

OPERATIONS MANAGERS VERSUS PROJECT MANAGERS IN THE MINING INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY

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The success of a project lies heavily on the shoulders of the project manager to deliver a project according to scope, within budget and on time. This depends heavily upon the behaviour of the project manager and not on his intentions or his personality but specifically on what he accomplishes throughout the lifecycle of the project.

'... good communications and the ability to motivate, lead, and enjoy working with a diverse group of people is the foundation of excellence in project management', according to Stephen Seay, an experienced project manager from Florida in the USA.

Considering this, it was decided to investigate the behavioral habits of project managers in the mining industry. Often in the mining industry, operations managers are used to managing projects because they know the environment well and are adept at managing outcomes. Once the behaviour of the project managers was identified, their habits were compared to the habits of operations managers in the same environment in order to determine which behavioural attributes distinguished project managers from operations managers in mining, if any.

Shadowmatch was used firstly to map the behavioural habits of 5 top performing operations managers within the gold and platinum mining industry into one combined profile or shadow. Secondly, the behavioural habits of 7 successful project managers within the same gold and platinum mines were mapped via Shadowmatch and also portrayed as one profile. These results were compared with one another and are presented in Fig 1.

Seven of the twenty five habits measured by Shadowmatch have shown a 10% or higher difference between the two combined profiles. Habits which had differences of less than 10% are either insignificant or will only be present when individuals experience high levels of stress.

