

VALUES BASED LEADERSHIP AND INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses values based management (VBL) and its relation to managing projects that include an international component. In an increasingly globalized business environment, the Project Manager (PM) must be cognizant of her own values, as well as those of the project team and operating environment. While these values are inherently individual, they are greatly influenced by cultural and societal factors. Failing to recognize these values can introduce risk to the project as differences emerge. Using commonly accepted project fundamentals, the PM can plan for these differences and mitigate any risks that may emerge from them.

1. What is the Concept of Values Based Leadership?

It can be argued that the concept of Values Based Leadership (VBL) has existed since the beginning of organized societies around the world. However, despite this deep-rooted lineage it is still difficult to find a concise and agreed upon definition of VBL. Values at their root are intrinsically personal and culturally specific. These qualities lead to values being something we grow up with, know and feel, without always being able to describe or characterize.

1.1. Values

When trying to define the word “values”, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary provides 8 different variants, as below:

“Definition of VALUE

- A. a fair return or equivalent in goods, services, or money for something exchanged
- B. the monetary worth of something : market price
- C. relative worth, utility, or importance <a good value at the price> <the value of base stealing in baseball> <had nothing of value to say>
- D. a numerical quantity that is assigned or is determined by calculation or measurement <let x take on positive values> <a value for the age of the earth>
- E. the relative duration of a musical note
- F.
 - a. relative lightness or darkness of a color : luminosity
 - b. the relation of one part in a picture to another with respect to lightness and darkness
- G. something (as a principle or quality) intrinsically valuable or desirable <sought material values instead of human values — W. H. Jones>
- H. denomination”

1.2. Personal Values

Drawing from the above dictionary definition, we can see two primary characteristics of a value:

1. Long-term / high-duration
2. Significant / of importance

From this, we can formulate that personal values in terms of something a leader would be interested in are:

- A deep rooted feeling or belief that holds importance to an individual, culture, or society

It must be noted that the subject of personal values crosses numerous disciplines, including anthropology, sociology and psychology (Vinson et al, 1977). While these disciplines are out of scope for this article, one take away from this acknowledgement is that personal values are shaped by environmental factors such as culture, society and world events.

1.3. Personal values vs team member values

Every individual has a value system. It can be argued that it is easier to exhibit Values Based Leadership when a manager's team shares the same cultural and societal values as the manager. However, exhibiting VBL becomes more challenging when the team members are located or originate from an area that shares a different set of cultural and societal values.

1.4. Why is this important as a leader?

In a global business landscape, where firms are constantly looking for new markets, lower costs and more efficient methods of offering their product or service, a leader will inevitably come across value systems, either in their customers or their employees, which will differ from their own.

From a business standpoint, a leader is tasked with motivating her team to achieve a certain set of objectives for their organization. While team members, functional locations, countries, etc may change, the task of the leader remains the same.

Take for example a common scenario, a Project Manager (PM) from the United States tasked with delivering a piece of software, that will be developed by a team consisting of in-house staff, as well as off-shore contracted developers, to be marketed and sold internationally.

In a time when team-member engagement is considered critical to delivering quality output and cultural sensitivities must be identified and respected, the PM must be cognizant of not only her personal values, but those of the extended team, and further downstream, the target customers around the world.

1.5. Other Major Leadership Theories

The prevalent leadership theories can be divided into 10 categories (O'Toole 2008). Below are the categories, and in parenthesis, reference to the names or disciplines of scholars who often are associated with advancing, or describing, each perspective (O'Toole 2008):

1. Biological: "The leader has the most testosterone." (Bio-sociologists, primate behavioralists)
2. Power: "Might makes right." (Thucydides, Hobbes)
3. Paternalism: "Rule by the brightest and most virtuous." (Plato)
4. Contingency/Situational: "It all depends: leaders do whatever it takes." (Machiavelli, Spencer, Gary Wills (Wills, 1994), business school social scientists)
5. Great Man: "The hero as leader; it's about personality and charisma" (Carlyle, Weber)
6. Transactional: "Followers act in their self-interest." (economists, political scientists)
7. Cognitive: "Leaders lead by ideas." (Marx, John Gardner (Gardner, 1989))
8. Transformational: "Leaders are moral agents and enablers of followers." (James MacGregor Burns (Burns, 1978), Ronald (Heifetz, 1994))
9. Shared: "Leadership is a team sport." (Center for Effective Organizations (O'Toole, 2002))
10. Servant-Leadership: "Leaders help followers achieve their goals." (DePree, 1989)"

1.6. *Where Does VBL Fit In?*

While my contention is that VBL is a division of its own, that does not mean a Values Based Leader cannot draw upon some of the traits exhibited by other leadership styles. In fact, the Values Based Leader must be flexible and proficient in a number of divisions to be successful. Consider the following example and the affects.

