

# The Relevance of Sharing Values in Project Leadership

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## Abstract

Project leadership is an important aspect for non-profit organizations (NPOs) that run projects to address societal challenges. While communication and goal orientation as determining factors in project leadership have extensively been researched little has been researched on the relevance of sharing values as a determining factor in leadership, in particular leader-leader exchange (LLX). The purpose of this research is to close this gap by confirming the relevance of sharing values in project leadership. If this relevance is been confirmed, the research model which was developed and includes sharing values as a determining factor will be used to address another research question that forms part of a wider leadership topic. A way of testing the relevance of sharing values in the model which was used to assess determining factors on project performance in auditing and consulting projects is the focus group discussion. The results of the focus group discussion as a qualitative research method should, it will be evident how relevant sharing values in leadership is. The questions addressed in the focus group discussion to eight participants from both the for-profit and non-profit organizations should give further answers to leadership components such as communication. The qualitative research indicates that the dimension of sharing values dealing with projects is not only important but, it acts as a catalyst for the organization's values as a whole. Findings also found justifications that sharing values is also considered a precondition for project leadership as a factor for improving the performance in projects. In the end, the research will confirm the criticality of sharing values and also give examples that help to address leadership as determining factor to achieve project performance.

## Keywords

Leadership, Sharing Values, Organisations, Project Performance

## 1. Introduction

This Project leadership is an important aspect for organisations, including non-

profit organizations (NPOs) that run projects to address societal challenges. While communication and goal orientation as determining factors in project leadership have extensively been researched (Chen & Lin 2018; Anantatmula, 2010; Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008; Müller & Turner, 2010; Rodney Turner, Müller, & Dulewicz, 2009), little has been researched on the relevance of sharing values as a determining factor in leadership. Even some authors addressed sharing values from a transformational leadership perspectives (Gillespie & Mann, 2004), underlying the fact that shared values are the building block of trust in the organization environment in a wider sense. However, it was not done from the project perspective nor analyzed from the perspective of the leading project manager. Other authors addressed shared values through the shared leadership (Clarke, 2012) as a matter of leadership style and not insisting on the values themselves. Lastly, authentic leadership (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011) matters in project delivery and the term authentic seem to hint towards the need to share the values of the project leader.

The purpose of this research is to close this gap by confirming the relevance of sharing values in project leadership as a factor for project performance. This relevance, in turn, will be critical for the research model derived from Chen & Lin (2018) which is part of wider research on project leadership. Findings also found justifications that sharing values is also considered a precondition for project leadership as a factor for improving the performance in projects. The research contributes by providing insights into a critical leadership element especially when it comes to leader-leader exchange for project managers who operate in an increasingly volatile environment.

One type of leadership that is mentioned in a particular model of leadership (Chen & Lin, 2018) model is leader-leader exchange (LLX). The exchange relationship between the project manager and a supervising role is named leader-leader exchange. When the leader-leader exchange works better, this has a positive influence on the leader-member exchange and, as a consequence, on the leader's influence on the team, and also on the work and project performance of the team-members (Erdeji et al., 2016).

Although sharing values has been confirmed as a building block in transformational leadership (Abazajian et al., 2004) this has not yet been proven in a project context. Derived from the model of Chen and Lin, sharing values as a mediating or moderating factor in LLX was introduced with the aim of better understanding how sharing values matters in project performance.

Some research was performed on leaders of project teams with different cultural backgrounds (Bodea et al., 2010: p. 178). Indeed, sharing values (including intercultural values) gain in importance with regard to leadership and it may be assumed that their impact on overall project performance, in particular in an international project environment is quantifiable. The challenge so far is to measure the leadership impact through a specific research model on the project performance of NPOs. So far this was not yet studied, at least not in the NPOs con-

text, and more particularly in project management associations.

An important concept for the research problem is project performance. Many elements in the literature refer to project performance of which most refer to projects carried out in the corporate world (Thomas & Mengel, 2008: p. 1; Saidoun, 2016: p. 218 ff; Tushman & Katz, 1980: p. 1072). Some studies focus on how goal orientation affects performance in a project context (Clark, 1989: p. 1247 ff). They primarily focus on team performance and not on overall project performance. From the social exchange theory perspective, a project manager has a different social exchange relationship with his/her supervisor (Mehta et al., 2009: pp. 1027-1028; Gong et al., 2013: p. 27; Huang, 2012: p. 2127). In associations, Gillespie & Mann (2004) it is generally a board member or the executive director who acts as the project sponsor. Project performance can have a different meaning according to whether projects are run in the private sector or in the NPO sector. Project performance can be understood as “the effective and efficient use of resources to achieve results” (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004: pp. 368-369; Bruthiaux, 2000: p. 269). The research process consists of three phases. In the first phase a research model that applies to address components of leadership is chosen. It allows measuring the impact of leadership on performance in projects, in particular in a non for profit context of organizations that manage projects. In the second phase, the confirmation of the relevance of sharing values in the model as a determining factor in leadership is conducted. The results are the subject of this paper. They are the results of the focus group discussion. In the third phase, an analysis of the research question “Does personal communication moderate the impact of the leader-leader exchange and the sharing of values on overall project performance in NPOs?” will be made. It needs to be addressed using a quantitative method and will be the subject of a future paper.

