Fall 2011

# Influence Tactics Used by Information Services Project Managers

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## Abstract

This case study explored the influence tactics used by successful information services project managers at Harley-Davidson. The participants were chosen via purposeful sampling for this study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, which brought out some themes on the qualities needed to be successful as an information services project manager. The predominant skills sets included active listening, effective communication, relationship building and organization.

The influence strategies primarily mentioned by the participants were consultation and bargaining, which was similar to what was found in the review of prior research. Other findings from this research included the challenges faced by project managers and the methods they use to overcome these obstacles, the participants' definition of project success and failure, and their description of successful project managers.

Although there were many similarities in the responses of the participants, there were some key differences that are noted in the findings section. All of the project managers spoke of the strong desire to deliver a product that met the customer's expectations and needs.


*Keywords: information services project managers, influence*

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## Introduction

Organizations depend on information technology projects to increase productivity and reduce costs (Legris & Collerette, 2006). Unfortunately, 11.54 percent of projects were cancelled before anything was delivered due to issues with requirements, scope change, lack of senior management involvement, as well as budget shortages and lack of project management skills (Emam and Koru, 2008). Despite the importance of information technology projects, failures cost more than $100 billion a year, negatively affecting the bottom line (Lientz & Rea, 1998). Project managers are accountable for the success or failure of projects (Kezbom, 1988).

Project management is an approach that was developed in the middle of the twentieth century that utilizes knowledge, tools and techniques to effectively run projects (Peng, JunWen & Huating, 2007). The sum of project management knowledge regarding widely accepted practices and emerging practices is known as the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK). The Project Management Institute (PMI) was founded in 1969 in order to form general criteria and standardization around project activities, such as project integration, scope management, time and cost management, quality management, and resource management (p. 108).

Projects are defined as temporary endeavors to create a product, service or to achieve a desired result (Peng, JunWen & Huating, 2007). Successful management of the triple constraints of time, money and performance specifications is one key component for project success (Kezbom, 1988). Project managers need to use influence skills to build a team with a strong sense of commitment and motivation to be successful (1.2.1). Leadership in project hierarchies is complex due to the fact that project managers possess little legal authority over their team members (1.2.1). Those who are effective at influencing the diverse group of professionals on their team are the most successful (1.2.1).

The purpose of this instrumental case study is to understand the influence strategies used by successful information services project managers at Harley-Davidson. This case study seeks to answer the question ‘What are the skills or attributes that highly successful project managers use to garner positive influence over those resources that they don’t have authority over?’ in order to gain a deeper understanding of what skills are needed by project managers to execute successful information services projects at Harley-Davidson. A total of seven information services project managers were interviewed for this study.

## Literature Review

### Leadership from the Middle

John C. Maxwell (2005) is an author who has written over forty books on the topic of leadership and dedicated much of his time to training leaders worldwide. In the book “The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization”, Maxwell (2005) states, ”Only 360-Degree Leaders influence people at every level of the organization. By helping others, they help themselves” (p. 3).

According to Maxwell (2005), “The reality is that 99 percent of all leadership occurs not from the top but from the middle of an organization” (p. 1). The amount of influence leaders possess is not limited to their title or position (p. 6). Instead influence is something that is earned (p. 10). “In leadership-no matter where you are in an organization-the bottom line is always influence” (p. 13).

### Levels of Leadership

Maxwell (2005) defines five levels of leadership (p. 5). The first level is known as the position level (p. 5). At this level people follow a leader because of his position only. The leader’s influence does not extend beyond his job description (p. 5). Level two is known as the permission level (p. 5). At this level, people follow the leader because they want to. This level allows work to be fun. The third level is known as the production level in which people follow the leader because of what he has done for the organization (p. 5). People want to work for a leader with a known successful track record (p. 5).

The fourth level, known as people development, is the level in which people follow the leader because of what she has done for them (Maxwell, 2005). At this level the leader is committed to developing her followers’ leadership capabilities. Maxwell (2005) states that this level is one in which all leaders should strive to reach and maintain (p. 5). The fifth and final level of leadership is known as personhood, where people follow because of who the leader is and what she represents (p. 5). Very few leaders achieve this level given the many years that must be spent by the leader growing the people and the organization (p. 5).

**Leadership Challenges**

According to Maxwell (2005), leaders in middle management face seven key challenges (p. 80). They are the tension challenge, the frustration challenge, the multi-hat challenge, the ego challenge, the fulfillment challenge, the vision challenge and the influence challenge (p. 80).

The tension challenge occurs because leaders in middle management have some power and authority, as well as authority to make some decisions, but lack power in other areas (Maxwell, 2005). The risk with this challenge is that the leader in middle management will overstep his authority (p. 25). This challenge is relieved when the middle level leader understands what is expected of him, is able to find quick access to answers, maintains the trust of his leader, and is able to find a positive outlet for relieving stress (p. 33).

The frustration challenge happens when the middle level leader follows an ineffective leader (Maxwell, 2005). Although no one wants to follow an ineffective leader, relief is found by adding value to the organization and leadership, developing a solid relationship with the upper level leader, understanding and appreciating the leader's strengths, and developing a game plan to complement the leader's weaknesses (p. 41).

The multi-hat challenge is one that middle level managers experience on a daily basis (Maxwell, 2005). Low-level employees are responsible for only one task or hat. In comparison, middle level managers must be able to deal with multiple shifting priorities with limited resources and time, and also be able to perform tasks that are beyond their personal experience

(p. 45). The middle manager must keep in mind that the hat, (metaphorically), sets the context when dealing with others (p.45). The manager shouldn't use one hat to accomplish a task required for another hat and should display a consistent attitude and behavior when interacting with others. Finally, the manager needs to ensure that no hat or duty is neglected (p. 47).

Challenge four is known as the ego challenge (Maxwell, 2005). This challenge refers to the fact that leaders in middle management sometimes don't get the credit or recognition they deserve (p. 51). For this challenge, it is important for the manager to concentrate more on the duties than his or her dreams, appreciate the value of the position, find satisfaction in knowing the real reason for the success of a project, embrace the compliments of others in middle leadership, and understand the difference between self-promotion and selfless promotion (p. 54).

Challenge five is the fulfillment challenge, which speaks to the fact that leaders like the front more than the middle, thus making the leaders in the middle feel disenchanted with their position (Maxwell, 2005). To realize contentment in their position, the middle level manager should develop strong relationships with others, define success in terms of teamwork, engage in continual communication to upper management, complete all responsibilities with excellence and put the team above personal success (p. 62).

Championing a vision that the middle manager didn't create is the sixth challenge faced by them (Maxwell, 2005). This can be a very difficult challenge for middle managers that may not agree with the vision (p. 66). Some key ways for middle managers to champion the vision are to find ways to align themselves to the vision or by taking the leader's vision and making it a reality and adding value to it (p. 71).

The seventh and final challenge for the middle level manager is the influence challenge (Maxwell, 2005). All leaders of organizations face the influence challenge because it requires that middle level leaders positively engage others beyond their own positions (p. 73). It is important that the middle level leader becomes the kind of leader that other people want to follow, a leader who cares, one that the followers trust, a leader they respect and is competent, and a committed leader with consistent behavior (p. 78).

Maxwell's (2005) seven challenges faced by middle level managers are also the challenges that project managers face. Project managers face the tension challenge due to the fact that they have authority to make some decisions, however they lack the power to discipline or reward their team members because in most cases they are not the supervisor (Kezbom, 1988). The project manager also deals with the multi-hat challenge due to the shifting priorities that occur on projects as well as limited resources to do the work (p. 1.2.1). And it is critical that project managers successfully deal with the influence challenge in order to motivate not only their teams, but also peers and customers in order to meet aggressive project schedules and budgets (p. 1.2.2).

**Key Skills for Middle Level Leaders**

Another key skill identified by Maxwell (2005) as critical for middle level leaders is relationship building (p. 213). "Relationship building is always the foundation of effective leadership" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 213). One critical component of relationship building for middle level leaders is staying connected to their followers (p. 214). The middle level leaders need to make a point of chatting with their followers informally in order to remain approachable and accessible (p. 214). Middle level leaders need to slow down in order to help their followers grow and reach their potential (p. 215). They need to show an interest in their followers' personal lives in order to show that they care about them as individuals, but they must be careful not to invade the followers' privacy or make them feel uncomfortable (p. 216).

