



## Conscious Software Development Telesummit

Why Project Managers Must Learn to Lead

Speakers:



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Michael Smith: Conscious software development summit. I'm here today with Susanne Madsen. I'm very excited to learn more about leadership for project managers. There's an issue today that a lot of people have teams that they don't feel take responsibility, maybe not making their clients happy. I know I've met a few CIO's and IT leaders who don't feel their teams are quite going where they want to go. We're going to look at some interesting ways to deal with that. Let me introduce you to Susanne. She has written several books: The Project Management Coaching Workbook and The Power of Project Leadership. Hello, Susanne.

Susanne Madsen: Hello, Michael.

Michael Smith: You've been working for 17 years. I'm amazed. You look so youthful.

Susanne Madsen: I'm amazed to, to be honest. I don't know what happened.

Michael Smith: You've worked on really big projects, for things like Standard Bank, Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase. I imagine those were quite high profile, high pressure projects.

Susanne Madsen: Yes it's nice actually to have the high pressure projects sometimes because you get all the attention, which can be good if you want to move forward.

Michael Smith: Subsequent to that, you've been helping project managers and chain managers improve their leadership skills so they can take control of their projects and even get their careers to fast track?

Susanne Madsen: Yeah, that's right.

Michael Smith: I believe you do coaching, mentoring, consulting, training-

Susanne Madsen: Yes, so-

Michael Smith: -ways to help people out.

Susanne Madsen: That's right. About one and a half years ago, I decided to expand my own comfort zone, which is what I tell people to do, especially leaders. I left my job and I set up on my own as an independent coach and consultant.

Michael Smith: That's a great way to expand your comfort zone and help other people out at the same time.

Susanne Madsen: It was definitely. Yeah, I had to face a couple of fears but I'm still here and I haven't looked back since. That was a good one.

Michael Smith: I don't think I've met a leader who faced a fear and died in the mirror.

Susanne Madsen: Good point.

Michael Smith: Or at least not physically. Sometimes we think we're going to die. Perhaps you can... You mentioned management and leadership. What is the difference about management versus leadership and why do project managers need to become leaders?

Susanne Madsen: Yeah, that's a good question and the heart of what I do really because I see so many project managers being exactly that. They are managers, meaning in the traditional sense, that they're very task oriented. They focus on events and tasks and processes. It's really concerned with logic. That's all right when you're planning a project or you're planning things out, as long as you engage other people in the process.

The problem is when you use logic to engage others or to lead others, then it becomes very rational and, as a project manager, you think, "Well this person here needs to do a task for me because he gets a salary for it. He reports to me." It's logical. That's just not the best way to get something good out of people, to engage people.

That's where leadership so beautifully comes in, because leadership is not just about logic. It's not about the skills we possess or the events or processes. It's really about the behaviors. It's about the attitudes. It's about of course being more visionary, but it's much more people-oriented. We look at how can we engage people, not from a rational point of view but, I suppose people are irrational, aren't they?

Michael Smith: They often seem to be, even when they're pretending to be logical.

Susanne Madsen: That's right and we're not even aware of it ourselves. A big part of leadership is trying to look, I call it below the bonnet. What is going on? Why are people behaving the way they behave? There is so much talk also about fear of change and people not wanting change in an organization. That's again from a rational point of view.

What about what is going on for people? Why do they resist? What is it that they're fearful of? Good leaders will unearth that. They will inquire about it, whereas managers they will see it logically. They will go, "Oh they resist change" you know?

Michael Smith: Mm-hmm (affirmative). They don't discover the underlying reasons and therefore aren't able to solve it. All they can do is try and control people to accept the change without them actually accepting it?

Susanne Madsen: Yes and control is a good word because again, managers and project managers, we do want to control. When there is so much change happening in the world, things happen so quickly, and we can't actually control it all. One person cannot control it all. Again, leadership, project managers need to embrace leadership because that's how you best empower your team. You need to empower your team so that they can help you know it all.

It's not about the project manager being this glorified super person who can run with it all. It is about "we" and it is about that collaborative team. With a management mindset, you just don't get there.

