

Team Leadership Challenges: Research Analysis

February 2020

Amy Buttiglieri

A Solid Launch Consulting

Research Background

Research on Team Leadership was conducted between December 2019 and February 2020 to discern patterns of challenges that managers have in leading their teams. Data was gathered using the ASK Methodology Model (www.askmethod.com) results compiled in the software application Bucket.io (www.bucket.io).

Per the methodology, all responses were gathered via a text chat (“Lean” Deep Dive Survey (DDS)) or directly within Bucket.io (“Classic” Deep Dive Survey). The Lean approach is used when respondents can have a more thorough conversation with the researcher, giving the equivalent result of 25 “Classic” approach responses. A Classic response is considered the equivalent of 1 Lean response when it scores high on the length of response plus additional information obtained, classifying it as “hyper responsive”. This research gathered 14 Lean responses and 1 Classic response that qualified as “hyper responsive”.

The number of Lean responses required for a valid DDS is 10. Additional responses, although not necessary, serve to increase confidence in the results.

Please note that this research and report are not intended to be used for formal studies submitted for inclusion in professional journals.

Research Questions

This research contained one main question: “When it comes to leading your team, what’s the single biggest challenge, question, or frustration you’ve been dealing with?” Answers were open response, and participants could write as little or as much on the topic as they wished, with no time limit. Due to the collection method for 14/15 respondents (text chat), there was immediate opportunity for dialogue to clarify responses or dig deeper into a particular area of response.

There were 3 supporting, demographic – or segmentation – questions with multiple choice answers:

- Position
- Age
- Paid Program Option Preference

The Position question was based on how the participants saw their role, rather than their title. The purpose was to identify the type of manager being interviewed. The Age question was derived from typical social media segments (10 year increments). The purpose of the Program Option Preference question was to identify the respondent’s preferred type of interaction regarding learning/coaching for team leadership skills. The Program Option Preference also included a cost component, though the goal was not to determine specific price, but rather a willingness to invest money to solve the issue.

Results

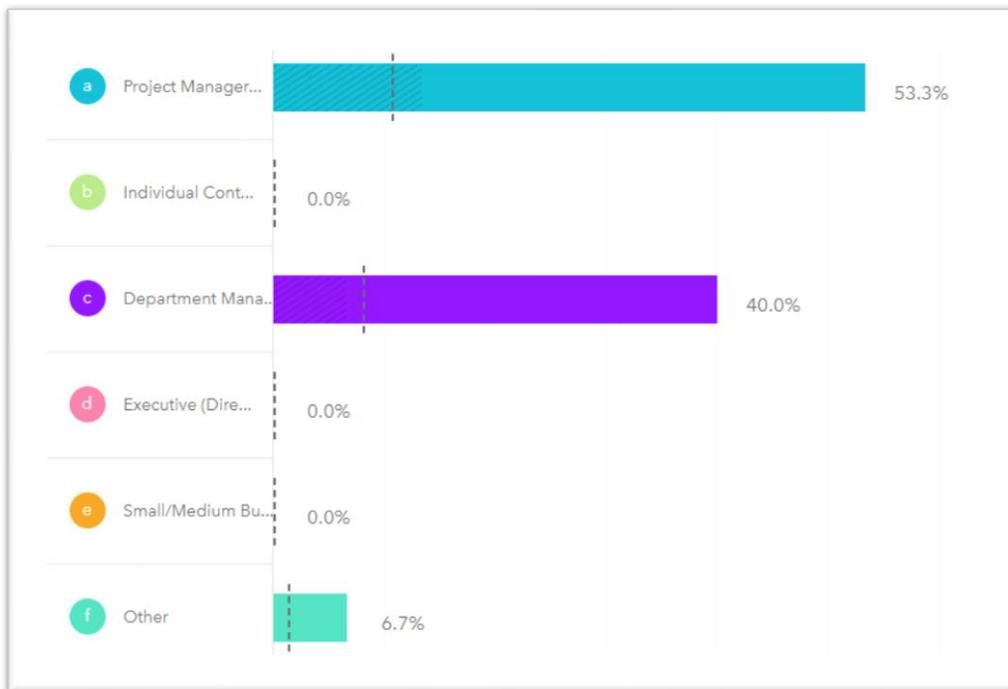
This Results section will first review the 3 demographic questions, then the main question, ending with a conclusion encompassing all questions.