Emperor Akbar (1542 – 1605) was a descendant of Genghis Khan and the third Mughal Emperor of India. While his predecessors had taken the role of conquerors in India, and governed as such with an iron-fist approach, Akbar saw that this was leading to internal strife and rebellion within the empire, in addition to increasing hatred for the “invaders”.

Akbar went against convention, and made the bold decision to marry a Hindu princess from a subject-state within the empire, without imposing any condition of her changing her religion. While this angered fundamentalists within the empire, this action showed Akbar’s respect for the vast majority of India’s population that belonged to the Hindu religion. After this first intrepid step, the Emperor went on to implement a number of policies and changes that brought the Mughal reign in alignment with the values of his Indian subjects.

Akbar’s reign went down as one of the most peaceful during the Mughal Empire. Akbar earned the respect of his subjects as a fair and just ruler, who understood the beliefs and values of his subjects, and made decisions in their interests. Citing Akbar's melding of the disparate 'fiefdoms' of India into the Mughal Empire as well as the lasting legacy of "pluralism and tolerance" that "underlies the values of the modern republic of India", Time magazine included his name in its list of top 25 world leaders (Tharoor, 2011). When future rulers returned to a conquerors approach to leading the empire, it eventually crumbled under the dissent and rebellion formed by the Sikh’s in the North and the Hindu Marathas in the South.

While my intent is not to glorify VBL as the be-all-end-all approach to management with the above example, I do wish to translate the above into business terms, and underline that consideration of the values of the culture and society a firm operates in is an essential component of an engaged and focused work-force.

2. **What is Project Management?**

2.1. *Definition*

The Project Management Institute (PMI), the leading proponent of the science of project management defines it as:

“...a temporary group activity designed to produce a unique product, service or result.

A project is temporary in that it has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore defined scope and resources.

And a project is unique in that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal. So a project team often includes people who don’t usually work together – sometimes from different organizations and across multiple geographies.

The development of software for an improved business process, the construction of a building or bridge, the relief effort after a natural disaster, the expansion of sales into a new geographic market — all are projects.

And all must be expertly managed to deliver the on-time, on-budget results, learning and integration that organizations need.

Project management, then, is the application of knowledge, skills and techniques to execute projects effectively and efficiently. It’s a strategic competency for organizations, enabling them to tie project results to business goals — and thus, better compete in their markets.”

2.2. A Project Manager's Focus

Based upon the above definition, a Project Manager is tasked with leading a team to ensure the project deliverables are completed, on time, on budget, and within scope (i.e. only the work agreed to by stakeholders is delivered, with additional pieces subject to stakeholder approval of the incremental cost and impact to schedule).

2.3. Implications

The implications of this activity-based focus include:

- Because the nature of a project is temporary (i.e. not an on-going operation), the project team may not directly report to the Project Manager
- Because of the focus and constraints on the Project Manager, she must be cognizant of all risks that could impact schedule, cost or scope, including cultural or societal sensitivities of team members or customers
- As mentioned earlier, outsourcing and remote workers are a common reality in most firms today, as is a global marketplace

While this may seem an irrelevant issue, consider the following scenarios:

- An offshore team member may not work the same hours as onshore employees because of time-zone differences. This would of course impact schedule if the time difference and turn-around time is not factored in
- While the primary language of business internationally is arguably English, the variances introduced by differing accents or influences (e.g. British vs American) can cause an unexpected communication barrier
- Many South American cultures consider lunch the primary meal of the day, while North Americans consider dinner the primary meal. While a working lunch is commonplace and accepted in the North American culture, those originating in South America or similar cultures, may not embrace this concept wholeheartedly.
- Under the pressures of schedule and budget, the above can all cause friction on the project team as the differences emerge, especially when unaccounted for, thereby introducing risk to the project

3. Major Values

China and India's emergence on the global business front, both in terms of outsourcing power and purchasing power, have brought their societal and cultural values to the vanguard of North American commerce.