Given that what happens in an employee’s personal life has an impact on his work, it is important for a leader to know enough in order to help the employee during difficult personal situations without violating labor rules and laws (Maxwell, 2005). “Because 360-Degree Leaders are by definition nonpositional, they lead through influence, not position, power or leverage. And they take that approach not only with those above and alongside them, but also with those who work under them” (p. 211).

Although project managers may not have direct reports like the middle managers in an organization, building successful relationships with their team members is critical. “Concern for project team members, an ability to integrate the personal objectives and needs of project personnel into project goals, and the ability to create enthusiasm for the work itself create a project climate which is high in motivation and performance” (Kezsbom, 1988, p. 1.2.1).

A project manager needs to take the time to truly understand the team members and how effectively they are working together, as well as any technical or organizational problems that are negatively impacting them (Kezbom, 1988). By doing so, the project manager will have a deeper understanding of the problems facing the project team and will be in a better position to help overcome obstacles (p. 1.2.2). These actions by the project manager will demonstrate a caring leader and foster trust with the team (p. 1.2.2).

**Skills Needed by Project Managers**

Project management is a combination of management techniques as well as leadership techniques (Kesbom, 1988). The management side of project management is participative, “…integrated across corporate divisional lines through consensus seeking activities which produce a sense of “buy in” and team commitment” (Kesbom, 1988, p. 1.2.2). The leadership style of project managers, however, will vary according to the challenge the project manager is addressing (p.1.2.3). Project managers must be able to adapt their leadership style or behavior to meet the growth, development and maturation needs of the team members, as well as the needs of the customer and upper management (p.1.2.3).

In order to be effective, project managers need not only technical skills but also skills in influencing their team and others in the organization (Pitts, 1990). The technical skills that project managers need to successfully manage a project include knowing how to establish objectives, develop a work breakdown structure, design a network and monitor the team resources (Pitts, 1990). The project manager's ability to influence others is directly related to others' perception of the expertise of the project manager (Pitts, 1990).

The project manager must not only understand the complex organizational physical and political boundaries, but also know how to motivate the diverse professional team members assigned to the project (Kesbom, 1988). Keeping the team motivated throughout the project is essential to increasing the probability of a successful project and satisfied customer (Brenner, 2007). According to Brenner (2007), motivation is defined as "… to inspire and encourage another person to do a good job, to enjoy what they are doing and to want to perform to the best of their ability " (p. 16). The project manager needs to be able to take on the role of not only the project leader, but also a mentor, facilitator, coach and motivator (Brenner, 2007).

The skills needed by project managers to be effective are numerous. According to Kezsbom (1988), they include:

- Technical Expertise/General Knowledge
- Forecasting/Planning/Scheduling/Estimating
- Problem Identification/Solving
- Ability to Establish Project Objectives/Performance Criteria/Standards
- Big Picture Orientation
- Task Organization
- Flexibility/Adaptability
- Resource Allocation

- Team Building/Management/Leadership
- Accounting/Budgeting/Financial Control
- Training/Development/Delegation
- Communications/Interpersonal/Written/Oral
- Conflict Resolution/Negotiation
- Group Dynamics/Organizational Development
- Creativity/Conceptual Thinking
- Systems/Project Management
- Walk on Water (p.1.2.1)

**Project Management and Authority**

Project managers carry a lot of responsibility and face many challenges that can negatively impact their careers. "Project Managers are usually faced with the responsibility for project integration and implementation and the accountability for success as well as failure. Yet because of their position within the structure of organizations, they possess minimum 'legal' authority" (Kezbom, 1988, p. 1.2.1).

Richard Hodgetts (1968) names this dilemma the 'authority-gap' that project managers must minimize in order to achieve success in running their projects (p. 211). In order to determine the key techniques used by project managers to overcome their authority-gap, a study was conducted that employed both interviews and questionnaires at a variety of companies employing project management techniques (Hodgetts, 1968). The four interviews were conducted in four different industries, including aerospace, construction, chemicals, and state government. The questionnaires, which included a definition of the term authority-gap, were sent to fifty-six firms, with a response rate of eighty-three percent (Hodgetts, 1968).

**Findings from the Hodgetts (1968) study**

The key finding from the analysis of the questionnaire data demonstrated how the authority-gap was handled in projects (Hodgetts, 1968). For large projects, the project charter gave project managers all the authority needed so they did not devote any time dealing with authority-gap. In fact, the larger the size of the project team, the more crises the project manager needed to deal with (p. 218). The project manager of large projects used the structure of the project charter to be an effective leader over the team (p. 218).

This larger team approach contrasted sharply with project managers of small projects who need to make each of the team members feel an important part of the team in order to be effective (Hodgetts, 1968). For the project managers leading smaller projects, the use of techniques to reduce the authority gap, such as negotiation, personality and/or persuasive ability, competence or reciprocal favors were used instead (p. 219). The importance of overcoming the authority-gap is much more important to project managers of small projects than project managers leading large projects (p. 219).

**Project Management and Persuasion**

Another important skill set for project managers is persuasion, which they need to possess in order to influence the team behaviors. According to Hoy and Smith (2007), an earlier work by Cialdini (2001a) argued that " five decades of research shows that persuasion is governed by a basic set of principles that can be taught, learned and applied " (p. 158). Cialdini and Goldstein (2002) elaborated on the six principles of liking, reciprocation, consistency, scarcity, social validation and authority and highlighted some of their applications in the hospitality industry (p. 40).

Hoy and Smith (2007) expanded Cialdini's (2001a) six principles of persuasion, coming up with a total of ten basic strategies that could be used by educational leaders to persuade and influence students, parents and teachers (p. 158). They called these ten basic strategies the ten principles of influence (p. 158). The ten principles of influence that Hoy and Smith (2007) identified were:

- *The principle of attraction* – This principle states that people are attracted to others who are similar to them. Leaders need to discover common interests with their followers (p. 158).
- *The principle of reciprocity* – People feel obligated to return a good deed or help those who help them, including behaviors such as trust, civility or a sense of efficacy (p. 159).
- *The principle of colleagueship* – People listen to and follow the lead of colleagues they respect. The leader needs to seek out and win the backing from a respected colleague among the followers in order to influence horizontally (p. 160).
- *The principle of commitment* –This principle states that people are motivated when they identify with the vision and goals of the leader. Small initial commitments generate more substantial future commitments (p.160).
- *The principle of expertise* – Leaders with demonstrated expertise are more likely to influence followers (p. 161).
- *The principle of scarcity* – Leaders that have access to scarce resources, whether it is information, resources or access to decision makers will have more influence over others. (p. 161).
- *The principle of trust* – This principle states that individuals follow those leaders that they trust. A lack of trust on the part of either party diminishes influence (p. 162).
- *The principle of fairness* – For this principle, leaders are unable to have positive influence on followers if the followers perceive they are being treated unfairly, whether or not the perception is accurate. Any misconceptions of inequity need to be corrected in order to enhance performance and increase the leader's influence.
- *The principle of self-efficacy* – Leaders with high self-efficacy in their ability to influence their followers are likely to be effective with that goal by providing examples, using persuasion and giving support (p. 163).
- *The principle of optimism* – Leaders with optimism are able to provide their followers with a 'can do' attitude that carries the followers through difficult times (p. 164).

Hoy and Smith (2007) assert that these ten principles of persuasion are to be used in concert in order to enhance a leader's influence and effectiveness (p. 164). They also note that each of these principles can be abused to manipulate others or for personal gain, so the principles should be used judiciously and with integrity (p. 164). Project managers need to be successful in persuading and influencing the team members, and can increase their effectiveness by utilizing these principles with integrity.

**The Connection between Persuasion and Power**

There are times in which project managers are not able to persuade others (Moore, 1999). This may be due to many reasons, such as power, self-interest, professional jealousy, sexism, or other unknown reason (p. 352). Power was defined by Robert Dahl (1957) as "the ability of person A to get person B to do something that person B would not otherwise do " (Moore, 1999, p. 202). People accrue power by relying on persuasive tactics such as marshalling good reasons and evidence or appealing to the audience's emotions (p. 352).

A project manager who fails with persuasion should analyze the six interconnected variables of power (Moore, 1999). The six variables of power identified by Moore (1999) were:

- Key players, including gatekeepers, actors and bystanders involved in the power struggle.
- The goals of the players involved.
- The stakes, which are whatever could be lost or gained in the competition for power.
- The resources that are needed to achieve a goal. It includes time, money, people, technology, goodwill and others.
- The values or relative worth or usefulness of a given behavior, standard, material or belief.
- The obstacles to gaining power (p. 352).