Demographic Results

Current Role:

- 8/15 participants self-identified as a Project Manager
- 5/15 participants self-identified as a Department Manager
- 1/15 participants self-identified as “Other” (note: in this case, Web Content Manager)
- 0 respondents self-identified as Individual Contributor, Executive (Director or above), or Small/Medium Business Owner

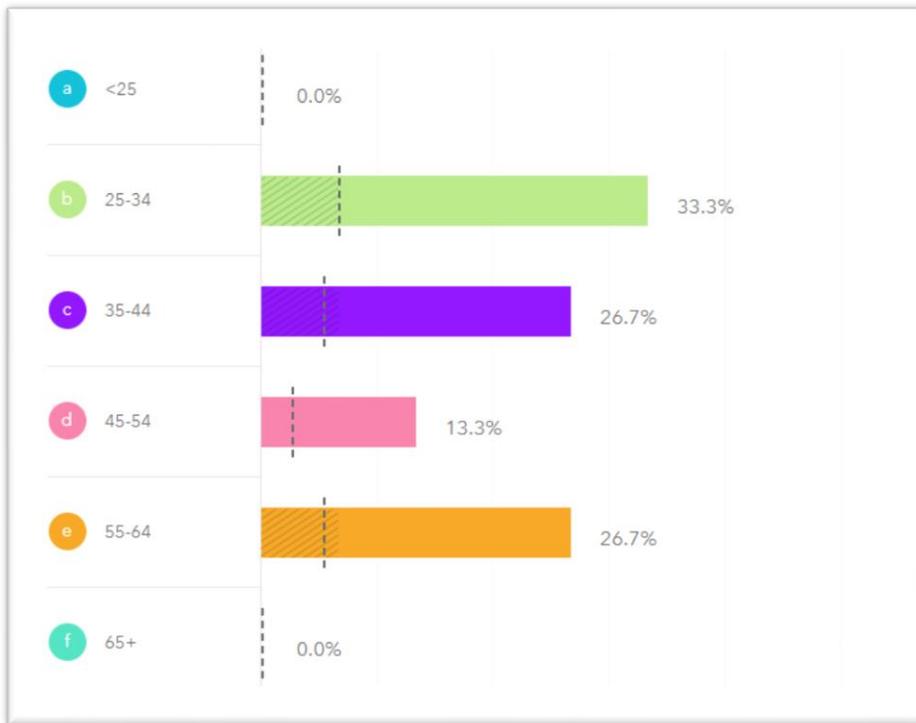
Note: some participants had titles that were different than their role. For example, their title is Department Manager but are working in the capacity of Project Manager.



Age:

