

Foreword

By Babu Surendran, Project Director

The concept of “soft power” is widely misunderstood and seldom applied by Project Managers. Most of today’s Project Directors/Managers have come from the “old school of hard knocks” and do not believe that managing “soft issues” can add value. This book has the capacity to change this mindset and add value to projects.

During my career as Project Director, on large Oil and Gas Projects worldwide, the one thing I realized very early in my career, was that the complexity of projects, especially these mega-projects, makes it almost impossible to be the one who knows it all, even if you are the Project Director! And as I always used to say, no human being lives long enough to know everything about everything. As such, we have no choice but to rely on others in our team to contribute specialist knowledge in specific areas. In order to get this done effectively and have a team with ALL members pulling in the same direction towards a common goal, the team has to have a “buzz,” be excited, be aligned and be unified. This can only happen if the soft power approach is taken.

I would strongly recommend this book to anybody who is aspiring to move up the ladder in any project organization towards management positions.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Jeremie for making this book available to the many who believe in “change,” when it is for the better.

Babu Surendran

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Introduction

*“You can't build an organization
which is fit for the future
without making it fit for human beings.” – Gary Hamel*

Why is this book important to the project management community?

This book was written to fill a wide-open gap, a real chasm in project management literature. It provides future and present project leaders with a simple framework for practicing and learning the real skills they need to thrive in their profession. As such, this book is a must-read for all people specializing in project management — a challenging and often rewarding profession!

Organizations generally choose upcoming project managers knowledgeable about the technical functions of the organization. Their technical abilities, their experience, and their process capabilities are the criteria used when deciding whether to promote them to project managers. The same criteria are used when it comes to selecting the project core team members.

The new project managers and core team members just do more of what they were doing before.

And then... many fail along with their projects, and many others just barely deliver average results.

They fail, in many instances, because the skills that are important as a project manager are not solely technical skills. As Marshall Goldsmith¹ says, “*what got you here won’t get you there.*” Though your promotion was based on technical abilities, and these will continue to be centrally important to your success as a new project manager, they are not sufficient. On the contrary: very different new skills are needed.

And indeed, the few outstanding project leaders and core project management teams show very different skills and areas of focus. These managers and leaders also often stemmed from technical positions; but they developed these other skills over time, generally by themselves or by observing and modeling their techniques on those of other successful project leaders.

Stop being a Project Manager. Be a Project Leader.

We have carefully observed successful and respected project leaders, and this research has allowed us to codify those skills for the benefit of the reader. These skills are not complicated. Still, they take practice and discipline to master over the years.

Yet many organizations just throw the new project manager into the turmoil of project leadership without any preparation or any hint that now, entirely new skills are important. This effect is reinforced by the numerous project management books and literature which represent project management as a mechanistic set of processes. Of course, processes are important; they are part of our technical knowledge. Yet the skills that really make a difference are not mechanistic process-related skills.

To start with, a project manager does not manage processes. In reality, he leads his team. So, in this book

we will use the ‘project leader’ terminology as a way to cut loose from the conventional, bureaucratic-minded ‘project manager’ term.

So... what is ‘Project Soft Power?’

‘Soft power’ is a useful concept that was first defined by Joseph Nye in the field of international relations, and that is used frequently in that context. Joseph Nye defined ‘soft power’ by opposition to the more conventional ‘hard power’ of sheer military and economic force. ‘Soft power’ is comprised of influence, persuasion, and the ability to attract. In the field of leadership, Joseph Nye states: *“many leadership skills such as creating a vision, communicating it, attracting and choosing able people, delegating, and forming coalitions depend upon what I call soft power.”*

This book uses the terminology of ‘Project Soft Power’ as a way to distinguish the five key skills identified in successful project managers and leaders from the usual project management approaches which are based on technical and process-related skills, which would be equivalent to ‘project hard power.’

In fact, as demonstrated repeatedly, success in project endeavors is not just the result of the mechanistic application of processes and analytical skills. It is the result of momentum created by the leader, enabling the project team to tackle the seemingly impossible, the never-done-before. Such a movement can only be achieved by applying ‘Project Soft Power.’

