

VPE/CTO Community of Practice – May 15, 2007

**Abstract**

Management has a bad reputation in much of the product development world. Many people would say it is a well-deserved reputation. As part of the management team, you now have the chance to avoid the traps that led your previous bosses astray.

To avoid them, you need a clear idea of what the goals of management are, and how they differ from the goals of people in other roles, such as project management, product marketing, and CTO. So our first question is, “what is management’s job?”

This leads to a host of other questions. Some of them are:

- Do leaders have to be managers?
- Can a department manager also be a technical leader?
- When does communicating about a project become the responsibility of a manager (as opposed to the project manager)?

Drawing on examples from industry experience, I will also address some practical matters, like:

- How do you establish credibility as a manager?
- How do you deal with autocratic executives?
- How do you avoid becoming an autocratic executive?

This is intended to be a jumping-off point for a lively discussion about managing development.

**John Levy short bio**

John Levy is a management consultant who works with high-tech organizations to help them manage product development to get consistent, predictable and innovative results. He also acts as an expert witness in patent litigation related to computer, software and Internet technologies, and has been a technical advisor to two U.S. District Court judges.

John has held management positions with Quantum Corporation, Apple Computer, Tandem Computers, and Digital Equipment Corporation. He earned a Ph.D. in Computer Science from Stanford University, and holds engineering degrees from Cornell and CalTech.

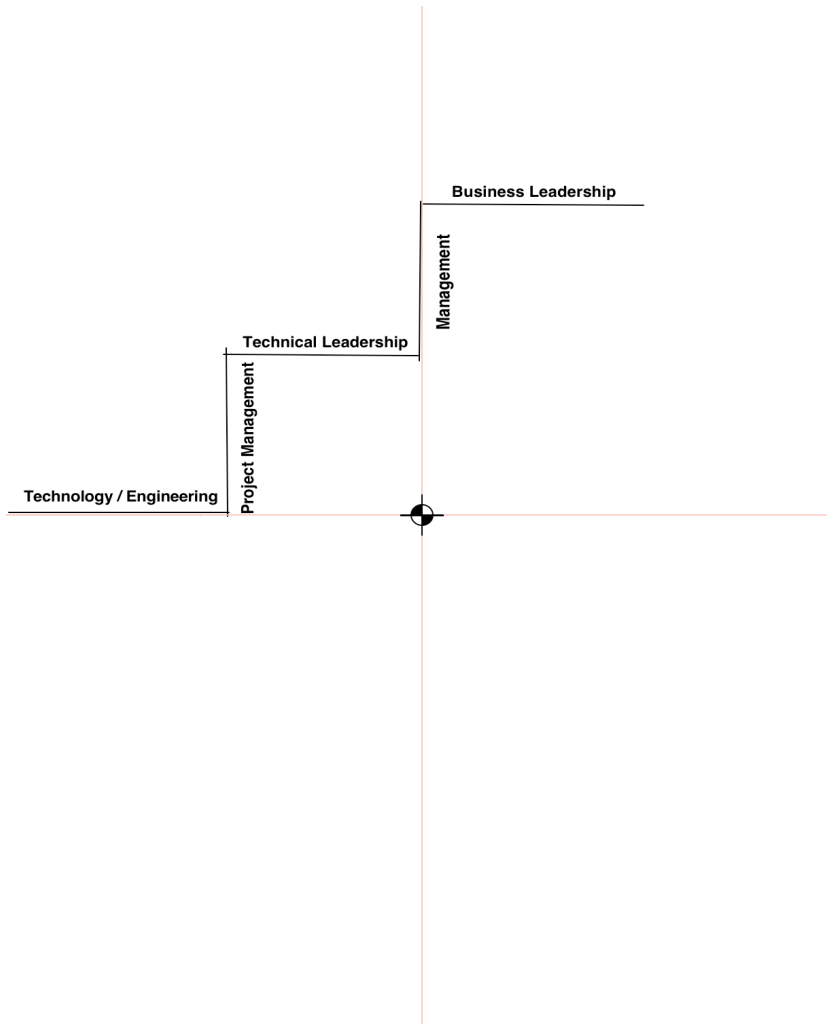
John is currently writing a book on management for technology executives titled, “Get Out of the Way.” His website is <http://johnlevyconsulting.com> and he can be reached at 415 663-1818 or [info@johnlevyconsulting.com](mailto:info@johnlevyconsulting.com)

**Playing the Management Game in Development – and Winning** by John Levy – outline as it was prepared for delivery, together with some of the interactions

**Introduction**

This is an experiment in which I will present 7 themes or sets of questions that are intended to stimulate discussion and discovery.

**Theme 1: Model of the circular platform**



If you look “from the top” of this diagram and imagine it rotated about an axis to the right of the topmost step, you get a perspective on management of the overall enterprise. The other segments shown in the example were: Marketing, Operations, Finance/HR, Customer Relations, Purchasing/Vendor Relations.

Most of us came up through the technology path, moving from “Project Management and Technical Leadership” on to “Technical Leadership and Management.” Now our challenge is to move upward towards “Management and Business Leadership.” From this perspective on the platform, you can see the whole business:

- building a team of VP and CxO players who develop and support the business strategy
- considering a wider variety of stakeholders

**Questions for discussion:**

Are you part of a management team?  
In what sense?  
Does it work as a team?

**Theme 2: Identifying and nurturing technology leaders**

Have you identified and encouraged individuals to become technology leaders? Or do you let them get into positions of technology leadership on their own?  
Are you one of the key technology leaders in your company? If so, you are juggling two (or more) roles.  
Do you coach your technology leaders on how to influence others and how to lead without management authority?  
Do you support your technology leaders by “public” acknowledgement and/or by placing them in positions of influence (such as a leader role in a team)?

