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Project uncertainty, project risk and project leadership: A policy capturing study of New Zealand project managers.

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

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2016
Abstract:
Cooperation between project practice and project research could help reduce failure rates for projects in New Zealand and globally. The current research used a “policy capturing” method - systematically varying sources of project uncertainty (policy cues) to explore project leadership responses. A contingency model proposed that project uncertainty (low path-goal clarity, low team cohesion, and high technical complexity) would lead to greater perceptions of project risk (scope/quality, budget, schedule, and project team satisfaction) that would negatively predict the (rated) effectiveness of transactional leadership style and positively predict ratings for transformational style. In total, n=131 experienced project managers rated the effectiveness of leadership styles from ‘not effective’ to ‘extremely effective’. Greater uncertainty produced higher perceived risks that reduced the rated effectiveness of transactional leadership. Path-goal clarity was of particular importance as a policy cue, directly predicting transactional leadership ratings ($R = -0.189$). These results are consistent with the task-orientation of traditional project management. However, the results for transformational style were unexpected - only team cohesion predicted transformational leadership ratings (negatively) ($R = -0.119$) and no link between risk and transformational leadership was found. Possible reasons for the ‘disconnect between transformational leadership, uncertainty and risk are discussed and further research suggested.
Acknowledgements:

My profound gratitude and respect goes to Professor Stuart C. Carr - a true humanitarian, a true scholar and a fine transformational leader. And of course kudos to Scott Ballantyne for achieving what we couldn’t... ;)

My thanks to Garry Miller, Director of Research, PMINZ, and all PMINZ members who took the time to complete the questionnaire.

My appreciation to Massey University, and Harvey Jones, in particular, for Qualtrix-ing and advice.

Thanks Amanda for your support.

Eternal love and hugs to Amelia and Juliette – my everything. Thanks to you (and Barry the fox terrier) for your patience. One day you will explore your very own piece of the puzzle!

Love and songs,

B.
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