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THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP WITH PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

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Process improvement implies change management. It means changing the way of working, changing the habits and behavior of people. Many improvements do not succeed, not because they are a bad idea but because the change management process fails. Most people do not want to change. Change management is a collective term for all approaches to prepare, support, and help individuals, teams, and organizations in making organizational change. In practice, many refer to management commitment as the number one critical success factor to make things happen. However, studies and personal experience reveal that although management commitment is important, effective change leadership is much more important. We need to involve leaders as a driver for process improvement, or any other improvement that constitutes change management. In this paper we look at what makes someone a leader, and how to recognize and identify leaders. We will also explore the topic of good leadership and discuss whether leaders are born or can be made. This paper has been written with the intent to make the reader aware of the importance of leadership over management commitment with process improvement and change management, and to initiate thinking about who are (or could become) the so-needed leaders in their organization.

Management Commitment or Leadership?

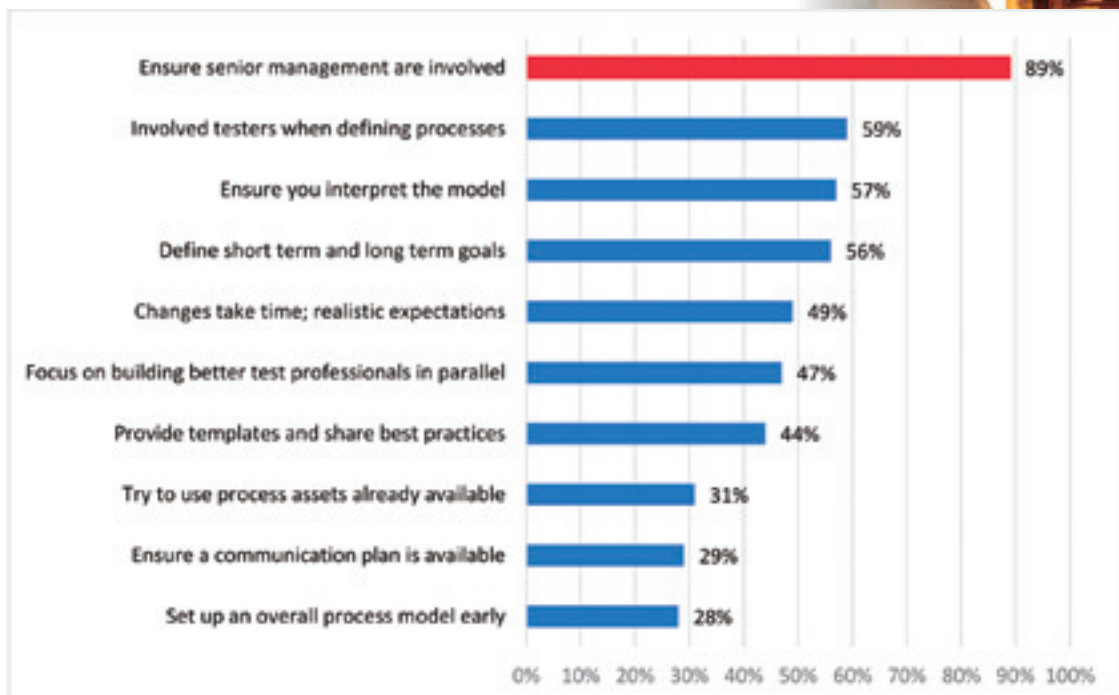
During the recent 2023 TMMi world-wide user survey, participants were asked the question "Based on your experiences, what advice would you offer to others planning to conduct test process improvement utilizing TMMi?", the number one answer by far (see figure 1) was: "Ensure senior management is involved". This probably does not come as a surprise since in any change management process management commitment is generally considered of utmost importance and a key to success. However, what do we mean by management commitment? In preparation for a recent keynote talk, I was looking back at many of the assignments I was involved in, asking myself the question, "At which organizations did I experience process changes to be most successfully deployed with tangible results achieved, and especially what made those organizations successful?". Reflecting on this and reviewing my data points, I started to make a list of organizations that complied with these criteria, e.g., a healthcare company, a small green bank, a consumer lifestyle company, a semi-conductors company, etc. The interesting question why were these organizations more successful in making changes than others immediately followed. Somewhat to my surprise for each company on the list, I could very easily identify the name of a person that made the difference (Ben, Michael, Jos, Harrie,

etc.). The manager responsible was leading the change, not “just” providing management commitment. In conclusion, based on my practical experiences for many years, to make things happen, to implement change successfully, leaders are needed. In terms of the nowadays popular manifesto’s:

LEADERSHIP OVER MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT.

“While there is value in the item on the right, we value the item on the left more.”

Figure 1: Advice TMMi-based test process improvement (top 10)



LEADER VS. MANAGERS: THE DIFFERENCES

Now that we understand that leaders are important for process improvement and change management, how do we recognize and identify them? This is of course easy with world leaders as Mahatma Gandhi, Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela and Barrack Obama, but typically less obvious within an organization. Hereafter some characteristics, skills and attitudes that typically come with leadership are described. The roles of a leader and a manager in an organization often overlap, but they encompass distinct mindsets and approaches. Understanding the differences between leadership and management is essential to be able to identify (potential) leaders. Below you will find a comparison between them.

Leadership	Management
Vision and Inspiration Leaders focus on the bigger picture and long-term goals. They develop a vision for the future and inspire others to follow it. Leaders encourage innovation and creativity, often challenging the status quo to find better ways of doing things. They motivate and inspire their team, driving enthusiasm and commitment.	Planning and Execution Managers focus on short-term and mid-term goals, and tasks that need to be accomplished. They ensure that day-to-day operations run smoothly. Managers develop and enforce processes and procedures to achieve efficiency and consistency.
Change and Adaptation Leaders are often agents of change, looking for opportunities to evolve and improve. They adapt to new situations and are comfortable with risk, ambiguity and uncertainty.	Control and Organization Managers allocate resources, including time, budget, and personnel. They subsequently monitor and control progress and performance, ensuring that tasks are completed on time and within budget.