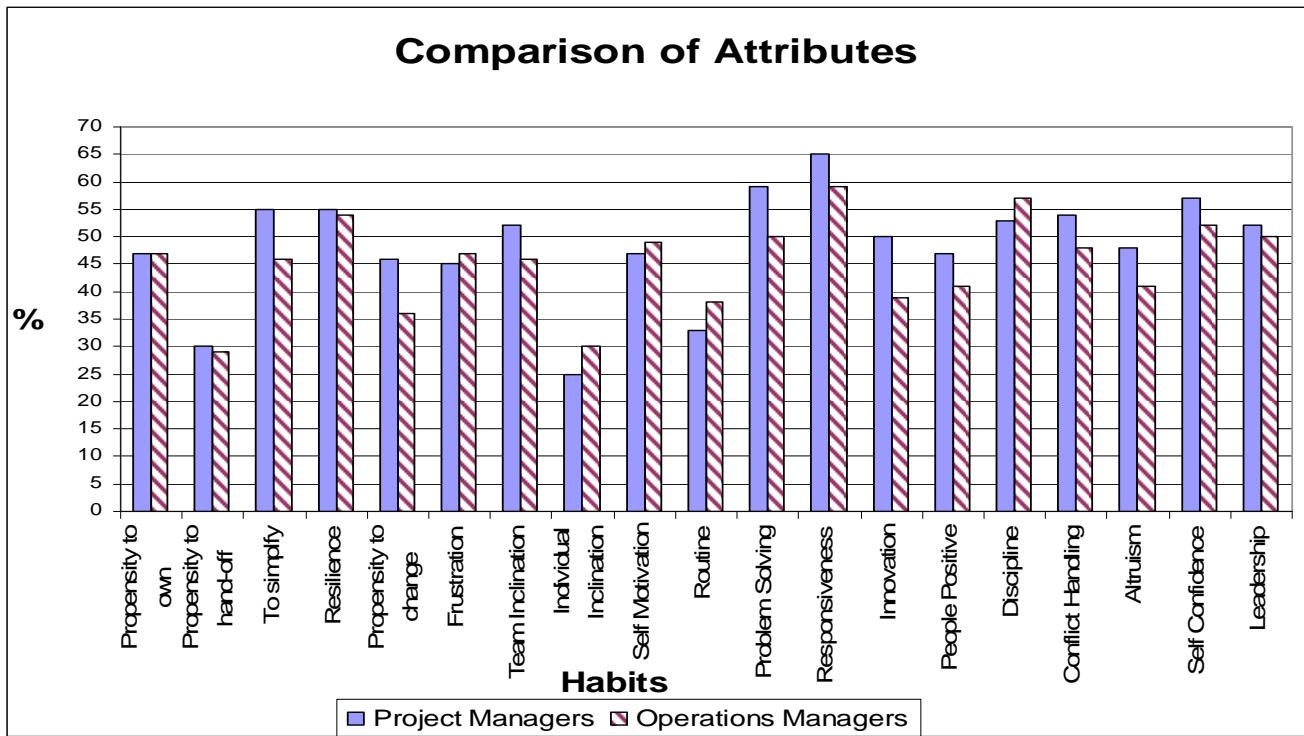


Fig 1. Comparison of Behavioural Attributes

The significant differences in the comparison between the habits of the operations and project managers lead to some conclusions in the given environment.

The Project Managers participate actively in changing situations and will probably drive towards change if necessary whereas the operations managers will be more reluctant to change. The Project Managers deal much easier with change and will probably prefer working in changing environments. There is a 28% difference between the groups in respect of their overall propensity to change.

Team & Individual inclination are pairing habits and have shown a distinct difference between the average combined profiles. The project managers have shown a 33% higher propensity towards team inclination compared to that of the operations managers. The Operations managers tend to work more on their own and prefer individual tasks to team tasks.

The group of Project managers showed a 28% higher preference towards finding new and creative ways to perform tasks or to identify new processes whereas the Operations managers in the same environment preferred to stay with the way things

were done in the past, rather than looking at innovative ways to approach tasks and processes. Finding innovative ways was often regarded as a time-waster for the operations managers.

The Project Managers had a 33% greater propensity of finding the correct solution to a problem than that of the Operations Managers. It took the Project Managers longer to resolve the conceptual problems, though. This is a critical difference and indicates that it is of more importance for the Project Managers to solve problems in their entirety even if it takes more time to do so. The Operations Managers were more time-efficient but less successful in resolving problems. The habit of successfully applying conceptual ability and the habit of simplifying are linked. Both of these attributes were more embedded habits in the behaviour of the project managers.

Altruism and Conflict Handling forms a habit pair and combine together in a single behavioural preference. The group of Project Managers displayed a 13% stronger habit in their willingness to help others without expecting anything in return. They also showed a 17% stronger habit in their ability to handle conflict between people in a constructive way as compared to the Operations Managers. When it comes to more people-intensive tasks, the project managers showed stronger developed habits in this area.

Critical Profiles

Shadowmatch creates a **critical profile** per benchmark group. The critical profile consists of the 5 strongest habits portrayed by the group from which the combined/average profile has been developed. The critical profiles of these two groups consist predominantly of the same attributes but in a different ranking order. It means that the way in which the two groups prioritise their behaviour differs (see fig2). Only one attribute between the two groups is totally different. Operations managers displayed 'Discipline' as a critical habit i.e. they are comfortable to work in a highly disciplined working environment where structure and timeframes are imperative whereas Project managers displayed 'To simplify' as a critical habit. They automatically make complicated concepts easier to understand and enjoy simplifying and resolving problems.

The scores in the critical profile of the Project Managers are higher throughout. This means that their habits are overall more strongly embedded.

Operations Managers		Project Managers	
Attributes	%	Attributes	%
Responsiveness	59	Responsiveness	65
Discipline	57	Problem solving	59
Resilience	54	Self Confidence	57
Self Confidence	52	Resilience	55
Problem solving	50	To Simplify	55

Fig 2. Critical Profiles comparison

Attitude

The two groups did not display significant differences in attitude. Both groups are predominantly participative and unaggressive in their approach towards life and work. Both of the groups become more aggressive when placed in situations where they experience high levels of stress.

What does this all imply?

There are significant differences in the behaviour of successful project managers and operations managers in the mining environment. Project managers have the habit of adapting to change, are team players and are willing to help others and handle conflict as part of their every day life. If the Operations managers were to handle project teams, the project would probably be delivered on time, according to scope and within budget, but there would be more conflict between the team members because they tend to be less adaptive to change, more individually inclined, less positive towards others and less effective in handling conflict situations.