

Are you a manager or a leader? Take our quick quiz

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Is the project manager the last bastion of “command and control” management? Traditional Waterfall (BDUF) methodologies encourage the PM to monitor and manage the team’s delivery against a detailed list of milestones. These deliverables were probably forecast many months before in a plan spiralling out in to the dim and distant future. There is no indication from a GANTT chart or an MS Project plan as to the relative value of each deliverable. As a result, the conversation between ‘manager’ and ‘managed’ can be binary: you delivered your milestones, or you didn’t.

Ticking off milestones can be motivating. There’s a sense of achievement; there’s an impression of action and progress – useful when stakeholders are breathing down your neck demanding results. But if that is the default approach, we are just confusing activity with achievement, and in so-doing, we are not managing the interests of our stakeholders. We are setting up our team for failure*.

But doing what is right rather than what is convenient takes courage and a thick skin. How many of us have spent hours justifying to “Leadership” why we prioritised THE one milestone that actually delivered real value, delaying multiple others that were frankly meaningless, only to be told off for failing to “hit the milestones”?

We now work in a world that is encouraging ‘Leadership’. But do we understand what that means in terms of the role and the responsibility of the project manager? What is the difference between project ‘management’ and project ‘leadership’? “Command and control” can feel tempting when we’re under pressure, but are we managing our own interests (keeping our jobs) rather than managing our stakeholders’ interests?

So test whether you are a manager or a leader with our quick quiz:

1. Are you “Managing” your team to hit milestones or “Leading” teams to deliver real value to your customer?
2. Are you taking enough time to really understand the outcome the customer needs and the value that lies behind each of those items on your plan?
3. Are you spending enough time explaining the relative value of those deliverables to your team?
4. Are you encouraging innovation and entrepreneurial thinking in your team, so that they have the authority to deprioritise low/no value tasks without blame or consequences?

Let’s lead our people to be successful not manage them to failure.

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\*Author’s note: I believe “failure” is NOT defined by doing something that turns out to not work. Rather, “failure” is to keep doing something when you KNOW it won’t work, and to learn nothing – but that is probably a whole new conversation!!