

Dilemmas of Leadership for High Performance in Product Development

Leadership is so important for competitiveness in turbulent environments that we need to rethink it. There are hundreds of books about leaders at the apex of the corporation, e.g., Jack Welch. Yet leadership opportunities are distributed throughout the depth and breadth of organizations. According to Peter Senge's Fifth Dimension (1990), structures in vibrant organizations are horizontal, not pyramidal. Effective leaders are architects of the relationships among people who work toward achieving a shared vision. Effective leaders constantly juggle seemingly contradictory role in creative ways. Analysis of the SPOT Diagnostic database of 100 companies profile the complex roles enacted by effective product development project leaders. The following leadership practices statistically predict why product development teams in some enterprises achieve requirements, schedule and budget far better than others.

STRATEGY

- Clearly communicate goals and objectives, but engage team members in their formulation.
- Ensure everyone works toward a common goal, but allow adaptations during the journey.

PROCESS

- Clearly communicate expected product development processes, but coach teams in their use.
- Enforce compliance with product development processes, but allow changes based on evidence.

ORGANIZATION

- Make provisional decisions promptly, but ask subordinates for advice on important decisions.
- Emphasize short-term, measurable achievements, but allow teams the autonomy needed to complete their work
- Reward individuals for how competently they did their own job, but also reward team members equally based on project performance.
- Hold team members accountable for project outcomes, but also focus on the well-being of team members.

TOOLS

- Set standards for the use of tools and technologies, but encourage team members to try new tools and technologies.
- Require common usage of tools and technologies among team members, but involve them in choices

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