Project managers that anticipate power struggles and limitations on their persuasive abilities are more successful if they have already thought about the six variables of power and what they would do if persuasion fails (Moore, 1999). Moore (1999) identifies four options that a project manager should consider if persuasion fails (p. 358). The four options include going over the gatekeeper's head to someone with greater power, changing the parameters, taking the risk or leaving it alone (p. 358).

The project manager must use discretion when selecting the first option of finding a person with greater power than the gatekeeper (Moore, 1999). This option is dangerous for the project manager in that this approach may alienate the gatekeeper, who may harbor negative feelings toward the project manager for a long time (p. 358).

The second option of changing the parameters occurs when the project manager changes the rules, laws, environment or climate of opinion in order to force the gatekeeper to change (Moore, 1999). It is extremely difficult for a project manager to effect significant change in an industry or with a technology (p. 358).

The next option that a project manager may choose is to ignore the gatekeeper's decision and proceed anyways (Moore, 1999). A project manager who pursues this option must be prepared for the consequences (p. 359). If none of the options listed above are palatable for a project manager, the final option of leave it alone may be most appropriate (p. 359). In this case, the project manager will follow the gatekeeper's decision and forget about it (p. 359).

Power is something that affects the influence and persuasion of project managers. All project managers face challenges to their ability to persuade others. Project managers need to be able to analyze the variables of power affecting their ability to persuade and influence others and determine which option is best suited for the situation at hand.

**Possible Influence Strategies**

Lee and Sweeney (2001) defined influence as "… the process by which people persuade others to follow their advice, accept their suggestions, or comply with their orders " (p. 17). Grenny, Maxfield and Shimberg (2008) ran three studies that found the most successful people in organizations were those that used multiple influence strategies to enable change (p. 47). The model developed by Grenny, Maxfield and Shimberg (2008) broke down influence strategies into six sources that fell into a distinct category of either motivation or ability (p. 48). The six sources were establishing a link to the mission and values, investing in robust training initiatives, harnessing peer pressure, aligning rewards and ensuring accountability, and changing the environment (p. 48).

The first influence strategy of establishing a link to the mission and values demands that the leader help people see the broad implications of their actions and choices and see how the changes align with their deeply held values (Grenny, Maxfield & Shimberg, 2008). Project managers increase their influence by helping the team see the alignment of the project goals with the company's strategy and by helping the team members see how the changes align with their own values (p. 48).

The second influence strategy that can be used by project managers is to work at increasing the personal ability of their team members (Grenny, Maxfield & Shimberg, 2008). Project managers help their teams absorb and focus on the new behaviors, whether technical or interpersonal, by providing training in small doses (p. 49).

The third influence strategy of harnessing peer pressure deals with the reality that " …no matter how motivated and able individuals are, they'll still encounter enormous social influences that can block change efforts " (Grenny, Maxfield & Shimberg, 2008, p. 49). Project managers must identify a key team member that is supportive of the change that can be used as role models to influence the rest of the team (p. 49).

Project managers utilize the fourth influence strategy of creating social support by becoming a teacher to the team (Grenny, Maxfield & Shimberg, 2008). In the teacher role, the project manager would regularly introduce new skills in order to help the team embrace the concept or change (p. 51). Implementation of new processes or methodologies is more successful when the team members are encouraged to try something new by their project managers (p. 51).

The fifth source of influence is aligning rewards to desired behaviors in order to ensure accountability (Grenny, Maxfield &Shimberg, 2008). Top leadership, not project managers, executes this influence strategy. The responsibility of the project manager is to raise awareness of any incentives that encourage wrong behaviors in the hope that leadership will change the rewards appropriately (p. 51). This type of influence can undermine people's intrinsic motivation, so it should be used less often than the other influence strategies mentioned (p. 52).

The final influence strategy of changing the environment focuses on changing the data that normally crosses people's desks (Grenny, Maxfield &Shimberg, 2008). This new data should be used to help the employee track problems and solutions more effectively (p. 52). Project managers can use this technique effectively by making sure the team has the information needed to not only identify problems hampering progress for the project, but to also identify alterative solutions that can be used to address the problems (p. 52).

**Findings from the Grenny, Maxfield, and Shimberg (2008) study**

Grenny, Maxfield, and Shimberg (2008) found that "Study participants who used four or more sources of influence in combination were 10 times more likely to succeed than those who relied on a single source of influence" (p. 48).

The degree of influence and leadership a project manager has over his team resources is key to successfully managing the triple constraints of time, money and performance specifications (Kezsbom, 1988). Project managers should not, however, rely on their position or legal authority as the basis of gaining influence (p.1.2.2). In fact, those project managers who rely primarily on position or legal authority are considered less effective at resolving problems and conflict (p.1.2.2).

**Influence Strategies and Tactics Defined by Lee and Sweeney**

Lee and Sweeney (2001) defined two terms related to influence, namely influence strategy and influence tactic (p. 17). For them, influence tactic is a specific expression of a general influence strategy (p. 17). Lee and Sweeney (2001) define the influence process as containing three elements, which are the influence tactics employed, the skill of the person in applying these methods, and the perceptions of the people targeted (p. 17). The more the people targeted for influence consider the power of the project manager, the greater the variety of influence methods the project manager can use (p. 17).

Lee and Sweeney (2001) define power into two domains, the positional domain and the personal domain (p. 17). The positional domain power is power that is legitimate, reward, coercive and informational, while personal domain power is based on the project manager's expertise, charisma, persuasiveness, or persona (p. 17). Due to the fact that there was no universally accepted set of influence methods, Lee and Sweeney (2001) developed a scale of twelve primary influence strategies (p. 17). The twelve influence strategies were assertiveness, bargaining, coalition, consultation, expertise, friendliness, higher-management support, inspirational appeal, legitimating, personal appeal, rational reasoning and sanctions (p. 18).

Lee and Sweeney (2001) conducted a survey of the frequency of influence methods used by practicing project managers. The respondents were project managers who attended a Project Management Institute Annual Conference (p. 18). Project managers were given a questionnaire that used a Likert five point scale for rating how frequently they used nineteen influence tactics to influence their project team members (p. 18). A total of 616 project managers answered the questionnaire (p. 18).

**Results of the Lee and Sweeney (2001) survey**

The results of Lee and Sweeney's (2001) survey demonstrated that the influence strategies of rational reasoning, consultation and inspirational appeal appear with the most frequency. The influence tactics most often used by project managers to influence their team members included explaining to the team member the reasons for their request, involving the team member in the planning and decision-making process, using logic to convince the team member to do what is requested and appealing to the team member's higher values, competitive spirit, or organizational loyalty to generate enthusiasm to do what is requested (p. 20).

In contrast, project managers used the influence strategies of assertiveness and sanctions with the lowest frequency (Lee & Sweeney, 2001). The influence tactics least often used by project managers include having a strong face-to-face confrontation with the team member, simply ordering the team member to do what was asked, expressing anger verbally to get the team member to do what was requested, and threatening the team member with an unsatisfactory performance appraisal if she or he does not do what was requested (p. 20).

The study did find some differences between male and female project managers and the influence strategies and tactics frequency (Lee & Sweeney, 2001). Female project managers used the influence tactic of carefully explaining to the team member the reason for their requests more often than male project managers (p. 21). And female project managers were less likely to use the influence tactic of threatening to give the team member an unsatisfactory performance appraisal than male project managers (p. 21).

Lee and Sweeney (2001) summarize their findings as follows (p. 23). First of all, there does not appear to be one best influence tactic or set of tactics for all situations (p. 23). Many of the twelve influence tactics fell into the middle range of frequency of use (p. 23). It is up to the project manager to select the suitable influence tactic for a given situation (p. 23).

Another finding by Lee and Sweeney (2001) is that different influence tactics may require different application skills and time commitments (p. 23). The different influence tactics require specific skills and time commitments in order to be used effectively (p. 23). For example, a project manager needs to be able to properly evaluate the facts, interrelationships and potential outcomes in order to use the rational reasoning strategy effectively (p. 23).

