

## PM WORLD TODAY – FEATURED PAPER – SEPTEMBER 2009

## The Fellowship of Teams: The Power of Individual and Shared Responsibilities on Projects

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**Introduction:**

In the quest for successful project execution, today's project managers must rely on more than their own leadership power to complete the project's journey. As projects become complex and more virtual, it is important that project managers consider group dynamics and form a "fellowship of the team" where members embrace both individual and shared responsibility for results.

**The Fellowship of the Team**

The Lord of the Rings movie "*The Fellowship of the Ring*" contains a scene where the Council of Elrond is convened with men, wizards, elves, hobbits and dwarves.<sup>1</sup> The council is preparing to sponsor a project of the utmost importance. The charter is to save Middle Earth from darkness and despair by destroying a magic ring in the fiery chasms of Mount Doom. Lord Elrond warns the council members that "Middle Earth stands upon the brink of destruction. None can escape it. You will unite or you will fall."

Aragon, the reluctant leader, now has the challenge to take a group of divergent personalities and transform them into a high performing "fellowship" to successfully execute a seemingly insurmountable project charter. Sound familiar?

In today's world, cross-functional and/or remote project teams are often formed where the members need to immediately rely on each other. If team members are unsure of their authority and level of accountability, it can easily result in mistrust and chaos within the project. The outcome can be devastating in terms of cost, time, and quality. We must unite or we will fall.

How can project managers create a "fellowship of the team" without the help of magic or wizards? It starts with understanding the characteristics of high performing teams.

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<sup>1</sup>Movie: *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, New Line Cinema, 2001

## **High Performing Teams**

Ken Blanchard explains “To succeed in today’s complex and changing business environment, we must learn a new way of working in teams. We must take our teams to the Next Level. This means creating teams that release the power of team members—power that comes from their knowledge, experience, and internal motivation.”<sup>2</sup>

“Next Level” Teams per Blanchard are highly skilled, interactive groups that:

- share information to build high levels of trust and responsibility
- set clear, but wide boundaries so team members can act with responsibility and a clear focus
- make effective use of the each team member’s time, talents, ideas
- self-manage to make decisions and yield great results

To become a higher performing and empowered team, each member must capitalize on their own talents and skills to achieve their tasks while also accepting shared responsibility for team results.

## **Individual and Shared Responsibilities:**

Christopher Avery in his book, “*Teamwork is an Individual Skill: Getting Your Work Done When Sharing Responsibility*”, defines a team as “a group of individuals responding successfully to the opportunity presented by shared responsibility”.<sup>3</sup>

It’s about accepting accountability for deliverables and taking responsibility for team relationships. And it all starts at the core with personal (individual) responsibility.

Project team members exhibit individual responsibility when they are accountable for their actions on specific tasks and project assignments from beginning to end. They display self-leadership by delivering the right results and demonstrating the right behaviors that align with team and organizational norms.

The project manager must also be willing to share the leadership role with team members through a balance of individual and shared responsibilities. With shared responsibility, team members freely communicate relevant information, solve problems rather than placing blame on others, and take an interest with assisting other team members to achieve project goals. This results in higher trust, stronger partnerships, and more collaboration within the team.

How can project managers instill a philosophy of individual and shared responsibility within their projects? One answer is by looking at traditional project teams and stakeholder management techniques in a different way.

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<sup>2</sup> *Go Team!: Take Your Team to the Next Level*, by Ken Blanchard, Alan Randolph and Peter Grazier, Berrett-Koehler Publishers © 2007 Citation

<sup>3</sup> *Teamwork is an Individual Skill: Getting Your Work Done When Sharing Responsibility*, by Christopher M. Avery, Meri Aaron Walker and Erin O’Toole Murphy, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001

Let's take a closer look at how a project manager can apply five simple but powerful concepts and techniques in a new way:

1. **Project Charter** - team's bulls-eye
2. **Maslow's Hierarchy** - team motivation
3. **Project Bill of Rights** - project manager and team expectations
4. **Stakeholder Analysis** - individual commitment
5. **RASCI Matrix** - individual leadership roles and responsibilities

### **Project Charter**

The project charter typically documents the agreement between the sponsor and the project team on the scope of the deliverable. However, it also serves as a baseline of what is expected from the project team. Each team member should participate in the chartering process to “personally and formally commit to doing their best to achieve the agreed-upon project results - even when things do not go as planned.”<sup>4</sup>

Project Managers will have stronger support from the project team if they are included in the development of the charter. In cases where the charter is approved before the team is formed, one of the first team activities should be to decompose the high level deliverables into SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound) goals.