Michael Smith: Does this apply further up the corporate ladder to the IT leaders and CIO's who are listening as well who may be managing project managers or other people on their project portfolio?

Susanne Madsen: Yes, very much so. As you said in the introduction, I have worked for some large corporate companies and it's unfortunate that I have to say that I saw a lot of good management, but very little leadership.

What that transpires to is that you have teams below you, who are very good at following orders, because that's a management trait, but they're not very good about putting their hand up and doing something new, something innovative, saying to people, "Why is everybody disengaged? What can we do? What can we really do to change this?" instead of just saying, "Yes, we tried before. It didn't work" and you go down that constrained way of thinking again.

Michael Smith: I think sometimes in corporate cultures, it's a bit like that Japanese quote that the hand that is raised is cut down. There's probably something we can do as leaders to help people to raise their hands without fear of them being cut off.

Susanne Madsen: Yes, and I think some of the new big tech companies are doing this really well. They are embracing different ways of doing things, different ways of leading people. That's good to see. There's more autonomy in those organizations often.

Michael Smith: What are some of the biggest mistakes you see project managers make on software projects in the work you do?

Susanne Madsen: One of them relates to what we talked about a minute ago, which is this focus of tasks over people. I think it stems from many project managers having a technical background. They come from some kind of technical background, whether it's engineering or there are many types of technical backgrounds. They've been taught to think rationally. They haven't been taught how to focus on people, how to relate, how to build trust, how to communicate.

In today's projects, that is as big a part, if not bigger, than the technical task side. That's one of the biggest mistakes is that people don't focus enough on people. That's the first mistake I would say, the classic mistake.

Michael Smith: That's not just restricted to people coming from a software background. I've seen people coming from an accounting background or a legal background who have a similar focus on the logical, who need to learn this as well.

Susanne Madsen: Yes. I think it is so interesting because in the western world, we are really schooled to be, by and large, rational and logical. You give young kids an assignment in school and you tell them to come back with an answer. If they answer that assignment outside of the box, then they don't get a mark.

The whole schooling system in the western world is actually really there to produce some say factory workers. That's where it comes from. It's compliance. It's management. It's following. School is not there to create leaders. That's why I think, as you say, irrespective of industry, we have this tendency to focus on tasks and the logic.

Michael Smith: Right and then that doesn't product great leadership, both in the project managers or CIO's but also in the team themselves. The modern company, the team members themselves, are many leaders co-leading the project.

Susanne Madsen: Yeah.

Michael Smith: What other mistakes do you see managers making these days?

Susanne Madsen: There's another big trend I see, both from the people I coach and from the organizations I work in, is this focus on the urgent over and above the important. What does that look like? People get to work and the first thing they do is to check their emails. They have their phones. They have their Blackberry's. I think Blackberry's have been phased out, aren't they?

Michael Smith: Yeah.

Susanne Madsen: They have those on them all the time and we want to be seen as being responsive and getting back to people very quickly, turning things around very quickly. Sometimes that is good but oftentimes it's at the expense of doing the assignments that are more important. Sometimes in project management, we need to get to understand our client's business better. We need to create a business case. We need to create a project definition document, whatever those big tasks are, or having difficult conversations, spending time with people.

We de-prioritize that because there is something more urgent that comes up. That is a big mistake because it prevents people from doing that which is important.

Michael Smith: I think that's a very common issue in modern society, not just in business but also in home life as well that people's attention spans are short and there's this firefighting mentality that seems to take over.

Susanne Madsen: Yeah. It's very unfortunate. It's interesting because how do people derive value? If someone leaves the office at 6:00 and they say, "Oh my God, I was so busy today. I got lots done." It somehow seems to be a way that they derive value. They think that was good, but do they look at the outputs of that, all those activities? What was the real value? Yes, you were busy, but with what?

Michael Smith: I think that's a great question. Any other mistakes that you've seen?

Susanne Madsen: Yes. The third one I think we should mention is that many project managers, and maybe just managers in general, they seem to think that they have to know it all and oftentimes do it all by themselves. In one of the large organizations I worked, the most predominant leadership style was something they called pace-setting. A pace setter is actually someone who sets the standard, someone who does it themselves and then they expect other people to follow.

