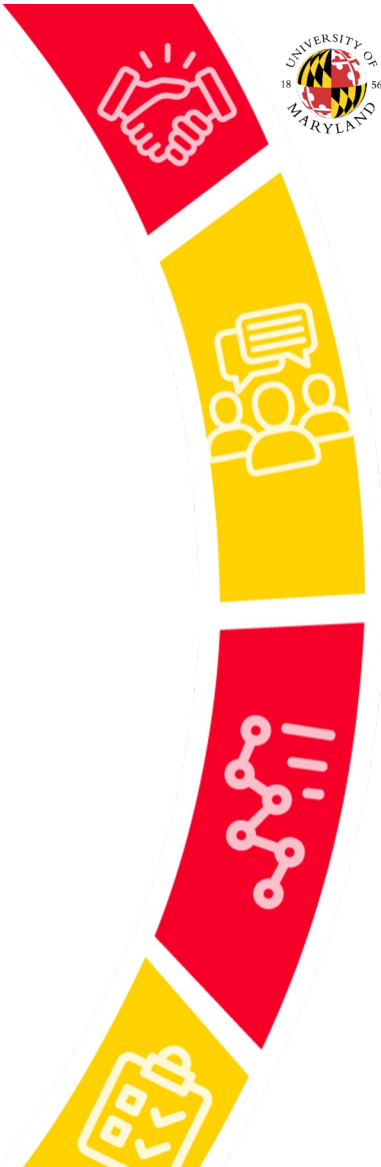




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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
2026 PROJECT MANAGEMENT SYMPOSIUM

A decorative curved banner on the left side of the slide, composed of five segments in red and yellow. The segments contain white icons: a handshake, a group of people with speech bubbles, a network diagram, a bar chart, and a clipboard with a checklist.

Lead Bigger: ***A Project Manager's Guide to Strategic Leadership***

Kim Hobson

Group Leader

UT-Battelle/Oak Ridge National Laboratory

PMSYMPOSIUM.UMD.EDU



Key Takeaways

1. Learn how to shift from tactical project execution to strategic thinking and influence
2. Discover practical strategies for leading without formal authority
3. Identify actionable steps to grow your leadership presence and career impact



Why Now?



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How it Started



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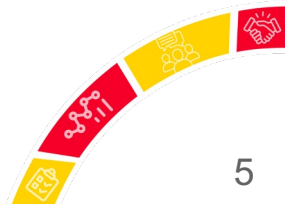
From Locks to Leadership:

The Power of the Right Tools



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My Professional Journey



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Phase 1: Project Management Excellence



NNSA G2 Project
2010 PMI Distinguished Project Award



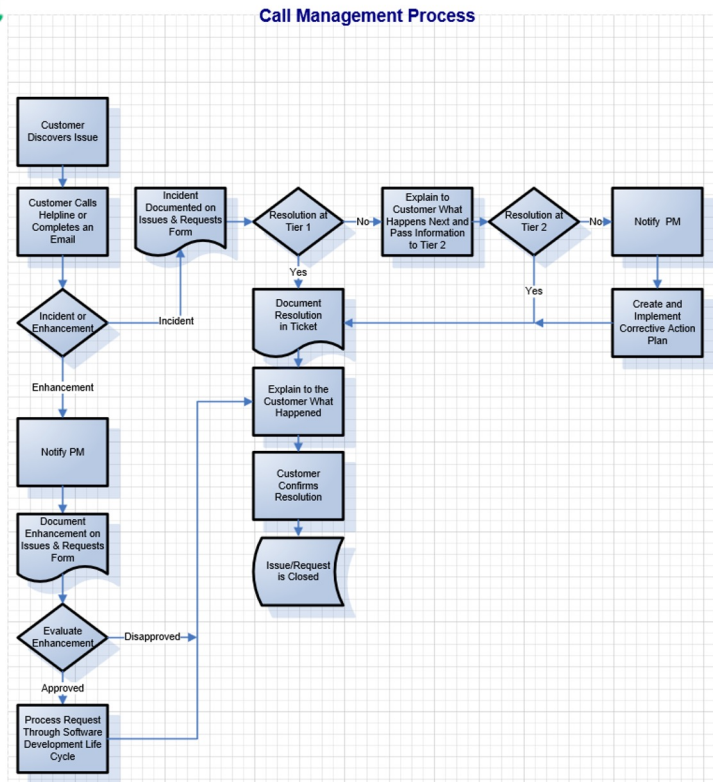
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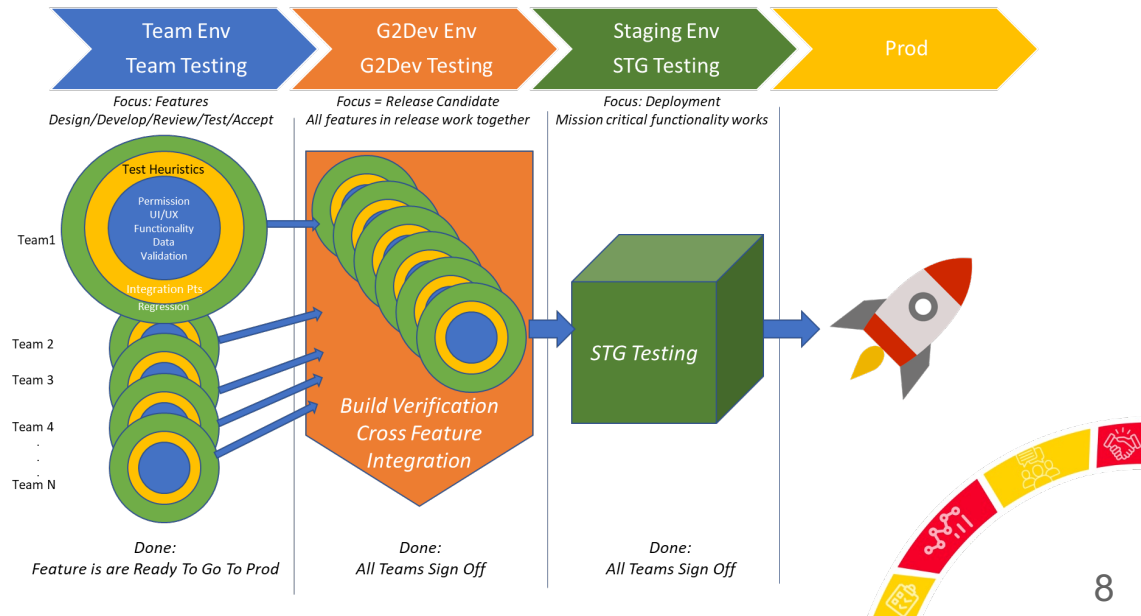