Lee and Sweeney (2001) also found that for some of the influence tactics, certain interpersonal communication skills are more important (p. 23). The influence tactic of consultation, for example, requires the project manager to use active listening in order to be successful. The project manager must also make sure that he selects the proper time and environmental setting before using the consultative influence tactic.

And finally, the Lee and Sweeney (2001) study found that influence methods are not all based on logic (p. 23). Some of the influence tactics are intended to elicit a more emotionally based response, which is seen with the inspirational appeal tactic, while other influence tactics, such as rational reasoning, are more intellectually based.

Those influence tactics with the lowest frequency by project managers have significant downsides to them (Lee & Sweeney, 2001). These low use tactics that use sanctions or punitive methods in order to influence team members can adversely affect team cohesion and motivation (p. 23). Lee & Sweeney (2001) also state that project managers that use more explanations and fewer threats are the correct direction for project managers to go if they want to successfully influence and motivate their team members (p. 23).

**Summary**

Influence, which was defined by Lee and Sweeney (2001) as "… the process by which people persuade others to follow their advice, accept their suggestions, or comply with their orders " (p. 17), is key to information services project managers being successful (Kezbom, 1988). Studies by Greeny, Maxfield and Shimberg (2008) and by Lee and Sweeney (2001) that focused on the topic of influence were analyzed for the current research.

Grenny, Maxfield and Shimberg (2008) broke down influence strategies into the influence sources of establishing a link to the mission and values, investing in robust training initiatives, harnessing peer pressure, aligning rewards and ensuring accountability, and changing the environment (p. 48). One key finding from their studies was that managers who used four or more sources of influence were more likely to succeed than managers that relied on only a single source of influence (p. 48).

Lee and Sweeney (2001) broke down influence into two terms, influence strategy and influence tactic (p. 17). They broke down influence strategy into twelve distinct influence strategies of assertiveness, bargaining, coalition, consultation, expertise, friendliness, higher-management support, inspirational appeal, legitimating, personal appeal, rational reasoning and sanctions (p. 18). Lee and Sweeney (2001) defined influence tactic as a specific expression of a general influence strategy (p. 17). Finally, they defined the influence process as composed of three elements; the influence tactics employed, the skill of the person in applying these methods, and the perceptions of the people targeted of the amount of power possessed by the manager (p. 17). The key finding from the Lee and Sweeney (2001) study was that although the influence strategies of rational reasoning, consultation and inspirational appeal appear with the most frequency, there does not appear to be one best influence tactic or set of tactics for all situations

(p. 23). It is up to the project manager to select the suitable influence tactic for a given situation (p. 23).

. As demonstrated in the discussion above, there is no one comprehensive authoritative list of influence strategies or tactics to use when analyzing the influence strategies used by either leaders or project managers.

For this qualitative study this researcher is using the strategies defined by Lee & Sweeney (2001) when analyzing the responses from the respondents during their interviews. The goal is to see if the Harley-Davidson information services project managers use a consistent set of influence strategies in order to improve their effectiveness at their jobs.

# Method

## Method Choice

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the influence strategies used by successful Harley-Davidson information services project managers. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative studies are preferred when the question asks how or what instead of why, the variables are not easily identifiable, the audience is receptive, and the researcher’s role is as an active learner. Qualitative research supports the idea that reality is not a fixed, measurable phenomenon (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Instead reality is found by interactions of people with their socially constructed world (p. 3).

Merriam & Associates (2002) break down qualitative studies into three key categories: interpretive, critical, or postmodern (p. 4). They define the interpretive qualitative study as a study in which the researcher is “… learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them ” (p. 4). Merriam & Associates (2002) definition of a critical qualitative study is one in which “ … larger contextual factors affect the ways in which individuals construct reality" (p. 4). And they define the postmodern category as a qualitative study that takes a philosophical stance, where "…researchers question all aspects of the construction of reality " (p.4).

Vanderstoep & Johnston (2009) describe some of the key differences between quantitative and qualitative research. According to them the scope of inquiry for a quantitative study is specific questions or hypotheses, while the scope of inquiry for a qualitative study is broad, thematic concerns. The data for qualitative research is described in a narrative fashion, as compared to the numerical description of quantitative research.

The primary advantage of qualitative research is a narrative description of the data that is rich and in-depth; while its key disadvantage is that the findings are not generalizable to the population at large due to the small sample size. These advantages and disadvantages compare to methods of quantitative research, with a primary advantage of a large sample that reflects the population and is generalizable. The key disadvantage of a quantitative study is the lack of in-depth data that can lead to a superficial understanding of the participant's thoughts and feelings. Vanderstoep & Johnston (2009) state that the ideal study is one that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative techniques, although that rarely happens due to limited time and resources for a given study.

This research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how information services project managers at Harley-Davidson influence team members that don't report to them. This deeper understanding will be reached by analyzing rich, in-depth data from interviews. This led to the decision that an interpretive qualitative study would be the best fit. Once this decision was made, the next step was for this researcher to determine which type of qualitative research study would be suitable.

Creswell (2007) defines five qualitative traditions of inquiry as the biography, a phenomenological study, a grounded theory study, ethnography, and a case study. The focus for each of these qualitative types differs. Biographies focus on the life of an individual, as compared to the focus for a phenomenology, which is gaining an understanding of a given phenomenon. For the grounded theory, the focus is on developing a theory from data gathered in the field, while ethnographies focus on describing a cultural system or group. Finally, the case study is focused on developing in-depth analysis of a single case or bounded system.

Yin (1984) asserts that there are three distinct conditions that should drive the type of study the researcher chooses. These three conditions are the type of research question posed, the extent of control the investigator has over actual behavioral events, and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events.

According to Creswell (2007), there are three distinct types of case studies that are differentiated by their focus (p. 61-62). The intrinsic case study is done because of the uniqueness of the item being studied, whereas the focus of the instrumental case study is to illustrate an issue (p. 62). Finally, a collective case study is used when more than one case is being studied (p. 62).

Of the different types of qualitative studies, a case study seeks to explain more than just the frequency of an event occurring; it seeks to answer a research question of "how" or "why" the event happened (Yin, 1984). The second distinct condition of case studies is the focus on contemporary events, as compared to studies of historical events that utilize investigation of archival records. And the third distinct condition of case studies is the examination of contemporary events through direct observation and systematic interviewing.

The instrumental case study type selected for this research study aligns with the three case study conditions as defined by Yin (1984). First of all, it seeks to understand how information services project managers are able to successfully influence team members that do not report to them. Second, it is focused on current events instead of looking at historical events of data. And the use of systematic interviewing for this study aligns with the third case study condition as defined by Yin (1984). The instrumental focus of the current research was chosen to illustrate the current issue of information services managers having many challenges in influencing their team members and leading successful projects (Creswell, 2007).

**Research Design Quality**

One key component of any research design is judging the quality of it (Yin, 1984). According to Yin (1984), four logical tests to judge the quality of a research design are construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (p. 36). The first test, construct validity, is especially difficult in case studies due to the failure of many researchers to develop a set of measures that are sufficiently operational. A researcher can increase the construct validity in three ways: using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having key informants review the draft case study report (Yin, 1984). The present research used the approach of having key informants reviewing the draft case study report in order to increase the construct validity.

The definition of Yin's (1984) second logical test, internal validity, is needed for explanatory or causal studies where the researcher is trying to establish a causal relationship. This attempt to establish a causal relationship can be seen in case studies in which researchers infer that a particular event resulted from an earlier occurrence, even though the event cannot be directly observed.

Yin (1984) states that there are three related analytics tactics that can be used to improve internal validity. They are pattern-matching, explanation-building and time-series analysis. Pattern-matching logic compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one to verify that the patterns coincide. The second analytic tactic, explanation building, is a special type of pattern-matching. This tactic is more difficult than pattern-matching and has a goal of analyzing the case study data "… by building an explanation about the case" (p. 107). The third and final analytics tactic is time-series analysis, which is analogous to time-series analysis done in experiments. This tactic can follow many intricate and precise patterns, many of which have been developed in clinical psychology, or it can be a simple instrument with only one dependent or independent variable.

The third logical test of research design quality, the external validity, is defined as the ability of the study's findings to be generalizable beyond the case study (Yin, 1984). Case studies use analytical generalization, which is generalizing a particular set of results to some broader theory. The generalization does not happen, however, until the theory is tested through replication of the findings by subsequent studies.

