

# **Distinguishing Leadership of Information Assurance Teams**

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## **Abstract**

Information assurance (IA) projects are essential components of the information technology industry and often fail due to budget overruns, missed deadlines, and lack of performance by the project teams. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the strategies necessary to improve IA project team performance. Lewin's situational leadership theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study. Interviews were conducted with 20 IA professionals located in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area. The data were transcribed, coded, and clustered for the identification of common patterns based on the Moustakas' modified van Kaam analysis. The major themes that emerged from the interview data included the importance of: communication and teamwork, technical knowledge, training, hiring of skilled resources, and balanced project teams. An organization-wide internal training program emerged as an overarching best practice to improve the leadership strategies within the IA sector. The study results may help improve project success and grow the IA industry by creating more jobs.

## **Problem Statement**

Over 70% of information technology projects failed due to cost and schedule overruns, poor estimation, reduced functionality, and cancellation before completion (Cecez-Kemanovic, Kautz, & Abrahall, 2014; Susser, 2012). The misinterpretation of deliverables, implementation of inadequate solutions, and lack of knowledge of the technical project at hand were some examples of the poor requirements analysis (Miller, 2014; Narayanaswamy et al., 2013). Porter, Gogus, and Yu (2011) contended that one of the reasons for the failure of technical teams stemmed from the

absence of effective leadership to encourage collaborative processes among team members. The general business problem is that the personnel structure of IT teams may often be flawed, which causes lowered project success (Bardhan, Krishnan, & Lin, 2013; Niederman & Tan, 2011). Williams and Williams (2011) noted that 72% percent of IT project failure was a result of poor technical, process, and people guidance. The specific business problem is that information technology leaders often have limited strategies to improve information technology project team performance.

### **Background of the Problem**

The typical structure of an IT security team consists of a project manager, technical lead, subject matter expert, technical writer, senior security analyst, and junior security analyst. The assigned project manager has the overall management responsibility of the project (Denning & Frailey, 2011). The project manager may not have a background in IT security and often manages projects through luck, perseverance, and force of will (Darrell et al., 2010). Miller (2013) concluded that organizations that place project managers to lead technical teams may leave room for the possibility of implementing the wrong solution. As a result, some technical projects fail to be completed on time, on budget, or to specifications due to lack of subject matter expertise (Narayanaswamy, Grover, & Henry, 2013).

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