The five key skills of the project leader

Beyond the technical and process skills, personal and inter-personal skills will in fact determine success or failure. The most respected and successful project leaders demonstrate consistently strong personal and inter-personal skills in their daily behavior. Indeed, their

contribution is much more reliant upon the application of these skills than on their technical experience or project knowledge.

The intent of this book is to provide a readily usable framework for these skills. After much research and after boiling down numerous observations, five key skills have been identified as being the main contributors to a project's success:

- a central skill: weave the network to engage with stakeholders;
- two personal skills: constant focus and discipline; and an entrepreneurial mindset;
- two inter-personal skills: leverage the team; and act as a people catalyst.

Anyone can develop and practice these skills. They are simple to understand and difficult to implement at the same time, because they require emotional work.

These skills can be summarized under the framework of 'Project Soft Power,' so as to distinguish them from the traditional 'project hard power.'

Why are the five key skills rooted in emotional work?

What is emotional work? Emotional work is the ability to connect with others at a deep emotional level to create one-of-a-kind experiences. Connecting with others at the emotional level is, in turn, not possible without a personal emotional balance and a consistent emotional discipline.

The concept of "emotional intelligence" popularized in the 1990's is directly related to emotional work. The terminology 'emotional work' is preferred here to convey the fact that it is not a particular talent; it takes effort, consistency and persistence to achieve great results in the field of emotional connections.

It is important to realize that today in our world, in particular as it changes with the Fourth Revolution², emotional work is increasingly valued above all other types of work, including manual and intellectual work. This is still shocking to a large part of the population, but that's the reality in our world today, as we shift into the Collaborative Age.

While the value of manual work has already been depreciated for a long time in the Industrial Age, beginning in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, intellectual (processing) work was favored and had the most value. The processing power was scarce; the decision-making was slow in hierarchical organizations. The coordination of geographically distant entities was made difficult by scarce and expensive methods of communication. Under these conditions, analytical and process-oriented approaches were favored and valued.

The premium placed on technical expertise and analytical process-oriented approaches is a direct heritage from the Industrial Age. Many people today still believe it has the highest value, which is why the value of emotional work is still not as widely recognized as it should be. Our education system and our society in general are still in many ways built to identify and promote students with the highest intellectual processing capabilities.

Today we are moving into a new Age, the Collaborative Age. It has been brought about by the availability of cheap and reliable long distance communication and plentiful processing capabilities. In this new Age, intellectual processing-type work will become increasingly depreciated. The work that has real value in this new Age is emotional work.

What makes a project leader successful will increasingly be the way he deploys and uses emotional work, and less and less how much he knows about technical and process issues.

In the field of project management, this book is key to discussing and evaluating to what emotional work entails.

Should conventional project management literature be thrown away?

No, it should not be thrown away. It is important both to know about the different fields and issues that the project manager will typically encounter, and to know that there are processes available to cater to many important aspects of project management.

Yet conventional project management literature is very much mechanistic, process oriented, and linear. It tends to make one believe that the perfect application of certain processes in a particular sequence will guarantee success. While studies show that application of these processes do slightly increase the odds of projects avoiding total failure, the project failure rate still remains very high even in organizations that supposedly apply these processes very well.

Actually, our consulting work shows that there are still many organizations that do not apply the basic disciplines and processes of project management, and this does not enable them even to have an accurate overview of the current status of their projects. An immediate improvement, then, is to enforce the application of some sound processes, which form a much-needed basic framework.

Still, in organizations that have implemented consistently and 'by the book' all the relevant project management processes, conventional project management processes appear to be necessary but not sufficient.

In reality, in the end, each project is a human adventure, albeit a temporary adventure with only a few players, and any person experienced in project management knows that success or failure often

depends ultimately on the synergy and spirit of a project team.

Projects have been run successfully in organizations that started from scratch with only the most basic processes and tools in place, or which developed tools specifically for the task. The availability of processes, tools and systems is necessary, in particular for large projects, but it is not a guarantee of success. The crucial success-determining factor is how the project leader demonstrates soft power and empowers the team to effectively implement the solutions needed to tackle the project objectives.