The fourth, and final test of the quality of a research design as defined by Yin (1984) is reliability. Reliability is the ability of a researcher, using the same procedures as the first study, to arrive at the same findings and conclusions. Reliability can only be done if the original researcher carefully documents the procedures used so that others can follow them.

Case studies are common research strategies in many fields, including planning, political science, sociology and psychology (Yin, 1984). Yin describes case studies as an investigation of real-life events that "…retains the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events …"

(p. 14). Researchers can improve the quality of their research by understanding the four design tests as defined by Yin (1984) and the techniques that can be utilized to improve them.

**Interview Structure**

This researcher made the determination that interviews would be the appropriate tool for gathering data from the participants in this study. Vanderstoep & Johnston (2009) defined three types of interviews that can be used for data gathering: informal, structured, and guided. The informal interview allows researchers to create impromptu questions as the interview progresses, which requires researchers to be fully prepared in advance and focus on the objectives of what they seek to accomplish. These types of interviews have an advantage in that the researchers theories are less likely to bias the data collection. However, the disadvantage is that the interviews with different people are not comparable, nor is the data generalizable.

The second interview type, the structured interview, is one in which a set of questions, probes and follow-up questions are pre-defined (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). One advantage is that the researcher does not need to think of probes and follow-up questions on the spot. And, the data is easier to synthesize and analyze, making it easier for the researcher to see themes and patterns. Another advantage is that the data from one interview to subsequent interviews are comparable, increasing the likelihood of the results being generalizable. The key disadvantages of this type of interview is that there is a diminished likelihood of unexpected or interesting responses and that the topics discussed in the interview may be more reflective of the researcher's interpretation of the situation than the respondent's interpretation.

The third interview type is the guided interview (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). This type of interviewing has some of the benefits of the informal and structured interview. It uses an outline of questions, but the probes, transitions and follow-ups are not established prior to the interview. As a result the interviewer is given freedom to deviate from the interview questions as needed to pursue unplanned direction of the questions based on the participants' replies.

This researcher chose to use the structured interview type. This decision was based on the limited experience of this researcher in interviewing techniques, and to increase the likelihood of finding themes and patterns that may be generalizable to others. The interview questions that were developed and approved by Marquette University's Institutional Review Board for the present research can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Interview Protocol Questions

1. How long have you worked in Information Services, and where?
2. How long have you worked as a Project Manager?
3. How many projects have you been involved in, and what were the roles you had on them?
4. What is your definition of a project that is 'successful'? What is your definition of a 'failed' project?
5. What was the most significant challenges you faced on projects you led as the project manager?
6. What do you think is the most important qualities for a successful project manager and why?
7. Describe someone who you regard as a highly successful project manager. What qualities stand out for this person?

8. Have you led or been part of a project team in which there were team members that didn't report to the project manager? If yes, how well did the project team work? Did the project manager have any challenges in managing the resources that he had no authority over?
9. Can you describe the leadership styles of project managers you consider successful? How did these leadership styles compare to poor project managers?

**Participants**

"In qualitative research, a sample is selected on purpose to yield the most information about the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 20). For this study, only information services project managers who worked at Harley-Davidson were considered as potential participants, a purposeful sampling strategy. According to Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009), "Purposeful samples are comprised of people based on a particular attribute …" (p. 187).

The current instrumental case study used purposeful sampling to secure seven information services project managers or their supervisors at Harley-Davidson to participate in this study. The participant criteria for inclusion in this study were as follows:

1. Participant is currently an active employee of Harley-Davidson, working in the information services department.
2. Participant has led multiple projects as an information services project manager at Harley-Davidson.
3. Participant has a proven history of leading projects that met the Harley-Davidson criteria for being considered successful. The definition of success for Harley-Davidson information services projects is that it was done on time, within the

budgeted dollars, and had completed the scope of work that was originally promised.

The participants selected for this study were six males and one female, with a range in number of years experience working in information services and in working at Harley-Davidson. They also had a wide variety of projects that they had led, ranging from complex Enterprise Resource Planning System implementations, to small custom-built applications.

**Data Collection**

Once approval was received from Marquette University's Institutional Review Board for this study, all of the potential participants were contacted or communicated either directly or via email about this study and asked if they would be willing to participate. If they indicated a willingness to participate, then the approved consent form and interview protocol questions were emailed to them to review prior to their interview. The consent form explained the purpose of the study and the possible impact from their participation. The consent form also described how the data would be kept confidential, and that the highest level of Harley-Davidson information services management had stated that the results of this study would not be used for personnel evaluations. This additional confidentiality statement was necessary because the researcher would be presenting the results from this study to upper management upon completion of this study.

The prospective participants were also told that they could change their minds and cancel their participation at any time during this process. Finally, they were all told that the interviews would be audio-recorded, and that the transcription of their interview would be sent to them for validating the quality of the transcription. A total of seven prospective participants were asked to participate, and all of them agreed to do so.

All of the seven interviews took place between April 2010 and June 2011. A private on-site interview at Harley-Davidson's corporate offices at 3700 Juneau Avenue in Milwaukee, Wisconsin was scheduled for approximately thirty minutes. At the start of the interview, the participant was asked to sign the consent form and told that he/she may skip any question or cancel participation if desired. Participants were also told that an audio recorder would be used to capture their responses for each of the interview questions, and the audio recording would be transcribed at a later date. They were told that they would receive a copy of their transcribed interview for review and feedback or changes. Finally, they were told that they would receive a copy of the final rough draft of the study.

The participants were also told that no quotations would contain specific data, such as project name, employee names or other identifying characteristics, so that their responses would remain anonymous. Once the participant had reviewed and signed the consent form, then the researcher turned on the audio recorder and began the interview.

After the interview was completed, this researcher copied the audiotape to her computer for transcription. Each audiotape was transcribed and saved as a word document, with alpha-numeric pseudonyms identifying each of the participants for confidentiality sake.

Each of the participants was sent the transcribed interview for review and feedback. This process, known as member check, is used to improve the validity in the qualitative study (Creswell, 1998). Finally, once the participants indicated their satisfaction with the transcribed interview, the final transcribed interview data was copied to an excel worksheet for data analysis, with each interview data taking a unique column in the worksheet and each question taking a unique row.

**Data Analysis & Interpretation**

"Undoubtedly, no consensus exists for the analysis of the forms of qualitative data " (Creswell, 2007, p. 140). One of the most important aspects of analyzing data for a case study is for the researcher to have a general analytic strategy in mind before beginning the data analysis phase (Yin, 1984). Two general strategies for data analysis are relying on theoretical propositions and developing a case description (Yin, 1984).

The relying on theoretical propositions strategy is the preferred strategy, given the original objectives and design of the case study were based on the theoretical propositions (Yin, 1984). "The propositions would have shaped the data collection plan and therefore would have given priorities to the relevant analytic strategies" (Yin, 1984, p. 100).

The development of a case description strategy is one in which a descriptive framework for organizing the case study is developed (Yin, 1984). This strategy is suitable when theoretical propositions don't exist.

The general analytic strategy used for the current research study was the theoretical propositions strategy. For this qualitative study this researcher used the strategies defined by Lee & Sweeney (2001) to analyze what influence strategies were used by the Harley-Davidson information services project in order to improve their probability of having successful projects.

R. Stake (1995) promotes four forms of data analysis and interpretation to be used in case study research (as cited in Creswell, 2004, p.153). They are categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, patterns, and naturalistic generalization. For the categorical aggregation approach, the researcher looks for issue-relevant meanings to emerge from the collections of data instances. In the direct interpretation approach, the researcher derives meaning from single instances of the data. This differs from the patterns approach, which is a method for the researcher to look for a correspondence between two or more categories. And the final approach of naturalistic generalization is where the researcher creates generalizations from the data that people can learn and apply to a population of cases (p. 154).

Creswell (2004) adds one more data analysis and interpretation approach called description to the list developed by R.Stake (1995). This approach takes a detailed view of aspects of the case and aggregates it into multiple categories that are then collapsed into a lower number of patterns. The naturalistic generalization approach is the data analysis and interpretation approach used by this researcher.

# Findings

## Introduction

All of the Harley-Davidson information services project managers that participated in this study were passionate professionals who cared deeply about building technical solutions that benefit Harley-Davidson. They all felt strongly that project success was much more than the project management standard of on time, on budget, and with the original defined scope. Their responses to the nine interview questions provided some insights and perspectives of what is needed to be successful in the field of managing information technology projects in influencing team members who don't report to the project manager.