3.1. China – Lenovo Group Limited

Lenovo Group Limited is a US \$21 billion IT and electronics company with its roots in China dating back to 1984. As per Wikipedia:

“Lenovo is the world's second-largest PC vendor by 2011 market share (after Hewlett-Packard) and markets the ThinkPad line of notebook computers and the ThinkCentre line of desktops.[4] These brands became part of Lenovo's offerings after its 2005 acquisition of IBM's personal computer business. Lenovo also sells the IdeaPad line of notebook computers. Lenovo markets its products directly to consumers, small to medium size businesses, and large enterprises, as well as through online sales, company-owned stores, chain retailers, and major technology distributors and vendors.”

From the Lenovo's own publications, we can see their core values stated as:

- 3.1.1 Serving Customers
- 3.1.2 Trust and Integrity
- 3.1.3 Teamwork Across Cultures
- 3.1.4 Innovation and Entrepreneurial Spirit

3.2. India – Wipro Limited

Wipro is a US \$7 billion IT services and consulting firm from India with origins dating back to 1948. As per Wikipedia:

“...As of 2012, Wipro is the second largest IT services company by turnover in India. It provides outsourced research and development, infrastructure outsourcing, business process outsourcing (BPO) and business consulting services. The company operates in three segments: IT Services, IT Products, Consumer Care and Lighting. It is 9th most valuable brand in India according to an annual survey conducted by Brand Finance and The Economic Times in 2010.”

Wipro publicizes their core values as:

3.2.1 Intensity to win

- a. This is the desire to stretch, to achieve that which seems beyond our grasp. This is aiming for maximum. This is the ardour to do our best, the hunger to be the best. This is the devotion to challenging our limits, it is about realizing our potential, and about expanding our potential.
- b. It is not about winning at all costs. It is not about winning every time. It is not about winning at the expense of others.
- c. It is about working together to create synergy. It is realising that I win when my team wins; my team wins when Wipro wins; and Wipro wins when its customers win, when its stakeholders win.
- d. It is about innovating all the time. It is a continuous endeavour to do better than last time.
- e. It is the Spirit of fortitude, the Spirit of never letting go... ever.

3.2.2 Act with sensitivity

- a. At its highest vision, respect for the individual is unqualified. The core of this sensitivity lies in understanding that every being, however different, is equal. The spirit of democracy underlies our notion of sensitivity... we believe in a society where each citizen sees the ethic of equity, the essentiality of diversity, the ethos of justice, and is thus driven to social action. It is seeing each of us is inextricably embedded in the same social fabric.
- b. The other source of respect is trust. Trusting that every individual is driven by learning, that each individual would like to grow, that every individual strives for a meaningful life and is intrinsically driven to do his/her best. Therefore, true respect means creating conditions in which every individual grows to realise his/her promise and potential.
- c. We are responsible for, and have an obligation to live in harmony with, our ecological environment. We should actively act to preserve nature, and refrain from any action that harms ecology.
- d. Thus, when I act with thoughtfulness, act responsibly, act with empathy... I act with sensitivity.

3.2.3 Unyielding integrity

- a. Integrity is a commitment to searching for and acting on the truth. "Truth" is a word with many manifestations - it means keeping one's word; it also means understanding and realizing one's highest vision of oneself.
- b. On integrity, there will be no compromise... we will always act to establish the foremost standards of honesty and fairness.
- c. Integrity is a beacon. It is what guides us, gives us direction... it is not a straitjacketing laundry list of do's and don'ts.
- d. Integrity is being ethical beyond doubt. It is living the law of the land in spirit. It is what will give us the confidence to stand up to any scrutiny.
- e. I am the litmus test of my integrity. For integrity is the manifestation of conscience.

3.3. US – Hewlett-Packard Development Company

HP is an iconic US \$127 billion U.S based IT firm. As per Wikipedia:

“HP is an American multinational information technology corporation headquartered in Palo Alto, California, United States that provides products, technologies, software, solutions and services to consumers, small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) and large enterprises, including customers in the government, health and education sectors.

HP’s company values are:

- 3.2.1 Passion for customers
We put our customers first in everything we do.
- 3.2.2 Trust and respect for individuals
We work together to create a culture of inclusion built on trust, respect and dignity for all.
- 3.2.3 Achievement and contribution
We strive for excellence in all we do; each person's contribution is key to our success.
- 3.2.4 Results through teamwork
We effectively collaborate, always looking for more efficient ways to serve our customers.
- 3.2.5 Speed and agility
We are resourceful, adaptable and achieve results faster than our competitors.
- 3.2.6 Meaningful innovation
We are the technology company that invents the useful and the significant.
- 3.2.7 Uncompromising integrity
We are open, honest and direct in our dealings.