Conventional project literature should not be thrown away, but should be supplemented with a warning that what it contains is necessary but not sufficient in enabling a person to be a successful project leader. The practices of 'Project Soft Power' are here to fill in the gap.

Who should read this book?

This book is directly written for project management professionals, and that comprises all men and women who are involved in project teams. Whatever your position, you can lead in your remit; you are a project leader. So, while this book is for experienced project "managers," junior project "managers," and men and women contemplating the career of project "management," it is also for all of those who, at any level, contribute to the effective delivery of the projects with which they are involved.

This book will transform the conventional "manager" into the leader that each of us deserves to be.

Because projects are at the heart of the Collaborative Age's Open, Fluid Organization², project leadership skills will quickly become desirable for everybody. While this book is primarily aimed at people who are already engaged in project management

practices, almost anybody can learn from the Project Soft Power practices and use them to great effect in his or her work.

The structure of the book

Section I proposes a fable in which people with some experience in project management will recognize a number of quite typical shortfalls and events. The object of this fictional story is to illustrate the impact of the application of Project Soft Power on project execution in a lively way.

In Section II we will examine one by one the different roles of the project leader when applying 'Project Soft Power:'

- the project leader in his role as SPIDER, weaving his network web;
- the project leader in his role as KUNG FU MASTER, practicing deep focus;
- the project leader in his role as ENTREPRENEUR, investing in the long term;
- the project leader in his role as TEAM COACH, unleashing the team's potential;
- the project leader in his role as a PEOPLE CATALYST, revealing each individual's potential.
- Finally, the Project Soft Power model is brought together in a general summary and overview.

Section III contains a simple Project Soft Power self-assessment to allow you to assess your skill level in the five key skills. This simple assessment is also available online at www.ProjectSoftPower.com where it can be viewed via the Internet at your convenience.

Section IV goes into the details of the assessment results and gives you practical, down-to-earth advice on what to do with your Project Soft Power self-assessment results.

Finally, Section V discusses in greater detail the general importance and value of emotional work, which is central to the concept of ‘Project Soft Power.’

The progression of the book goes from a more illustrated and practical approach, toward a more theoretical and conceptual one. The reader can choose to approach the subject according to her preferences. The central piece of the book, the description of the five key skills of ‘Project Soft Power’ (Section II and III), forms the core of the book’s message.

Now ... take action!

“It is one thing to study war and another to live the warrior’s life.” – Telamon of Arcadia, mercenary during the 5th century BC

Developing these ‘soft power’ skills is difficult because they are rooted in emotional work. It is because they are so difficult to acquire and develop that those few people who successfully master them are rare and extremely valuable.

You, as well as anyone else, can learn to demonstrate these skills consistently. You can become one of these highly respected and successful project leaders. The ambition of this book is to formalize skills that have not been previously shown that way and to show the path to mastering Project Soft Power.

Yet reading this book is not enough. Knowing those five skills is not enough. You might have already developed some talent in a few of these skills, but it will take time and consistent practice to develop them all. You might need to unlearn some ways of doing things in order to apply these practices. Don’t under-estimate the investment. Get some help from a coach or from colleagues to help you overcome the difficult barriers and obstacles that are in the way of your emotional work development.

Do it, because it is worth it, both in your life as a leader of projects and in your community and life in general. I fully hope that beyond reading and sharing this book, you will take action, become a true Project Soft Power leader, and help raise the bar of the project management community at the time when project management spreads everywhere in the wake of the Fourth Revolution.

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Singapore

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Let's keep in touch through the website:

www.ProjectSoftPower.com

so that you can share with the community your Project Soft Power stories.

Notes

1: *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, Marshall Goldsmith, Mark Reiter, Hyperion, 2007: a must-read in the field of career development, from one of the most successful executive coaches

2: *The Fourth Revolution, How to Thrive Through the World's Transformation*, Jeremie Averous, Fourth Revolution Publishing, 2011: a description of the current transformations of the world as we move from the Industrial Age into the Collaborative Age.