Therefore, the present study is aimed to validate the second phase, consisting in confirming the relevance of sharing values in the leadership model derived from Chen & Lin (2018) through a focus group discussion. This is precisely the novelty this piece of research brings to the subject of project leadership.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research Design

The research will analyze the gap between the current determining factors in leadership as found in the literature and the one applied in the research model of leadership chosen by the author in a wider piece of research derived from Chen & Lin (2018). A way of testing the relevance of sharing values in the model which was used to assess determining factors on project performance in auditing and consulting projects is the focus group discussion. The focus group discussion is carried out in a group setting on a topic and engages in reflection (Morgan 1997). The focus group can be positioned as a method between the group interview/discussion and participatory observation (Maylor et al., 2017).

The collected data from the focus group discussion topic form the basis of this article.

## 2.2. Analysis Method

The research process consists of three phases, of which one has already been completed. The other phases will be completed later on.

Phase 1: One of the models that could apply to address components of leadership that allow measuring the impact of leadership on performance in projects, in particular in a non for profit context of organizations that manage projects.

This model is part of wider research and is summarized in **Figure 1**.

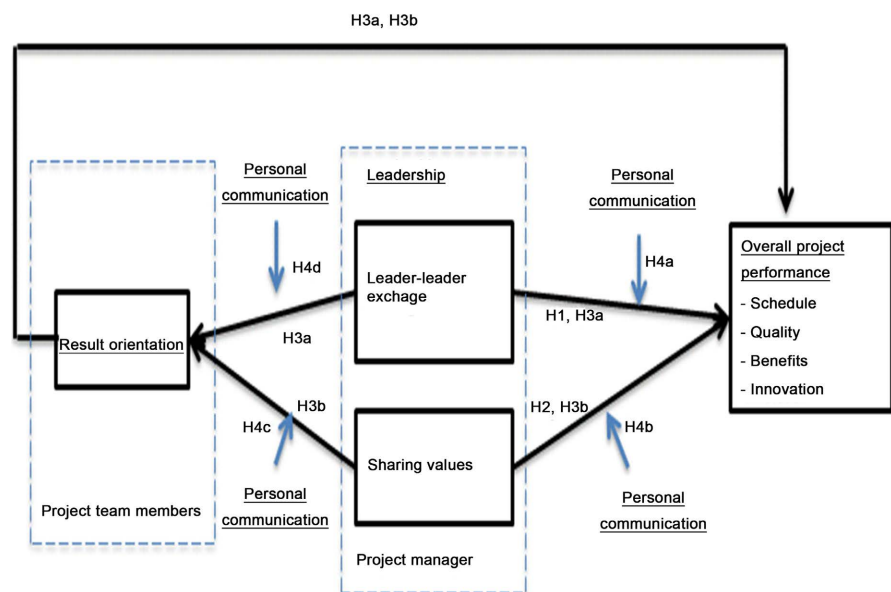
Phase 2: A confirmation of the relevance of sharing values in the model as a determining factor in leadership is the purpose of this paper. It summarizes the results of the focus group discussion.

Phase 3: An analysis of the research question “Does personal communication moderate the impact of the leader-leader exchange and the sharing of values on overall project performance in NPOs?” needs to be addressed using a quantitative method

This process is chosen to address the main research question of wider research:

Do leader-leader exchange (LLX) and values sharing directly and indirectly (with results orientation as mediator) impact the overall project performance in NPOs? And if yes how?

For research in this paper, namely the testing of the research model on the relevance of sharing values as a determining factor in leadership, eight participants from both for-profit and non-profit organizations were chosen to participate in a focus group discussion. They responded to nine questions related to the



Source: Saidoun and Bodea (inspired from [Chen & Lin, 2018](#)).

**Figure 1.** The research model.

relevance of sharing values in leadership in a project context.

A qualitative methodology was used to address the three questions addressed in the introduction by organizing a focus group discussion among leaders of different organizations.

Nine questions were raised. Each person shared his opinion about each question, which led to both answers and a debate that will be addressed in the discussion part of this paper.

The questions are summarized in **Figure 2**.

After completing the research, the collected and analyzed data should answer the research question. Doing so will provide a better understanding of the relevance of sharing values in leadership and will add empirical insight into the relevance for NPOs and companies from various industries.

The persons and their functions in their respective organization that participated in the focus group discussions are summarized In **Figure 3**.

The qualifying project managers are experienced leaders with dealing project management and have a robust project management culture based on internal and external qualification certification systems.

The organizations are both large private companies and non-profit organizations from the education sector.

The answers to the questions were written and also notes were taken regarding the reaction of the people present in the meeting through detailed observation.