SMART goals derived from the project charter serve as the “north star” or “bulls-eye” for team members in terms of their individual and shared responsibilities. Translating the charter into team oriented SMART goals is also an extremely beneficial exercise for virtual teams during the forming stage of team development.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

In the 1940s and '50s, Abraham Maslow developed a Hierarchy of Human Needs<sup>5</sup> based on his observations of what underlying personal needs motivated most people. His theory is based on the premise that people must generally satisfy lower level, basic needs such as food or shelter before they will strive to fulfill their higher level needs such as a reputation or relationships. Only after addressing the basic needs will individuals be motivated to move further up the hierarchy.

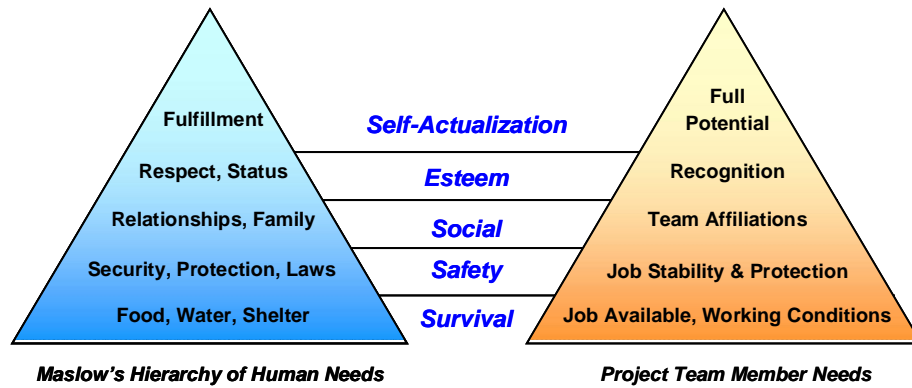
Flannes and Levin<sup>6</sup> further tailored Maslow's hierarchy to help project managers to better recognize the motivational elements affecting their team members (Figure 1).

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<sup>4</sup> *Project Leadership*, Timothy J. Kloppenborg, Arthur Shriberg and Jayashree Venkatraman, Management Concepts, 2003

<sup>5</sup> “A Theory of Human Motivation”, Abraham Maslow, *Psychological Review*, 1943

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from “*Essential People Skills for Project Managers*”, Steven W. Flannes and Ginger Levin, Management Concepts, 2005



**Figure 1**

A comparison of Maslow's Hierarchy to Project Team Member Needs

To apply Maslow's concepts to your project team, decide which level pertains to each team member. Savvy project managers recognize that team members have different needs and tailor rewards/recognitions accordingly. In today's economic climate, the survival and safety needs of individuals have resurfaced and often must be considered as a motivation (or de-motivation) factor. At the lower levels of the hierarchy, use your influence with the PMO or functional manager to recommend future project opportunities for individuals. At the middle and higher tiers, tap into your organization's resources for rewards, recognition, training budget, and professional networks as individual motivators.

### **Bill of Rights for Project Teams**

One of the best and easiest ways to build trust within the team and to clarify expectations between the project manager and team members is a Project "Bill of Rights" (Figure 2).

The Bill of Rights sets the framework for individual and shared responsibility from the team's perspective by level setting expectations and uncovering interpersonal needs. It constitutes the team's operating norms. Because team membership and needs may change during the course of a project, treat the Bill of Rights as a living document - referring to it often and revising it as applicable at the end of each project phase.