**Question for discussion:**

*Suppose you have a critical hiring decision to make AND a critical technology selection to make. Which one do you give priority to? How do you feel about doing so? [the comfort trap]*

**[feedback: A better question might contrast a hiring decision against a customer issue]**

**Theme 3: Project Management vs. Management**

Project Management

*Do you consider letting an Administrator handle the day-to-day tracking of project status, etc.?*

*Does the Project Leader also concern him/herself with PERT, status reports, etc.?*

*How formal is the project leader role?*

*Are YOU the project leader for one or more projects in your department?*

Management – Seven activities that are not part of Project Management

*Self-development as a manager*

*Leading change (in process, design, tools)*

*Allocating resources – Planning & budgeting*

*Evaluating business trade-offs & negotiating them with other departments*

*Encouraging people / giving them room to grow*

*Communicating appropriate information into and out of the department or organization*

*Paying attention to relevant things going on outside of the company*

**Question for discussion: What else?** You suggested these:

*Strategy*

*Organization design*

*Staffing*

*Team-building*

*Diplomacy with other organizations*

*Compensation/salaries*

*Managing perceptions*

#### **Theme 4: Agile philosophy applied to management**

Agile methodology as a grassroots reaction to management shortcomings

*Constant change / shifting requirements*

*Over-driven by management*

*Excessive emphasis on process over results*

*Poor ability to predict what and when*

*Until estimating is on a sounder basis, individual managers will need to stiffen their backbones and defend their estimates with the assurance that their poor hunches are better than wish-derived estimates. – Fred Brooks, The Mythical Man-Month, p.21*

Key concepts of Agile

*"light" process*

*everyone on the team (including customer surrogate)*

*daily interaction*

*short (2 to 3 week) iterations*

*brief "requirements" as functions or capabilities [user stories]*

*priorities are for current iteration only*

*iteration duration takes precedence over functionality*

*"test-driven": we know how to show that it works*

*build only enough to pass the tests*

*rewrite/refactor/[rebuild] as needed*

Agile adapted for management

*Presume that engineers and managers are capable and can organize themselves as needed **[this caused considerable debate]***

*Expect improvement over time in forecasts/resource*

*requirements/schedules/communication/tools (implies that we should encourage review and feedback)*

*Plan to inspect (see demo of) everything – "inspect what you expect" (and maybe have a customer surrogate see it, too)*

*Set up a visible priority map and allow it to change (implies that we must find ways to reduce the pain of changing priorities)*

*Separate the longer-term issues (such as vendor, cost, ...) from immediate roadblocks & problems, and let different people work on the two classes of issues. ("Let's presume that there will be a solution to that problem when we get to that point.")*

And, Agile or not ...

*Find metrics that are relevant, easy to gather, and provide the right incentives*

#### **Questions for discussion:**

*What metrics do you use?*

*Are they posted regularly?*

*Are the things they measure improving over time?*

*Do you care?*

#### **Theme 5: Defining the product**

How does product definition work in your enterprise?

*Who sets the constraints?*

*How do you (or they) know what's possible?*

*Are customers involved?*

*Do you get a clear charter? Or do you have to work at discovering the real requirements?*

*Who sets the schedule/budget/feature-set (and quality level)?*

*Do you have to keep two schedules (one for Engineering, one for executive management)?*

Sidebar: Product Teams

*The traditional "2x2": Engineering x Product Management*

*Quantum's Product Team approach: 3x3+*

*Engineering*

*Product Management*

*Operations*

*Executive Sponsor*

*Process Coach*

*+others as needed*

*Compensation – bonus based on team results*

*Peer review at the team level*

*Product Team reports to Operations Team*

**Question for discussion:**

*Where do product definitions come from in your enterprise?*

**Theme 6: Teamwork and Credibility**

Team stressors and constraints:

Causes of stress for a team – peer interactions; boss interactions; top management interactions; schedule promises; tool inadequacies and malfunctions; missing requirements; missing feedback; badmouthing from other teams; inadequate leadership; blame; change; moving; changing management;

*Getting feedback (as manager) from teams*

*Do you let team members interact with outside people?*

*Do YOU interact with customers?*

Credibility:

*To whom? Constituencies may include:*

Engineering -- Hardware / Firmware / Software/Mechanical / other disciplines

QA / Test Engineering

Sustaining Engineering / Product Support

Product Marketing

Customer Support

Operations / Manufacturing

Purchasing

HR / Finance

*Deliverables*

*When?*

*Quality/Cost*

*What about "sustainable pace"?*

**Questions for discussion:**

*What gives you the most credibility?*

*What detracts most?*

**Theme 7: Dealing with the autocratic executive**

*Schedule, budget & features/quality – which one is top priority?*

“All three”

“What will it take to get what I’m asking for?”

“Why can’t you tell me how long it will take?”

“I need you to commit”

“You’re not being a team player!”

*Why don’t you build what I want you to build?*

The moving target

The functional test – did it sell & make money?

Incrementing the requirements – weekly

Executive amnesia: “I didn’t say that!”

*Establishing discipline*

Documenting the key parameters

Getting signoff

Offering alternatives

Positive feedback – reinforcing good behavior

“Refusing insane contracts” - putting your job on the line

*Could YOU become an autocratic executive?*

Blind spots – as technology leader

Habits of “knowing” rather than asking

Styles – of leading, of thinking

Decisiveness vs. encouraging growth

**Questions for discussion:**

What do you most need to improve as a manager and business leader?

**Your responses:**

Communication – sharing data

Strategic decision-making

Too candid with CEO and others

Too much time with peers, not enough time with my own team

(Opposite of the last one above)

I’m often disappointed at results – because I don’t inspect enough