## Background Information on Participants

Table 2 depicts the answers for questions one through three from the approved interview protocol. These three questions were used to gather background information on each of the participants in order to gain an understanding of the length of time they have worked in the information services field as well as the length of time they have been project managers. This background data was the basis of further analysis of the answers provided later in the interviews related to their perception of what makes projects successful and what qualities are needed to be a successful project manager in information services.

All of the participants had relatively long histories of working in information services, from a low of twelve years to a high of thirty years. A slightly larger variance can be seen in the number of years working as a project manager, ranging from seven to twenty-nine years. Another key finding from the questions was that the average number of years the participants worked in information services before moving to a project manager position was nine years, although participant J3, who had over thirty years of experience, moved to that position within one year. Five of the participants had begun their information services careers as programmers, while the remaining two participants started as a quality assurance analyst and a project lead. At most companies information services project managers are expected to have experience in roles such as programmer analysts, systems analysts or project leads for a number of years before they can take on the additional responsibility of information services project management.

The final findings from Table 2 can be seen in the data gathered related to the number of years worked at Harley-Davidson and the number of projects the participant has been involved in. The number of years worked at Harley-Davidson ranged from two to eighteen years. All but one of the participants had worked at Harley-Davidson between nine and eighteen years. B1 had worked at Harley-Davidson for only two years, significantly less than the others. This participant, as well as M7, had the least amount of work history as a project manager out of all the participants.

The number of projects the participant has been involved in had a wide range between twelve and seventy projects. B1, the project manager with the fewest number of years in information services and as an information services project manager, has been involved in over fifty projects, while J3, the project manager with the highest number of years in information services and as an information services project manager, has been involved in only twelve. These numbers infer that B1 has been primarily involved in small projects, while J3 has primarily been involved in large projects. They do not, however, mean that B1 has not led any large projects or that J3 has not led any small projects.

Table 2
Participant Work History

| **Participant** | **Years in Information Services** | **Years as a Project Manager** | **Years at Harley-Davidson** | **Number of Projects Involved In** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| B1 | 12 | 7 | 2 | 50 |
| J3 | 30 | 29 | 18 | 12 |
| C5 | 19 | 11 | 13 | 50-60 |
| M7 | 13 | 7 | 9 | 15-16 |
| R2 | 27 | 8 | 15 | 70 |
| T6 | 29 | 11 | 14 | 40-50 |
| S4 | 19 | 11 | 13 | 50 |

**Participant Definition of Successful or Failed Projects**

Question four of the interview protocol focused on the participants' definition of successful projects or failed projects. Table 3 shows the key points made by the participants, where three key messages were heard in their answers. The most frequent response was that the customers' needs must have been met. The second most frequent response was that you must make sure your team is happy and proud of their work. And the third most frequent response was that the business should be still using the system at least two years after the system is implemented.

The first most frequent response to what defines a successful project, meeting the customer needs, was given by all of the participants. Some of the participants elaborated on this initial response by stating that meeting the customer needs could happen in scenarios where the requirements had changed from what the business had originally wanted at the beginning of the project. J3 described it as delivering what the business people needed, not necessarily what they thought they needed, but what they actually did need. C5 stated:

> So, a project that is really successful is, in my eyes, is one that met the customer's expectations. It is not necessarily what was planned and agreed on at the front, but what was agreed on at the end (C5, personal communication, February 17, 2011).

The second most frequent response to the qualities that make a project successful was when the project team is happy and proud of what they have done. This answer was given by three of the participants. S4 stated:

> But I would also add that being successful is not leaving any dead bodies in your wake. Making sure that you are not only meeting the needs of the project and hitting your targets for budget and timing, but also being respectful of your team that you didn't burn out your team by making them work one hundred twenty hour weeks. You might be able to deliver things, but partial failure would be if you harmed others to get it done (S4, personal communication, June 13, 2011).

The third most frequent response to what makes a project successful was that the system should be used by the business at least two years after the system went into production. Four of the participants felt that the design of quality systems are those that not only meet the business needs, but also are easy to support by the information services staff. If the business stops using the system, it is a sign that the system was not designed properly. R2 commented:

> Generally if you have something that you delivered and met the business requirements and a year later the business doesn't use it anymore, then someone didn't do the proper research (R2, personal communication, April 6, 2011).

The second part of question four asked the participants to explain what they define as a failed project. Some of the participants' answers were the exact opposite of their definition of successful projects, such as the project did not meet the customers' expectations, the business stopped using the system after two years, or there were chronic problems or issues with it after go-live that couldn't be resolved. Two of the participants mentioned projects that were cancelled prior to implementation as failures. There were, however, some unexpected responses to this question. According to B1\:

> In my mind a failed project is a project where you don't learn anything. So, you may have had a rough time in a project, but if you learn lessons from that project as an organization or a person or a group, then that is a setback, but you got something out of it (B1, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

Table 3
Definition of Successful or Failed Projects

| **Participant** | **Definition of Successful Projects** | **Definition of Failed Projects** |
|---|---|---|
| B1 | • Customer got what they wanted.<br>• Team is happy and proud of it.<br>• It is easy to sustain long term. | • You didn't learn anything. |
| J3 | • It delivered value to the customers.<br>• It delivered what the customers needed, not necessarily what they thought they needed.<br>• It was on time and on budget. | • It was on time and on budget, but didn't deliver what the customers needed.<br>• It was over time and budget. |

| Participant | Definition of Successful Projects | Definition of Failed Projects |
|---|---|---|
| C5 | • It met the customers' expectations based on what was agreed upon at the end, including the budget.<br>• The team is happy. | • It failed to meet the customers' expectations.<br>• The project manager failed to communicate status of the project. Customer lost touch of where the project was. |
| M7 | • It met all of the business metrics and goals. | • It did not meet the initial goals of the project. |
| R2 | • The system was implemented.<br>• Delivered functionality that the business wanted.<br>• It is still being used by the business two years after implementation. | • The system was not implemented.<br>• The business stops using it before two years after implementation. |
| T6 | • It met the customers' expectations.<br>• It is easy to sustain long term.<br>• It was implemented. | • It was not implemented.<br>• It is difficult to sustain with chronic problems that can't be resolved. |
| S4 | • It met the customers' expectations<br>• It was on time and on budget.<br>• The project manager stayed in touch with customers all the way through the project.<br>• It didn't harm team to meet the deadlines. Thee were no 'dead bodies' in your wake. | • It did not meet the customers' expectations.<br>• The project manager did not stay in touch with customers all the way through the project<br>• The project was unable to adapt to changing business requirements. |

**Participants Most Significant Challenges**

Question five asked the participants to describe the most significant challenges they faced on projects they led as the project manager. This question elicited two main responses, communication and relationship building. Communication was mentioned by all of the participants as one of the significant challenges they faced. Communication was needed for the team members, external partners, business partners, as well as with upper management and other project teams. Lack of sufficient communication by project managers increases the risk that they will not be aware of issues or risks that arise. B1 commented:

> More substantive project managers are talking, emailing, and communicating all the time. They are the pulse of the project. There are significant challenges if there is no communication and then you have no idea what is going on. As the project manager, you are failing. It is your job to know. The buck stops with the project manager to know (B1, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

The other response by the majority of the participants was the need to establish and build relationships, both with the team members and with business customers. Positive relationships built on trust with the team members, business counterparts, and external vendors are critical to leading a successful project. T6 stated:

> I think that team building or relationships with business or IS counterparts is critical. When you have challenges facing you it is easier if you have a relationship with them. Then you understand what peoples' needs are (T6, personal communication, May 24, 2011).

**Most Important Project Manager Qualities**

Question six asked the participants to describe the most important qualities for a successful project manager and to identify why. The predominant response to this question was communication skills. The project manager needs to have significant face-to-face conversations with a wide variety of personalities, which can be difficult. The participants also defined communication as the ability to not only talk, but to listen carefully to others. M7 spoke of effective communicators, along with active engagement in the project:

> "Successful project managers have the ability to communicate effectively with his/her team; one who other members can look at and feel that they are pulling their weight, who is actively involved on a day to day basis "(M7, personal communication, March 22, 2011).