Steve Robbins, author of *"Leading with Vision: Getting Things Done Through Other People"*, proposes taking the Bill of Rights a step further to create a Bill of Responsibility. He states that "Leadership doesn't come from exercising your rights; it comes from fulfilling your responsibilities, and doing it with honor." And it comes from having a set of responsibilities that the people around you respect—the kind that make you an example worth following."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Leading with Vision: Getting Things Done Through Other People*, Steve Robbins, Acanthus Publishing, 2007



**Figure 2**  
Project Team Bill of Rights

**Stakeholder Analysis**

“A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK)”, defines a stakeholder as a “person or organization ... that is actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be positively or negatively affected by execution or completion of the project. A stakeholder may also exert influence over the project and its deliverables.”<sup>8</sup>

Each individual on the project team is a major stakeholder of the project. They inarguably are actively involved and their advocacy and support (or lack thereof) will have a profound effect on the outcome of the project.

You’ve heard the famous quote “keep your friends close, but your enemies closer”. As a project manager, do you understand which team members have the greatest influence (power) over your project? Do you know which team members are advocates and which are critics?

Applying internal stakeholder analysis (Figure 3) to your project team can help you answer these questions, win over the critics (or at least manage them more effectively), and strengthen the “fellowship” of your team.

<b>Stakeholder Analysis</b>								
Click on the '+' or the '2' in the first column for instructions. Click on the '-' or the '1' in the first column to hide instructions.								
Stakeholders		Impact (L/M/H)	RACI Responsibility/ Authorization/ Support/ Consult/Inform	Level of Resistance (L/M/H) Overt/Covert	Potential Needs, Issues, Concerns	Anticipated Benefits	Potential Actions for Project Team	Potential Actions for Stakeholders
Group	Contact							

**Figure 3**  
Stakeholder Analysis Worksheet

<sup>8</sup> A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide), Fourth Edition, Project Management Institute, 2008

## **RASCI**

The RASCI is a type of Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM) used in project management to map out individual and team responsibilities for project deliverables. The letters in the acronym indicate the context of the role assigned to an individual for a deliverable or major activity.

- R** Responsible - primary ownership or responsibility for executing the task and ensuring that it is appropriately accomplished
- A** Authorize - signs off or approves the deliverable
- S** Support - assists the responsible person with performing task to complete the deliverable
- C** Consult - provides advice and input on decisions about the deliverable
- I** Inform - kept apprised of the progress, results, and decisions for the deliverable

To encourage leadership at all levels, treat the R (Responsible) as an L (for Leadership). Define and recognize the person with task or deliverable responsibility as a leader of that subcomponent for the project. Give them decision making authority as they partner with the other roles in the RASCI to further build upon shared responsibility towards each other and the deliverables.

## **In Conclusion**

As projects become more virtual and complex, a single project manager can no longer bear the leadership duties alone. Therefore, leadership at all levels within the team must be encouraged through individual and shared responsibilities. Traditional concepts and techniques such as the Project Charter, Needs Hierarchy, Bill of Rights, Stakeholder Analysis, and the RASCI can assist project managers with recognizing and tapping into the full potential of project teams to deliver great results in a positive, fulfilling way.

And how did our heroes fare in The Lord of the Rings movie? Through courageously accepting their own individual responsibilities and by banding together in the spirit of shared responsibility, they completed their quest to save Middle Earth from destruction by destroying the ring. And at journey's end, they discovered the true and lasting power of the Fellowship of the Team.

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### The Fellowship of the Teams - Templates

#### SMART GOALS

Primary Project Objective	Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Time-Bound

#### HIERARCHY OF PROJECT TEAM NEEDS



#### PROJECT TEAMS BILL OF RIGHTS: I have the right to ....

Project Manager's Bill of Rights	Project Team Member's Bill of Rights
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

#### STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Stakeholder Analysis							
Stakeholders		Influence Level	Resistance Level	Potential Needs, Issues, Concerns	Anticipated Benefits	Potential Actions for Stakeholder	Potential Action for Project Team
Person	Role						

#### RASCI

Deliverable or Activity	R	A	S	C	I

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