4. Drawing cultural values from corporate values

4.1. Comparison

Extrapolating the values of the companies in section 3 to be representative of their home countries, we can make the following observations:

4.1.1. Primary value

	China	India	U.S
First listed value	Serving customers	Intensity to win	Passion for customers

All three have chosen to a customer based focus for their first value, however worded quite differently and introducing cultural nuances.

4.1.1.1 China

Chinese culture is heavily influenced by Confucius, the Chinese teacher, editor, politician and philosopher. As per Wikipedia, “The philosophy of Confucius emphasized personal and governmental morality, correctness of social relationships, justice, and sincerity”. Furthermore,

“Confucius's principles had a basis in common Chinese tradition and belief. He championed strong family loyalty, ancestor worship, respect of elders by their children (and in traditional interpretations of husbands by their wives), and family as a basis for ideal government. He espoused the well-known principle "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself", an early version of the Golden Rule.”

From the wording “Serving customers”, you can sense the value Chinese culture puts on respect, humility and strong relationships.

4.1.1.2 India

India is typically thought of as the land of religion, spirituality and mysticism, with 4 of the world’s major religions having taken birth there. However, sometimes overlooked are the deep-rooted martial traditions. Much of this can be drawn back to the ancient Hindu Vedic scriptures and epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which both focus on the battle between good and evil. Furthermore, India had been invaded and under foreign rulers for much of its history, prior to the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, which was the culmination of a 90-year long freedom struggle against the British Raj. Previous invaders include the Macedonians, Persians, Mongols and Afghans.

The “Intensity to win” and the further explanation of this core value of winning, but not at all costs, is a balanced combination of the spiritual and martial values of the society.

4.1.1.3 U.S

Reflecting on U.S. history conjures up thoughts of a turbulent past including fighting for freedom from England, the reprehensible times of slavery, to the civil war through the Wild West, and recently 9/11. Throughout this turbulence, Americans have valued and championed patriotism, self-reliance and freedom. The U.S. is also considered a melting pot of cultures from around the world, where immigrants embrace the societal values of their new home. Furthermore, the U.S. is considered the “home” of capitalism, and is what many developing nations strive to achieve.

The “Passion for customers” reflects this history, as well as the melting pot concept, melding the concepts of its patriotism and the world cultures. Furthermore “Passion for customers” implies many things from a business sense, including striving to gain customers, and retaining and growing current customer business. Both of which reflect the capitalistic ideal.

4.2. Commonalities

Looking at all of the values listed above, four common themes emerge:

- A customer centric approach
- High-performance teams
- Integrity
- Innovation

4.3. Progress

Chakraborty (1995) carried out a similar yet more detailed comparison as above, using the examples of the U.S and Japan in comparison with India. Interestingly, his study found more differences in values than our study above. This can be, in my opinion, attributed to the globalization of the world's economies, and the removal of business barriers in the world markets. It can be argued that as globalization increases, corporate values will become more similar.

5. Putting it all together for the PM

With the above knowledge of the common corporate themes around the world, how does this help the international Project Manager? One way is that the differences of language, culture and personal values become less daunting.

1. Understand your values – what drives you? How do your personal values mesh with our common values of a customer centric approach, high performance, integrity and innovation? Once you understand your personal values and how they fit with the common set, you can begin leading your team in that direction.
2. Use the project kick-off meeting to drive the discussion of personal and common values. The project kick-off meeting is typically very light-hearted, with a team bursting with enthusiasm for a new challenge. The trials and tribulations of the work at hand have not yet begun. Use this environment and time to have an informal round table discussion of where each team member is from and what they value most in the workplace
3. Use this discussion to define commonalities in the themes mentioned by the team members
4. Begin creating a brief document with acceptable team norms, values and rules
5. Have everyone sign off and indicate their buy-in
6. As the PM, be cognizant that the team norms values and rules are being adhered to by all members, especially during times of high-stress and tight dead-lines
7. Don't hesitate to step in as needed if you feel someone is not behaving acceptably, using the norms, values and rules document as a basis

6. Conclusion

While on the surface, teams may see more differences than commonalities, in fact the opposite is true. Project's can be extremely taxing on team members and management. Using a basis of common values, Values Based Leadership can be implemented and often stop issues between individuals before they arise. It

is important for the organization to know its values, the PM to know hers, and the team to know theirs. From this knowledge, the common points can be harnessed to mitigate the risks team disharmony and miscommunications can magnify.

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