Phase 2: Process Integration & Governance



Testing by Environment



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Phase 3: Advisor & Organizational Influence



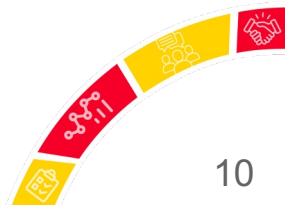
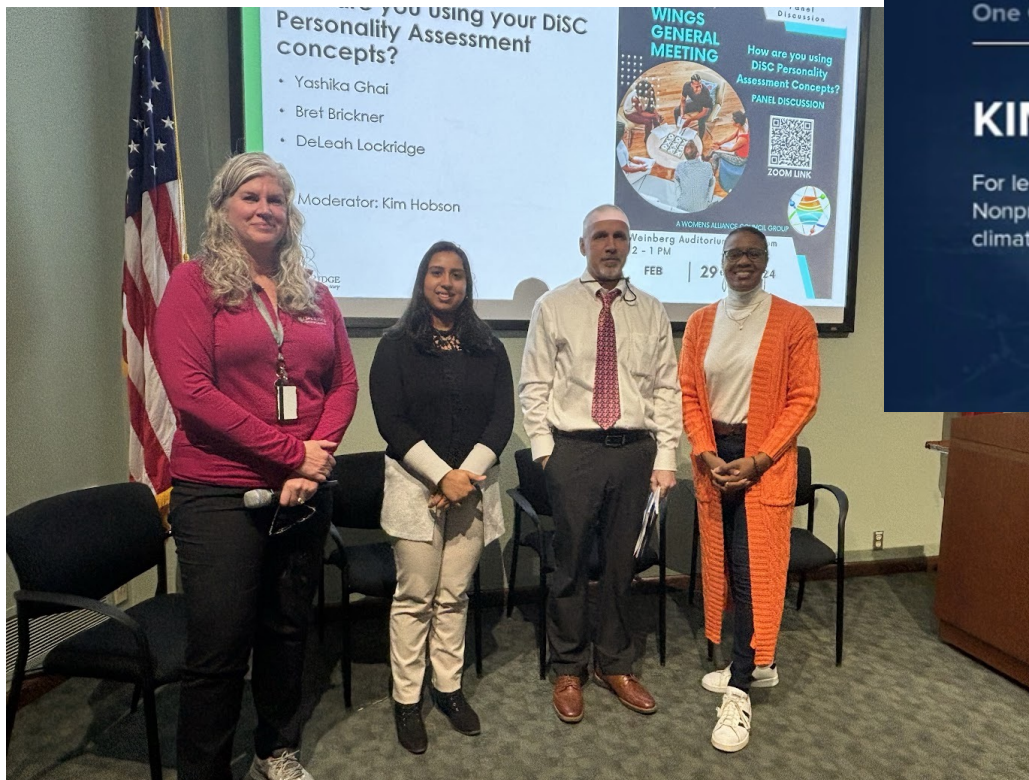
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Phase 4: Strategic Leadership



