

Management Seminar on Project Alliancing

From Accidental Superhero to Creative Leader

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Introduction

Alliances, by definition, are complex, evolving endeavours with a dynamic array of interwoven challenges associated with multiple stakeholders, competing organisational dynamics, understanding the owner's investment aspirations and addressing the day to day technical and management demands associated with developing and delivering the physical scope of work.

Yet, although industry has excelled at building core capability in traditional project management disciplines, the skills required to excel in the complex environment of alliances are much rarer. *Great Alliance Managers are in short supply*. Moreover, such skills are often lacking among Alliance Leadership Team (ALT) members and owner selection panel members who have come largely from operational backgrounds with limited personal exposure to alliance environments. So what?

Whilst various studies have concluded Alliances perform positively in the main, there is an increasing realisation that many are still underperforming relative to potential and relative to owner investment aspirations thus *further fuelling the Value for Money debate*. In many cases, the quest for Alliance performance is being thwarted by well meaning leaders relying on outdated perspectives and deploying sub-optimal methods. Ironically, *the immense potential of the Alliance delivery vehicle is being systemically under exploited by those at the wheel*. As an industry we need to evolve our leadership capabilities in line with our determination to address ever more complex challenges. So, what type of leadership is required?

Creative Leadership

Far from continuing to rely on "accidental superheroes", the success of Alliances and Alliancing requires a new brand of talent – it requires the passion, skill and discipline of *Creative Leaders* - leaders drawing on bold, insightful perspectives and deploying well targeted combinations of hard and soft skills to *reliably deliver outcomes acknowledged by all as a genuine, sustainable industry breakthrough*. Importantly, Creative Leaders embrace and expand on (rather than replace) the existing traditional project management capabilities which have brought us so far. Creative Leaders are:

- Choreographers of group energy
- Emotionally literate and purpose-rich
- Multi-faceted, intuitive and highly adaptive

Creative Leaders are “choreographers of group energy”

We all understand the tangible ingredients of complex projects which typically include problems and solutions, concrete & steel, financial and human resources, processes and systems. Yet to view complex projects simply as a series of tasks to be performed is a limited and limiting view of reality. More elegantly, a complex project can be viewed as an unfolding or emergent system of tasks and human interactions the purpose of which is to efficiently and effectively harness and convert collective potential to create results (and thus VALUE). This conversion of potential – potential energy, intellect and passion - is at *the core of satisfying industry’s insatiable quest for value* and is directly related to the quality of human interactions in the project “system”

Frequently however, this critical dimension of performance is obscured by our absolute focus on the familiar, tangible dimensions (as we move inputs and measure outputs) such that *we risk not seeing the wood for the trees*. Reactive leaders routinely overlook vital opportunities to influence system outcomes with every thought, every conversation and every action as they busily “plan-do-check-act” their way to unremarkable outcomes. Choreographers of Energy have well developed capabilities for sensing and enhancing the “energetic state” - or the essential mood - of the Alliance moment to moment. Rather than waiting for a crisis to emerge or for someone to perform a periodic “health check”, they are *constantly diagnosing and improving the health of alliance’s energetic state* to facilitate higher quality interactions and outputs.

They do this by recognising that processes and tactics alone don’t transform performance but people do – individually and in concert with one another. In order for this to occur, people have to feel safe and energised and be committed to being their best selves every day and to supporting each other to do the same. They complement the commercial contract by facilitating the development of a powerful *Human Contract* with and between team members. Unlike many leaders, Choreographers of Energy understand that humans are non-linear entities with imperfect coefficients of restitution and thus do not obey conventional laws of cause and effect. They act on subtle and obvious factors inhibiting the drafting and execution of the Human Contract and encourage others to do the same. *They do whatever it takes to enhance the quality and quantity of collective energy available for value creation* rather than see it dissipated by factors such as confusion, cynicism, conformism and excessive control.

Creative Leaders are “emotionally literate and purpose-rich”

Creative Leaders are self aware and highly intentional. Their commitment to developing emotional literacy in themselves and others is based on recognising that *reactive leaders subconsciously “infect” their environments with their personal fears, limitations, and neuroses* and thus cultivate a culture which inhibits rather than facilitates the conversion of human potential as collective energy is diverted to game-playing, man-marking and self preservation.

Creative Leaders have consciously committed themselves to a higher order sense of purpose (often related to making a meaningful and sustainable difference in the world around them) and draw on it to shape their core motivations and day to day activities as a leader. They seem at ease and effective even under pressure relying on what they know and feel to be right rather than energy-sapping analyses of “shoulds and should nots.”

Even in the face of extreme pressure they see beyond personal risk, make constructive choices and take firm action directed at creating value for the system. Their emotional literacy leads not only to positive immediate outcomes for their cause but also inspires systemic changes in their operating environment.

Creative Leaders are “multi-faceted, intuitive and highly adaptive”

Because Creative Leaders view their projects as complex, dynamic, evolving systems of tasks and interactions designed to create value, *they see themselves as facilitators of those systems*. They seek to understand system health and underlying causes and set about intuitively designing combinations of hard and soft interventions to continually optimise system performance. This requires flexibility and focus (ie focus on best for project as opposed to best for me or my organisation). Because the Creative Leader is self-aware and committed to creating value, they commit themselves to developing an ever expanding repertoire of effective responses to common and new challenges. Their thoughts, words and actions are dedicated to *system performance*. They are:

- **Navigators of Possibility** – they create an environment where people routinely explore what could be as well as what is – they create portals and pathways to new possibilities. They take responsible detours from the linear path to be open to emergent forces and opportunities that others may miss if they are blinded by *the* path.
- **Beacons of Trust** – they are the first to take the risk of trust and encourage others to follow – they have the confidence and courage to embrace the risks and enjoy the rewards of being open and vulnerable with others. They are at ease with the tensions associated with challenge because they know this builds trust, cohesion and fresh perspectives. They challenge thoughtfully.

- **Tamers of Complexity** – they are willing to hold the tensions associated with ambiguity and uncertainty to ensure the right questions are being asked and addressed in preference to collapsing into action to “be busy” and look heroic.
- **Fountains of Confidence** – they empower those around them by issuing compelling invitations for responsible initiative. They build bow waves of collective confidence by cultivating rituals of appreciation, feedback and acknowledgement. Team members actively supporting each others’ success – “*your success is my success*”.
- **Enablers of Success** – their insight, thoughts and actions pave the way to others’ success and to a sound end game. They have no need for bouquets – their reward is the accomplishment of the goal and leaving the space and people better for the journey.

What or who creates Creative Leaders?

The good news is developing Creative Leaders is remarkably straight forward. Encourage people to look for and listen to what they care deeply about and help them do what they love. In a sense, it’s like the old saying “*don’t just do something – sit there*”. From here all the other essential skills will emerge with a little guidance. Whilst this is a deliberately provocative proposition, it is not far from the truth and core perspectives and capabilities are achievable in a matter of days with effective training and development. The real challenge is many of those responsible for developing leaders in their organisations are themselves at various stages of making out the wood from the trees. So if you are serious about creating Creative Leaders ask your peers and teams “what will raise the quality, quantity and focus of our collective energy around here?” Or if you want to make a point: “how do we enhance our essential mood?”

About PCI Alliance Services

PCI provides specialist commercial, cultural and leadership advisory services to the construction industry focusing on alliancing and other forms of collaborative venture. We have extensive experience in setting up and coaching alliances and helping proponent teams secure alliance contracts. We also provide strategic, cultural and leadership consulting advice to organisations. We support clients around Australia and internationally and have our head quarters in Melbourne. Visit us at www.pci-aus.com.