggests that a project manager should exercise switch leadership in a project situation.

Switch leadership did not always or necessarily need to follow the team development cycle to produce success on the project. However, the time factor seemed to have a critical impact on the choice of the project leadership style and projects with mainly autocratic leadership tended to be more successful than ones run principally with the other forms of decision leadership of consultative, consensus or shareholder.

We therefore suggest that to achieve success on a project, the permanently fixed parameters of time and task require the complementary intransigency of the autocratic leadership approach but that this should be sharply contrasted with flexibility and temporary changes in style to produce the necessary drive on the project to move the team along to a positive outcome due to the moving team and environment dynamics.

Switch leadership is not a new type of leadership in itself but a successful methodology to employ existing styles for optimum performance. The situational approach places emphasis upon matching the leadership style to the task, team and other variables, whereas switch leadership, also project management oriented, is heavily dependent on time factors.