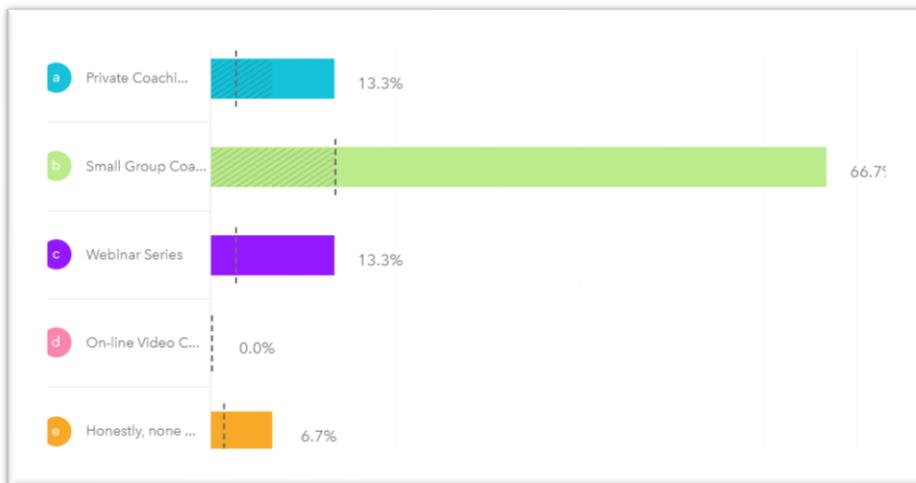
- 5/15 respondents self-identified as age 25-34
- 4/15 respondents self-identified as age 35-44
- 2/15 respondents self-identified as age 45-54
- 4/15 respondents self-identified as age 55-64
- 0 respondents self-identified as <25 or >64

Note that although there were no respondents who were in the youngest or oldest age bracket, that does not necessarily mean there are no managers of these ages. Logically, however, it is less likely that they would be in a team leadership role (<25) or interested in furthering their career (>64).



Paid Program Preference:

- 10/15 respondents selected Small Group Coaching Calls for a program
- 2/15 respondents selected Private Coaching for a program
- 2/15 respondents selected a Webinar Series for a program
- 1/15 respondents selected Honestly, none of the above
- 0/15 respondents selected On-line Video course



Observations based upon demographic questions:

- 100% of respondents 25-44 selected Small Group Coaching Calls as their preferred program method
- There was no correlation found between Job Role and Age

Open Response Analysis

Each response had up to 3 themes contained within it. There were a handful of themes that came up several times and are noted here:

- A majority of the responses focused outward (~75%) – on resolving challenges for the team. This focus was across all types of issues noted by the participants.
- Several of the responses focused inwards (~25%) – on improving their own leadership skills, including the perception of others on their leadership abilities.
- Conflict was often mentioned as a challenge, as an individual action or amongst the team.
- Resistance was repeatedly cited by participants. Resistance of both individuals and of whole teams.
- Time was another big theme. Respondents commented on lack of time for: completing their own work, their team to complete their work, team development, team bonding, communication, etc.
- A few responses focused on “management” rather than “leadership”, as commonly defined and understood in the industry.
- When participants talked about “team”, they exclusively focused on the core team, or the people they personally manage. No responses mentioned other groups (i.e. Executive Team or Steering Committee, Extended Core Team, Users, etc.) as a team in the context of leadership. When other groups were mentioned, it was in the context only of communication, change management, etc.
- Less frequently, but still significant, were themes of:
 - Team & individual engagement in the project
 - Individual focus on task exclusive of how each task impacts the whole
 - Communication across stakeholder groups
 - Continuous improvement of the team
 - Motivation
 - Managing change
 - Workload
 - Use of tools to enable communication and decision-making

Word Cloud

Since the responses were entered into a software application, a Word Cloud was generated to note the words with the most frequent use. A Word Cloud is not only used to pull out the most frequently used words, but to understand the vocabulary used by participants (e.g. the word “basement” instead of “cellar”). This helps fine tune messaging in both written (i.e. webinars) and oral (i.e. coaching) forms to help connect to the end user in training programs.

The Word Cloud contains the top 100 frequently used words, with some common words removed (i.e. it’s, an, etc.).

Stakeholder Focus:

Themes for Stakeholder Focus include communication challenges across sites/levels/groups, decentralized communication paths & tools, managing upwards, organizational lack of understanding of PM role & responsibility, managing change, ensuring global alignment

It is notable that some of the themes fit into more than one focus area, such as communication. And the responses may be split differently. For example, Time Management could have its own grouping, as could Team Member Resistance & Conflict. However, this study is focused on the segmenting the themes so that respondents would be able to more clearly identify with one area of opportunity for progress over the others.