Michael Smith: They're working hard, appearing busy all the time, always checking their email.

Susanne Madsen: Yes, and knowing the answers.

Michael Smith: And knowing all the answers. Well it's great to have lots of knowledge but that doesn't leave any room for any new learning to occur.

Susanne Madsen: That's right. Plus, it doesn't leave any room for other people to really step in. Where is the empowerment of other people? If you're a manager who believes you have to know it all yourself and set the pace, you're really oftentimes discarding, not 100 percent but to a large extent, the rest of the organization or the team or whatever it is. You're saying, "I know best."

Michael Smith: Having mentioned these different issues with managing versus leading, what can project managers and other IT leaders do to get better results, both for themselves and their organization and their clients?

Susanne Madsen: Yes, all of these issues can be tackled one-by-one in their different ways. Really it's all about being aware of how you come across. It's being aware of where you put your attention. Where do I put my focus? Do I focus short-term? Do I focus on getting things done today or do I have a focus on people? Do people in my team thrive? What makes them tick? Why are they resistant or what makes each person motivated?

It's also a question of are you focusing on your client's longer term objectives? Are you in this game to add value or are you just in this game to tick boxes? It's really about awareness at so many different levels about what your leadership role adds and how you can empower others in the process to help you on that quest.

Michael Smith: Yeah I think that comes back to one of the things that I've been saying a lot. It's the things we don't know that we don't know that often are the most difficult to address because we're not even aware of them. Becoming aware that there's value in addressing people and trust and relationships and understanding the root causes behind issues so that we can solve them fundamentally, that's something a leader can do.

Susanne Madsen: It's great to see more coaching going on in organizations because I think the biggest role of a coach is to ask those awareness expanding questions, if you like. Are you aware as a leader how you come across? Are you aware of whatever it is and to bring that attention and awareness and consciousness to the leader.

Michael Smith: I think that's a great thing. I would also add not only is it good to have a coach yourself as a leader, but also be aware you're probably providing a coaching role to your team.

Susanne Madsen: Yes.



Michael Smith: To help them overcome issues they have or to become aware of talents they have that they may not be using.

Susanne Madsen: Yes, now sometimes that is misunderstood though. I see that. Sometimes managers and leaders in organizations are expected to also coach, as you're rightly saying. They haven't always received the right training. They sometimes misunderstand coaching for mentoring, supervising, telling people what to do, if that makes sense. Instead of helping their team find their own answers, they provide the answers. There's a balancing act there.

Michael Smith: The difference being that if you tell someone the answers, they don't really learn. It's just like if you catch the fish for someone else versus teach them how to fish.

Susanne Madsen: Yeah, I think that's a good analogy. Sometimes it is very appropriate to tell people what to do, but not as a consistent leadership method.

Michael Smith: Yeah. I know in a lot of organizations there's a focus on short-term results. What can we do to deliver better projects, focusing on longer term strategic measures?

Susanne Madsen: It's interesting you mention that because we have probably all been in organizations where we get in to deliver a project because those who were there before us did a bad job. Right? If we're talking software, we have to replace a system which was only built two years ago because it never fulfilled the vision or never did what it was supposed to do. It was badly implemented, etcetera, etcetera. That I think is a result of that short-term thinking and of managers wanting short-term results. Then they move on.

People leave an organization and they don't have to face up to the consequences. What project managers can do as they step up and become project leaders and help here is to have that longer term focus of value. What is it that adds value for my customer in three, five years time? Yes, in the short term, we need to deliver a system which has a number of attributes and where certain requirements have been fulfilled.

What does that system enable users to do? What does that system enable the business to do? Do they get better, more turnover as a result? Do they save costs? What are the business benefits? A great way that we can measure this is not from the good old time/cost/quality, but it is by introducing some other dimensions that I call more strategic dimensions,



which are measures such as effective relevance and sustainability and effect.

How do we measure effect of a project? What is the effect of this project on the customer's or the organization's strategic objectives? It's no good to just deliver an IT system, let's say. What is the effect of that system on the organization's objectives let's say in five years' time?