Leadership	Management
People-Centric Approach Leaders empower their team members, fostering an environment where people feel valued and motivated to contribute. High emotional intelligence is common among leaders. They understand and manage their emotions and those of others effectively.	Task-Centric Approach Managers delegate tasks and responsibilities to team members, ensuring that everyone knows what is expected of them. They address and solve problems that arise in the course of operations.
Influence and Guidance Leaders rely on influence and persuasion rather than authority to guide their teams. They often act as mentors, helping team members grow and develop both personally and professionally.	Authority and Accountability Managers have formal authority within the organization and use it to direct and control the work of their teams. They are accountable for their team's performance and ensure organizational objectives are met.

Analyzing the above and studying literature, the key differences between leaders and managers can be summarized around five main topics: focus, approach, risk, innovation, and people:

- With **focus**, leaders focus on vision, direction, and inspiring change. Managers focus on executing tasks, maintaining control, and ensuring efficiency.
- Regarding their **approach**, leaders are more about motivating and inspiring through influence and emotional connection. Managers are more about organizing, planning, and monitoring through authority and structured processes.
- Leaders are willing to take **risks** and embrace uncertainty. Managers are risk-averse and seek to minimize uncertainty through planning and control.
- Leaders often prioritize **innovation** and change, while managers prioritize efficiency and consistency.
- In their relationships with teams and **people**, leaders build relationships based on trust and inspiration. Managers build relationships based on structure and accountability.

Good Leadership

Having established a basic understanding of leadership, we should probably take it one step further. One could argue that Adolf Hitler and Napoleon Bonaparte were leaders in their time, and some of today's somewhat controversial politicians are also leaders. Some business leaders are highly effective in getting people to follow them in the single-minded pursuit of making more profit and/or maximizing stakeholders' value. These are probably not the types of leaders that we need to support process improvement and drive change management in our organization. Some leaders, those who crave and bathe in the spotlight, may in fact be not so great. Others, who are also highly effective (and perhaps even modest) are good leaders and are the ones we need in our context.

So how can we distinguish good leadership from "not so great" leadership? This is a discussion that is directed towards issues like ethics, values, and standards. Good leaders have a focus where they strive for goals that society deems fitting. They also act today and inspire people to change, but especially with an outlook to build for the future. For their organization, they will focus on what is sustainable for tomorrow.



Figure 2: Characteristics of Good Leadership

To them people, e.g., employees, are important and they will ensure people are happy and satisfied, sometimes even before caring about themselves. Finally, they adhere to ethics, values and standards. They are typically people of impeccable behavior and lead by example. See

BORN OR MADE LEADERS?

The question of whether leaders are born or made is a long-standing debate. Both perspectives have some merit, and contemporary views suggest that while certain inherent traits can make leadership come more naturally to some individuals, leadership skills can also, at least largely, be developed and cultivated over time. As such born leaders have some inherent traits. Some people have personality traits that naturally lend themselves to leadership, such as charisma, confidence, and assertiveness. They are often also the individuals who are naturally persuasive, can inspire others and often emerge as leaders in group settings. Many born leaders show leadership tendencies from a young age, often taking charge in group activities or being seen as a go-to person for guidance. They seem to have an intuitive understanding of how to motivate and influence others. Made Leaders on the other hand depend largely on skill development, education, and training, but also on experience. Leadership skills can be taught through formal education and training programs. These can cover communication, strategic thinking, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence. Practical experience in leading teams, managing projects, and making decisions also helps individuals to develop their leadership abilities.

Most contemporary leadership views suggest that effective leadership is a blend of inherent traits and learned skills. Even people with natural leadership traits should enhance their effectiveness through education and experience. Those who may not have natural leader-

ship traits can develop into effective leaders by building their skills and gaining experience. Effective leaders, whether born or made, are often lifelong learners, continually seeking to improve their skills and adapt to new challenges. Thus, even if you are born with leadership DNA, you still need to develop your leadership skills to become an effective and good leader. If you are born without any leadership DNA, despite formal training and education, it will be almost impossible to become a true leader. People will always notice that they are made leaders, and that it does not come naturally to them. You probably need to have some leadership DNA to be able to grow into an effective leader over time with training, education, and experience.

GET LEADERS INVOLVED AND BE MORE SUCCESSFUL

Both leadership and management are essential for the success of any organization. Leaders provide direction and inspiration, driving change and innovation. Managers ensure that the day-to-day operations are efficient, organized, and aligned with the organization's goals. An effective organization requires individuals who can embody both leadership and management qualities, depending on the situation and needs. To be successful with the deployment of improvements that require people to change their habits and behavior, we need leadership from management rather than just management commitment. Identify the (potential) leaders in the management of your organization and get them involved and supporting you. Their involvement will make the difference that is essentially needed and required. Sometimes the process improver themselves is a person with leadership DNA. Although they do have the standing of a leader from management, from practical experience I have learned they too can make a difference. A leader inspires others to act, and leadership power allows them to influence people and teams. Identify them, get them involved, and be more successful.

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Unscramble these words!

H	S	J	G	W	J	L	F	B	V	P	S
B	A	S	E	L	I	N	E	T	U	G	C
R	E	G	R	E	S	S	I	O	N	G	R
N	O	I	T	A	D	I	L	A	V	Q	I
Z	D	W	E	S	A	C	T	S	E	T	P
Y	T	I	L	I	B	A	E	C	A	R	T
T	N	E	M	E	R	I	U	Q	E	R	I

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