The findings are discussed in the next part:

Q1: On the question regarding the meaning of sharing values, the respondents had mostly converging answers. They agreed that sharing values is a prerequisite for building trust and being able to communicate with each other in a project. It was underlined that sharing values was fundamental at organizational level first and that this is why the corporate charter and values charter was established after a lengthy consultation process. This needs to be broken down at the project level, as a project is a temporary organization within the larger corporate organization. It was also underlined sharing values means using the right communication to do so, via written documents and corporate communication initiatives. It was even more important that sharing values is done through leading by example on an everyday basis. This means, that it is a top-level process by which management has a role model. Sharing values means being compliant with regulations in place on an everyday basis.

Q2: all participants of the discussion concurred with no exception that sharing values was important regarding leadership both at the organization and project level. One participant mentioned that in the absence of a value-sharing project manager, self-organizing could be a consequence, which is not an obvious thing to do in all project teams.

Q3: the reason for the importance of sharing values was essentially justified as a trust-building component of leadership. Sharing values is bringing stability to the team.

1	What means sharing values ?
2	Does sharing values matter in leadership ?
3	Why are sharing values important in leadership ?
4	What are shared values in a project team ?
5	What do have shared value project leaders have in common ?
6	What type of values do you share as project leader in your organization?
7	Why project managers need shared value to be engaged ?
8	Do you think that sharing values has an impact on project performance in a project?
9	How are values shared in your organization ?

**Figure 2.** Focus group questions.

Person (function)	Organizations	Origin	Number of participants in each function
Project Director	Siemens	Austria	1
Project director in project excellence division	Alstom	France	1
Project Director	Renault	France	1
Professor for project management	Polytechnic School of (Cologne)	Germany	1
Professor for project management	University of Vylnius	Lithuania	1

**Figure 3.** Members, functions and organizations of focus group.

It was underlined that if values change throughout the project (ex. a change of the project manager or project sponsor), this will be difficult for the team to understand and could lead to demotivation. An example from the construction industry was quoted, in which a project manager asked his members to falsify some critical project data. This was not accepted by an important team member who left the project and ultimately the company following this change in sharing values.

Q4: in a project team a member mentioned that shared values mean focusing on top values and making sure they are shared through different means. This could be a charter displayed in some offices or project sites, it could be values that are lived, it could be values that are derived from the organization to the project.

Q5: on the question of what shared values leaders do have in common, the answer focused on communication in its various format (oral, written), clarity of expression, balance and tone.

Q6: on the question on the type of values shared by the project leader, the participants mentioned compliance, concern of the environment, health and safety, fairness, innovation, honesty and innovation. Openness was mentioned further. These values are needed to share the same vision and give a solid basis to common project work; they represent the core of the project culture; the stronger

they are communicated, the more the team will act in the same direction. Living values is a sentence that was repeated by several participants. Furthermore, it was underlined that company values should be broken down consistently to project values by the leaders. One example quoted was agility.

Q7: The reason why project managers need shared values to be engaged was the need for stability of the project team who often work in a complex and demanding environment which includes heavy workload, time constraints and deadlines, risks, threats, and pressure from multiple stakeholders.

Q8: All participants agreed that sharing values has an impact on project performance.

The reason for this is that the role model, the exemplarity of the project manager will lead to project engagement. It creates a project identity as a symbol for the project. An example was quoted from Renault, in which the model Logan was associated with the effectiveness

Sharing values has a positive impact on people's well-being.

It is critical to make a gap analysis regarding sharing values at the team and project manager levels. Special tools were developed for that.

Q9: the way that values are shared is through an on boarding process (Siemens). This starts with the signing of a business code of conduct, a non-disclosure agreement, systematic training, kick-off meetings and having a project manager that has a role model.

One participant underlined that writing values are now enough. It should be a bottom-down process. An example was mentioned the development of a speak-up culture. This has to be lived.

It was underlined that there was a gap between what top-management lives and the values which are written in the companies. Values can be shared by carrying out social activities before project kick-off.

### 3. Conclusion

The use of qualitative research indicated that the dimension of sharing values dealing with projects is not only important for leadership but, it is impacting the leadership in projects and how projects perform. This has both been confirmed in the focus group discussions by project managers from the for-profit as the non for profit organizations.

This is even more important in a globally volatile project environment characterized by inflation, recession and socio-political instability in many parts of the world. Sharing values makes a difference as it allows the building of trust and created a positive intrinsic atmosphere in the project team to perform projects.

The focus group discussion also confirmed that even if the values of the organizations differ, there is a need for a common understanding of these values at the project and at the large organization as a whole, in which the project is embedded.

This research-in-progress paper offers insight into the possibility to qualify



sharing values in leadership as determining factor to achieve performance in projects. The challenge will be to complete the findings with quantitative methods to understand if sharing values is a moderating or mediating factor of project performance, combined with the factors illustrated in **Figure 1** of this paper. This, in turn, will determine how sharing values influences the overall project performance in non-profit organizations and helps to better understand the criticality of leadership in projects, and more particularly the leader-leader exchange (LLX).

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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