Michael Smith: It's hard enough to deliver software that's delivered on time, on schedule, and is bug-free. It's pointless to do that if it's not delivering business results and fitting in with the strategy of where the whole organization is going.

Susanne Madsen: That's right. I have been, as I'm sure many of the listeners have been, in situations where we were building something and it was never used. It was never implemented because needs and wants were confused.

The team were implementing what they thought the customer wanted or what they thought the customer needed. It was what they wanted but it was not the real needs. That happens when the team and the project manager doesn't understand what it is that adds value, what the customer really actually needs, what it is that adds value to them.

Michael Smith: I think this also applies every more so if you're a CIO looking at the portfolio of all the software projects that have been completed or are under progress and figuring out which of these are we going to keep? Where does this align with the strategy the organization has?

Susanne Madsen: Yeah, definitely.

Michael Smith: That's also a way, I know one of the complaints that I sometimes hear from IT leaders is they're not taken seriously at the C level meetings. I think part of that is addressed by saying, "Okay how does IT support the strategy of the company? How are we providing fundamentally much greater value to the business in one way or another?"

Susanne Madsen: Yeah and I think the best thing people can ask themselves, no matter where they are in the organization, is what value do I add? What value does my project add? Exactly to that point, we have to become value driven. They're the people who thrive. People who have an entrepreneurial attitude within the company.

That's really where we want to get to and for managers to ask themselves, "Would I put my own money into this project? Would I invest

my own money into it?" Because then you get the real answer of, "Oh god no, not with this management" or "No, because it's not going to deliver benefit." What can you do to change that then?

Michael Smith: Right. If we're going to do this, it seems to me that we're going to need to get the people that work in our teams or the stakeholders we work with to step up their game as well so we can deliver that value. How do we do that?

Susanne Madsen: Yes, very much so because it is a team effort. If we want to engage everybody, as you're saying, we have to start understanding human behavior better, not just relying on that logic that a manager will do. That's really about taking time out to focus on the individual person in the team, to understand what makes each person tick. It sounds very simple. It is actually quite simple.

It's through conversation that the manager or leader can get to understand their team members and understand what does motivate everybody or each person. I often ask people to imagine that everyone on their team were volunteers and to ask, "If everybody were volunteers, what would make them turn up for work if they didn't get a salary for it?"

Michael Smith: I think that's a great question and I've worked on non-profit Boards and subcommittees and everyone there was a volunteer and trying to persuade people to do things became a totally different exercise.

Susanne Madsen: Yes, because then you rely on influence, on how visionary you are or how you mobilize, motivate people. Then it's not just about paying people. It's a completely different ballgame.

Michael Smith: What other things would help in building up our teams?

Susanne Madsen: Connecting with the individual is extremely important but there are many other things we can do. Asking questions. In the research for my new book, I came across some great leaders who are talking about how you can engage your team with questions and the importance of questions, like "What if?" We've always been taught that what and how are great questions. What can we do?

But what if questions are even better because when you ask your team, "What if we could deliver this cheaper and quicker? What if we could be the best team every? What if we could win this award?" Whatever, whatever, etcetera. It really opens up creative thinking and then the

leader needs to take a step back and actually let the team fill in the blanks.

Michael Smith: That sounds frightening.

Susanne Madsen: That's why people don't do it. If you constantly tell people again what to do, you leave no space for them to step up. There needs to be a vacuum. There needs to be an empty space for them to step up.

Michael Smith: You might need to ask them how they're going to do it and then be quiet and let them maybe struggle a bit and grow and learn?

Susanne Madsen: That's right. That is actually so hard for many reasons. One of them is that we want quick results but it is a more sustainable way to actually let people try and make their own mistakes. Now this shouldn't be confused with the manager completely stepping away. Sometimes when we delegate or want our team to step up, we say, "Okay the ball is in your court. I'm waiting for action." Then the manager or the leader will become invisible. That's not right either.

There has to be this constant coaching and support when people need it but letting them find their own feet. It's actually, it's not that easy, but we can't try, can't we?