Another important quality of successful project managers is the ability to identify issues that could impact the project. S4 said, "The most important quality is for a project manager to understand when something is going wrong; to have that instinct. They need to interview people and hear their updates; to know when to dig in; and to be able to sniff out issues" (S4, personal communication, June 13, 2011). B1's response was very similar to S4's response, which was:

> So, a project manager needs to communicate. They are, there is a term, a servant-master, which is from the scrum world. They let people do their jobs and remove their hurdles. So, that basically means that a project manager has to be extremely good at identifying the hurdles, and he or she may be the first one (B1, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

**Descriptions of Highly Successful Project Managers**

Question seven asked the participants to describe someone they consider a highly successful project manager and to discuss what qualities stood out in their minds. This question brought out a large number of answers, including good communicator, good consensus builder, good at managing the budget and timeline, well organized, involved in the project on a day-to-day basis, understand the technologies, well planned testing plan, understanding of the business requirements, and deep thinker in building out the project plan.

The three predominant answers to this question were good communication skills, good at building relationships with the team, and organizational skills, as can be see in the quotes in Table 4.

Table 4
Descriptions of successful project managers.

| **Participant** | **Quote** |
|---|---|
| B1 | I will name one individual, my mentor, who led project management for a very large food company. He is a very bright guy, and he would sit in a meeting and he would ask questions when he would see that everyone didn't get it. He would keep asking questions until he could tell that everyone got it. So, he would go any level to make sure the team is getting it. He is an extremely good listener. |
| J3 | I work with someone who is very good at building consensus with team members and is able to reach across departmental boundaries and build consensus. So those resources who may have some flexibility and can choose their assignment gravitate to that resource and want to work on that project and work with that person. |
| C5 | They have the basic project management skills, to manage budget and timelines. They don't necessarily know the technologies. They have a team that wants to work for them. |
| M7 | They are very organized, actively involved in the project on a day-to-day basis and they understand the technologies at play. They also have a good understanding of what the developers are telling them on a day-to-day basis. Finally, they have a well-planned testing phase where the business and IT feel comfortable that what they are putting into production will not cause a lot of support work post project. |
| R2 | He is able to communicate well, understand the business requirements, is well-organized, and manages the plan. |
| T6 | I think it's having some deep thought into the project and deep planning, and I think its dedication to it. They need to put quality time into it and are not distracted or spread among multiple projects. |
| S4 | I could bring him any assignment, whether or not he had any background in. He would do the research. In dealing with teams, including business, he was very tenacious, very much staying on top of the details going on in the sub-teams. He made some folks very uncomfortable staying on top of folks, including the business. |

**Managing Team Members that Didn’t Report to Them**

Interview question eight asked the participants whether or not they had been part of a project team in which there were team members that did not report to them, whether or not there were any challenges in managing those resources, and how well the project team worked. The answers to this question were interesting in that while all of the participants spoke of this aspect of project management being challenging at times, they provided a wide variety of situations that caused it to happen. J3, for example, spoke about a difficult resource assigned to the team; “It was extremely difficult to get the resource to do the right thing at the right time” (J3, personal communication, February 5, 2011). B1 described a situation in which lack of awareness of the culture of the developers caused challenges:

> The issue was communication. There was no communication. I did not know that in the Indian culture they don’t say ‘no’. I wasn’t consciously aware of it. I learned that ‘yes’ may mean ‘yes,’ it may mean ‘maybe’ or it may be ‘no.’ In that culture, it means ‘I understand you’. I failed, and we never got anything” (B1, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

And S4 spoke about the challenges of resources that are assigned to a project on a part-time basis. “They are very part-time resource, maybe working four to eight hours per week. Prioritizing their time is the challenge here; it doesn’t function very well, it slows the team down” (S4, personal communication, June 13, 2011).

Some of the participants spoke of techniques they used to overcome this challenge. T6 found that team building helped to overcome the obstacles.

> I have been on those projects; and worked with our shared technology support group who all report to their managers, but are part of the team. I think it does work; I think that team building helps it work better (T6, personal communication, May 24, 2011).

R2 took another approach for handling this challenge. "I go over my expectations with them at the beginning of the project" (R2, personal communication, April 24, 2011). R2 described situations in which those resources were slipping in their commitments. "The few times someone is having an issue getting their work done, I have a talk with them" (R2, personal communication, April 24, 2011).

C5 and M7 found that the technique that worked best for them was to engage the team member's manager. C5 used the project org chart to help overcome the challenges in this situation. "You need to make sure that whoever those folks report to is involved on your org chart, so that you have an escalation path you can use" (C5, personal communication, February 17, 2011). M7 also found the best way to handle these types of team members were to make sure the team members' resource manager was involved. "The fact that the project manager doesn't have authority really makes it difficult, so they need to get the resource manager involved" (M7, personal communication, March 22, 2011).

**Leadership Styles of Successful Project Managers**

The last question for the interview, question nine, asked the participant to describe the leadership style of the project managers they considered successful. They were also asked to compare the leadership styles of successful project managers to those that they considered poor project managers. The primary leadership style that the majority of the participants felt was important for success in the project management role was servant leadership. R2 responded:

> For a good project manager, some of the leadership styles they need to have is being open to input from others, flexible, and able to adjust to the team's various personalities. They can coach others and support them, lead and guide. If a member comes to you, you may not have the answer, you should be willing to find the answer for them (R2, personal communication, April 24, 2011).

S4 also described the leadership style of effective project managers as open and involved, with the project manager spending time to get to know his team and their strengths. And J3 spoke of successful project manager leaders as those who are willing to work with their team and are open to ideas from their team; defining them as the opposite of autocratic leaders. B1 described how someone could tell when a project manager is successful in leading a team.

> Leadership is not given to you. It's not by force. The team makes you a leader. So, if they think you are removing their hurdles and solving their problems, if it is not about you, but about them, then you will become the 'defacto' leader (B1, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

The participants also discussed the leadership style of poor project managers. R2's response for poor project managers described an autocratic style. "For a poor project manager, they are dictatorial, their way, not interested in others' opinions, they don't interact with others as well, or deals with various personalities" (R2, personal communication, April 24, 2011).

B1 provided some other great attributes of a poor project manager:

> Poor project managers use their title as a shield, they are taskmasters, they tell people what to do, they run the project by the project plan. Most poor project managers don't realize that change is a constant in all projects. They follow the saying 'Plan the work

> and work the plan.' Projects don't work like that, especially when you have multi-month projects, change always happens (B1, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

M7's response aligned closely with B1's response:

> The poor project managers are not involved at all and all they are concerned about is maintaining a project plan with tasks they don't understand. They are unable to question the developer from an estimate standpoint or when there are obstacles they are less likely to be able to get others to assist their team (M7, personal communication, March 22, 2011).

**Influence Strategies Used by the Participants**

The interviews uncovered some key insights from the participants' responses related to how they defined projects as successful or failures, their biggest challenges as project managers, their definition of successful project managers and the leadership style used by them, and how they influenced team members that didn't report to them. Although these insights were beneficial, the goal of this case study was to gain a deeper understanding of the influence strategies used by successful Harley-Davidson information services project managers.

Do these successful project managers use the influence strategies of rational reasoning, consultation and inspirational appeal with the highest frequency as seen in the study by Lee & Sweeney (2001)? According to Lee & Sweeney (2001), the four strategies most often used by project managers to influence their team members included explaining to the team member the reasons for their request (bargaining), involving the team member in the planning and decision-making process (consultation), using logic to convince the team member to do what is requested (rational reasoning) and appealing to the team member's higher values, competitive spirit, or organizational loyalty (higher management support) to generate enthusiasm to do what is requested (pp 18 - 20).

Most of the participants' responses to the nine interview questions pointed to the project managers using the influence strategy of consultation with their team members, as seen in Table 5. B1 described the project manager as a servant-master; while J3, R2, M7 and S4 all mentioned managers who are open to ideas or feedback from their team. And C5 mentioned the need for the project manager to be a great communicator who builds positive relationships with his customer and the team. This is not surprising, given the many responses in which the participants mentioned communication and active listening, which is a key criterion for the consultation influence strategy as defined by Lee & Sweeney (2001).

None of the participants mentioned the other influence strategies of rational reasoning or higher management support in their responses, although three of the participants mentioned bargaining in their responses. Consultation appears to be the influence strategy primarily used by successful project managers at Harley-Davidson.