Michael Smith: We're all here to learn I think.

Susanne Madsen: Exactly.

Michael Smith: Do you have to know how to do this all yourself or?

Susanne Madsen: Sorry, what do you mean by that question?

Michael Smith: In being able to delegate successfully, is that something we have to totally understand this and what the team is going to do and we know it all ourselves or is this a co-creation that we do with the team?

Susanne Madsen: Yes, I mean delegation is one of the main parts and absolutely essential for managers to step up and become leaders. In doing so, in delegating it, the best way to delegate actually is the co-creation. It's not just about me offloading stuff to my team or people below me. One of the best ways to delegate is to create a stretch for the person we delegate to. You can't do that if you don't understand the person you're delegating to.

What would really be motivating for someone else, you sitting here with 10 customer accounts, if you delegated 2 of those customer accounts to someone on your team, would that really motivate them? Who would that motivate? Which part could you ask them to do that would create a stretch for them? Co-creation, absolutely. Ask people. What would you love to do?

Michael Smith: Understand what are their strengths and what are they looking to grow in their life?

Susanne Madsen: Absolutely. Many companies now have development plans. They have year-end reviews. Oftentimes it becomes very mechanical. It's tick boxing. It's something we have to do. That's a shame. It really has to be about the individual, the individual manager understanding people on his or her team. What is it that motivates an individual? How can they step up? What are they looking to gain in their careers? Where do they want to be?

Do they ultimately want my job and, if so, how can you help put that transition in place because we all have to have a succession plan anyway.

Michael Smith: That sounds like that's going to take a little courage on the leader's part, point of view.

Susanne Madsen: Leadership is very much about courage. It's courage to empower others and, in that sense, sometimes diminishing yourself, which is a good thing. It's being humble. It is also courage to put your hand up and say when there is something you do not agree with. Putting your hand up and saying, "We are going in the wrong direction." That is leadership. That takes courage but I'm a firm believer that we do not need more followers. We have a lot of followers. We need leaders.

Michael Smith: I think that's a very true thing these days. There's so many things that organizations need to do. Trying to do it all top down and controlled just won't get it all done.

Susanne Madsen: Yes. It will get some of it done to following instructions but is it in the right ways motivating people in the right way? Is it using people's skills? No, it's not. There are so many surveys that are being done in large organizations saying that people feel sometimes that only 40 percent of their skills are being used and their capacity.

Michael Smith: That's an enormous amount of resources. I think the assets of many organizations are their staff and their skills. That's saying it's almost like if they were a factory that 60 percent of their machines are not being used.

Susanne Madsen: Yes.

Michael Smith: They've invested in them. They've spent millions of dollars on the staffing and training and yet they're not getting what they could get.

Susanne Madsen: It's very sad and you know it's not about loading people with more work, because there is more work than people can do. It is about loading them with work that they find fulfilling and interesting. That's the challenge. That's the real challenge.

Michael Smith: If one of the people listening wanted to train their managers to become strong leaders, what would you recommend?

Susanne Madsen: I would recommend a mix of things. I would recommend a mix of training, awareness building leadership training, and one-on-one coaching. Coaching is very, very powerful as a combination. Recently, I've thought about a new concept. Let's see what you think of it. We talk about peer programming. Why don't we talk about peer management?

Michael Smith: Or peer leading?

Susanne Madsen: Peer leading. Many, many years ago, I read about a large Danish pharmaceutical company. I'm Danish, by the way. The CEO, in fact there were two female CEO's. It was so striking. It was about 10 years ago and they had that position for a long time and it worked. It worked really well for them. We just don't see it very often. Why don't we see it on projects? Why don't we see even maybe a slightly different model, why don't we see more senior project managers having junior project managers work with them?

That's the best way to learn is in the experience and from someone experienced. Combining that with coaching and leadership training is very powerful.

Michael Smith: I think that's a brilliant idea, Susanne. The advantage in peer programming is when one person is doing the task, the other person can look for things that have been missed or forgotten or can help learn or maybe both people are learning. I think the same can be true in a leadership role. If people are sharing that, there's an opportunity to learn. The other thing, a lot of agile development is around co-leading

and the group coming up with things together. I'm wondering if there's an opportunity there to apply that into more leadership and managing and planning?

Susanne Madsen: Maybe it's the next big thing.

Michael Smith: I know you've written a few books. Can you tell us a little bit about those?

Susanne Madsen: Yeah. I wrote the first book, The Project Management Coaching Workbook, probably two and a half, three years ago now. It really came from my own big awakening because I had been managing some large programs for a number of years. I was making many of the mistakes I've been sharing here today. I was micromanaging. I believed I had to know it all. I believed I had to be this super person telling people what to do.

I had this big awakening where I went on a leadership course and received some one-on-one coaching. Out of that came my own interest in coaching and leadership and out came my first book, which is really a self-coaching framework for project managers. That was my first one.

The second one is The Power of Project Leadership, which is a book that is currently being printed and will be out on the 3rd of January 2015 I'm being told. It can, thankfully, already be pre-ordered. It's received really great reviews. I'm very thankful for that. It's a book that exclusively focuses on how project managers can transform into leaders.

Michael Smith: That sounds exciting. If anyone listening is interested in improving in this area of leadership, what would you, I know we have a free gift in the show notes on your site. Can you tell people about that a bit?

Susanne Madsen: Yeah. Absolutely. It's all happening from my website, which is my name, [susannemadsen.com](http://susannemadsen.com). I'll just spell that. It's s-u-s-a-n-n-e-m-a-d-s-e-n.com. On that website, I have a resources page. From there, people can register to get free access to all the resources I have used personally in my career, up until this time. Lots of templates but there's also links to some of the best project management forums out there and there are webinars and podcasts that I have participated in.

My whole website is full of resources and it's possible to purchase my books from there. All the stuff I've done I've really put up there. That's a good place to start definitely.

Michael Smith: Wow, that sounds a really great gift to give people who want to take this further. I really appreciate you sharing that, Susanne.

Susanne Madsen: Yeah. I've had 2,000 people so far in the last year I think I've had it up who have registered to get access. Every two, three months, I put a new resource out there and I will email people.

Michael Smith: Fabulous. Great talking with you today and thanks so much for joining me.

Susanne Madsen: You're welcome. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

### **Susanne Madsen Bio:**

Susanne Madsen is an internationally recognized project leadership coach, trainer and consultant. She is the author of *The Project Management Coaching Workbook* and *The Power of Project Leadership* (Jan 2015). Prior to setting up her own business, she worked for 17 years in the corporate sector managing and rolling out large technology programs of up to \$30 million for organizations such as Standard Bank, Citigroup and JPMorgan Chase.

Susanne specializes in helping project and change managers improve their leadership skills so that they can gain control of their projects and fast-track their career. She does this through a combination of training, coaching, mentoring and consulting. She is a PRINCE2 and MSP Practitioner and a qualified Corporate and Executive coach. She is also a Member of the Association for Project Management (APM).

### **Topic and Questions:**

#### Why Project Managers Must Learn to Lead

In today's 'more for less' culture, the expectations of project management and delivery are no longer limited to budgets, schedules and quality. For projects to make an impact and add lasting value to the organization, project managers must be able to strategize, innovate, motivate, empower and collaborate – in other words, project managers must learn how to lead. This interview with Susanne Madsen will reveal how project managers can begin to shift their managerial and task-orientated mindset into one of inspiration, motivation and collaboration.

1. You write, teach and blog about the differences between management and leadership and how project managers need to become leaders. Can you explain what the differences are between management and leadership?
2. What are some of the biggest mistakes project managers make?
3. What can project managers do to get better results for themselves and their organisations (clients)?



4. Some organisations are focused on short-term results and measure benefit in terms of time, cost and quality (tactical measures). In which ways can organisations better deliver projects by focusing on longer term, strategic measures?
5. How can project managers better leverage people? (create a high performing team / better relate to stakeholders?)
6. What are some of the most effective ways for organisations to train their PMs to become stronger leaders?
7. Tell a bit about what your upcoming book. When is it out and where can people get hold of it?

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