Table 5
Influence strategies

| **Participant** | **Influence Strategy** | **Quotation** |
|---|---|---|
| B1 | consultation | So, a project manager needs to communicate. They are, there is a term, a servant-master, which is from the scrum world. They let people do their jobs and remove their hurdles. |
| J3 | consultation | I think project managers who are willing to work with their team are open to ideas from their team (the opposite of autocratic) are successful. They work late nights with their team if needed. . |

| Participant | Influence Strategy | Quotation |
|---|---|---|
| C5 | consultation | Successful project managers are really good communicators. They don't sit behind the desk and email. They have a lot of face-to-face conversations, both with both the customer and the team. Building team relationship is when the team knows that you 'have their back', without crossing the line. |
| M7 | consultation, bargaining | Successful project manager have the ability to communicate effectively with his/her team; one who other members can look at and feel that they are pulling their weight, who is open to feedback and who is actively involved on a day-to-day basis. |
| R2 | consultation, bargaining | For a good project manager, some of the leadership styles they need to have are being open to input from others, flexible, and able to adjust to the team's various personalities. They can coach others and support them, lead and guide. |
| T6 | consultation | I think that successful project managers need to develop strong relationships with business or IS counterparts. They also need to be open to input from the team and flexible. |
| S4 | consultation, bargaining | I think effective leaders in that project manager role are those that are really good communicators, spend time getting to know their people, are open to input from the team, and assign tasks to their strengths. Those who communicate well, keep it fun and play to strengths of the team are more successful project managers. |

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the influence strategies used by successful Harley-Davidson information services project managers. As a result of the face-to-face interviews that were conducted with seven Harley-Davidson information services project managers, this researcher was able to elicit some common themes.

Communication, relationship building, and organizational skills are the three key qualities needed to be a successful project manager, with communication the most important skill of them all. Project managers who communicate well either verbally or in written form need to be able to utilize active listening. The active listening included the project manager's willingness to be open to feedback and ideas from the team, helping the project manager to gain a different perspective on an idea or issue. Project managers who effectively use active listening seek out opinions from team members proactively so that they can keep a finger on the pulse of the project.

Successful project managers also need to be able to build strong relationships with both customers and their team members. Strong relationships are created when project managers take the time to get to know their team members and customers, gaining a deeper understanding of their expectations and motivations. Project managers who build strong relationships are able to build consensus with customers and motivate their team to produce the desired results.

And finally successful project managers need to be able to be organized, so that they can effectively build and manage a project plan from creation to implementation. This organization can also be seen in the project manager's deep knowledge of the business requirements and ability to identify issues easily.

All of the Harley-Davidson information services project managers interviewed mentioned using the consultation influence strategy as defined by Lee and Sweeney (2001) to positively influence their team members. Although this influence strategy is not the only influence strategy used by successful Harley-Davidson project managers, it appears that it is used with the most frequency. This result partly aligns with the results of the Lee and Sweeney (2001) study that found consultation strategy to be one of the four predominant influence strategies used by information services project managers. The one difference in results from the Lee and Sweeney (2001) study was that the rational reasoning and higher management support influence strategies were not mentioned by any of the participants. This difference may be a result of the culture at Harley-Davidson, which emphasizes building positive collaborative relationships.

**Limitations**

One of the key limitations of this study is that the size of the study participants was small. Seven participants are not sufficient to fully represent the experiences of all information services project managers. Another limitation in this study is the relative scarcity of female information services project managers as participants. Harley-Davidson has a total of sixty information services employees with a title of ‘lead’ or ‘project manager.’ Out of that total, only thirteen are female, for a percentage of twenty-two percent, as compared with a percentage rate of fourteen percent for this study.

Another limitation of this study is the use of a structured interview, which has a diminished likelihood of unexpected or interesting responses. Thus the topics discussed in the interview may be more reflective of the researcher’s interpretation of the situation than the respondent’s interpretation (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

Lastly, the traditional definition of ‘successful’ projects as being on time and on budget may not necessarily mean that the project managers selected were, in fact, project managers who were successful at influencing their team. Some of the participants, such as J3, may primarily lead large projects that did not require them to deal with authority-gap, as defined by Hodgetts (1968). Instead, for those participants, the project manager’s authority is clearly defined and authorized in the project charter (Hodgetts, 1968).

**Implications for Future Research**

There is a good amount of research, both qualitative and quantitative, on information services project management, and what is needed to be successful. The current research deals with many topics pertaining to successful projects, such as power, persuasion, authority-gap and influence strategies and influence tactics. The participants for this study were very willing to share their insights on what they perceive as important qualities for successful project managers, including the best methods for influencing team members that don't report to them. Additional research in this area would be beneficial. Perhaps it could be done in other industries, such as government or non-profit organizations, in order to see if similar findings would occur. And it would be interesting to see if the consultation influence strategy is the predominant influence strategy used by project managers in other parts of the United States.

Information services projects are difficult to manage and cost companies millions of dollars. Gaining a deeper understanding of the soft skills needed by information services project managers is important for developing future project managers who will have a high probability of leading a successful project.

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Appendix A Consent Form

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
***Types of influence tactics used by Highly Successful Information Services Project Managers***
Gail English
Leadership Studies

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of how Information Services Project Managers are able to influence team members that do not report to them. You will be one of approximately 10 participants in this research study.

**PROCEDURES:** You will need to read carefully and sign the agreement of consent form before any one-on-one interviews can occur. Once a signed consent form has been received, then the actual date and time of the interview will be scheduled. Signing the consent form is not part of the research.

The interview will take between 30 and 45 minutes, and the principal researcher will use an audio tape to record the interview in order to ensure accuracy. The answers provided during the interview will be transcribed from the audio tape. Next, a follow-up meeting will be scheduled for you to review and make any changes to the transcribed interview. Once you have reviewed the transcribed data the audio tape will be destroyed. For confidentiality purposes, your name will not be recorded.

**DURATION:** Your participation will consist of one forty-five minute interview as well as one 30 minute follow-up session in order to validate the accuracy of the transcribed data.

**RISKS:** There is a risk that someone may be able to identify you as a participant through your responses to questions, which could have a negative impact on you professionally or personally. The principal researcher will not use any direct quotes that provide specific details that could be used to determine who made the quote in order to mitigate this risk. You will also have the freedom to not answer any of the questions during the interview that you are uncomfortable answering.

The principal researcher has also received an organizational consent form signed by the highest level Information Services leader that states that results of this study will not be used for employee performance evaluations.

**BENEFITS:** The benefits associated with participation in this study include gaining a better understanding of the best way to influence team members in which the project manager has no direct authority. There is no direct benefit to subjects.

Participant Initial ___________________

Date ______________________________

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All your data will be assigned an arbitrary alpha-numeric number rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual. The data collection process will utilize a number identifying system and only the researcher will hold the list of names and correlating identifying numbers. This list is confidential and will only be provided to the university upon request and will not be made available for public viewing or use.

When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files 3 years after the completion of the study.

Audio tapes, which will be used for gathering the interview responses, will be kept long enough to transcribe the recorded information and then immediately erased. Data waiting to be transcribed and transcribed data will be kept in the primary investigator's residence. Transcribed records will be kept for 3 years.

The principal researcher will not use any direct quotes that provide specific details that could be used to determine who made the quote in order to maintain your confidentiality.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:** Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you would like to withdraw from this study, you will need to email the researcher with your desire to stop participation in this study.

The primary researcher will transcribe your interview data immediately after your interview and before the next interview. You may withdraw from this study at any time prior to the completion of the study results.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Gail English at gail.English@mu.edu or 414-343-4983.

For concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

Participant Initial ___________________

Date _____________________________

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

______________________________________________ ___________________________

Participant's Signature Date

______________________________________________

Participant's Name

______________________________________________ ___________________________

Researcher's Signature Date

# Appendix B Interview Protocol

## MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
## INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

1. How long have you worked in Information Services, and where?

2. How long have you worked as a Project Manager?

3. How many projects have you been involved in, and what were the roles you had on them?

4. What is your definition of a project that is 'successful'? What is your definition of a 'failed' project?

5. What was the most significant challenges you faced on projects you led as the project manager?

6. What do you think is the most important qualities for a successful project manager and why?

7. Describe someone who you regard as a highly successful project manager. What qualities stand out for this person?

8. Have you led or been part of a project team in which there were team members that didn't report to the project manager? If yes, how well did the project team work? Did the project manager have any challenges in managing the resources that he had no authority over?

9. Can you describe the leadership styles of project managers you consider successful? How did these leadership styles compare to poor project managers?