5 Strategic Shifts from the Journey



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Strategic Shift Number 1

Lesson: Scope Creep Is Like a Cat

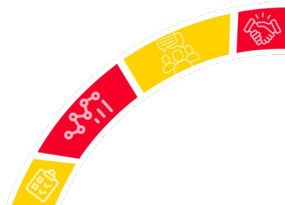


PM Reality: If you don't keep the door closed, it sneaks in and makes itself at home.



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Strategic Shift Number 1

Lesson: Scope Creep Is Like a Cat



PM Reality: If you don't keep the door closed, it sneaks in and makes itself at home.

Strategic Shift: I moved from fighting scope creep one change request at a time to aligning scope with enterprise strategy, so the “cat” never enters the house.



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Strategic Shift Number 2

Lesson: Stakeholders Are People Too

PM Reality: One wants AI magic, one wants a plug-in, and I'm expected to make it work with vintage tech.



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Strategic Shift Number 2

Lesson: Stakeholders Are People Too

PM Reality: One wants AI magic, one wants a plug-in, and I'm expected to make it work with vintage tech.

Strategic Shift: I evolved from managing expectations to building governance boards and engagement frameworks that give stakeholders influence without chaos.



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Strategic Shift Number 3

Lesson: Risk Management Is Like Sunscreen



PM Reality: Apply early and often, or you'll get burned.



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Strategic Shift Number 3

Lesson: Risk Management Is Like Sunscreen



PM Reality: Apply early and often, or you'll get burned.

Strategic Shift: I went from reactive risk mitigation to embedding risk thinking into organizational roadmaps and processes.



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Strategic Shift Number 4

Lesson: Meetings Without Agendas Are Stand-Up Comedy

PM Reality: Everyone's improvising and nobody's laughing.



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Strategic Shift Number 4

Lesson: Meetings Without Agendas Are Stand-Up Comedy

PM Reality: Everyone's improvising and nobody's laughing.

Strategic Shift: I evolved from running project meetings to facilitating executive-level sessions focused on strategic objectives and cultural alignment.



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Strategic Shift Number 5

Lesson: Documentation Is Your Insurance Policy

PM Reality: If it's not written down, it didn't happen.



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Strategic Shift Number 5

Lesson: Documentation Is Your Insurance Policy

PM Reality: If it's not written down, it didn't happen.

Strategic Shift: I went from writing project plans to authoring governance frameworks, operational roadmaps, and strategic staffing plans that influence enterprise direction.



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**Leading Bigger isn't about
doing more**



**it's about expanding
how you
think, influence, and impact**



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Leading Bigger: The Catalysts



Leading Bigger: The Catalysts



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Elevate Your Thinking

Build Influence

Evolve Your Leadership



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Elevate Your Thinking

shift from tactical project execution to strategic thinking and influence



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Tactical	Strategic
Focus on meeting deadlines and budgets for individual projects.	Understand the organization's long-term goals and ensure projects contribute to those objectives.
Communicate with stakeholders about project status and risks.	Engage stakeholders to understand their business priorities and influence decision-making.
Report on what happened (e.g., tasks, budget, milestones).	Analyze trends to predict future challenges and opportunities.
Manage one project in isolation.	Recommend adjustments across the portfolio to optimize resource allocation and maximize ROI.
Execute tasks as directed.	Share insights on industry trends, emerging technologies, and process improvements.

Elevate Your Thinking

shift from tactical project execution to strategic thinking and influence



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Strategic	How?
Understand the organization's long-term goals and ensure projects contribute to those objectives.	Regularly review the organization's strategic plan and map project deliverables to business outcomes.
Engage stakeholders to understand their business priorities and influence decision-making.	Schedule strategic conversations with stakeholders/executives to discuss how projects support their objectives, not just progress updates.
Analyze trends to predict future challenges and opportunities.	Share information that shows impacts of project performance.
Recommend adjustments across the portfolio to optimize resource allocation and maximize ROI.	Participate in portfolio review meetings and suggest reprioritization based on strategic value.
Share insights on industry trends, emerging technologies, and process improvements.	Publish internal blogs, lead lunch-and-learn sessions, or present at leadership meetings to position yourself as a strategic advisor.

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Build Influence

create structures where collaboration thrives and decisions stick



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Tactical	Strategic
Become a connector across departments, enabling knowledge flow and breaking down silos.	Implement structured governance so roles and authority are clear.
Send status updates and hold routine check-ins.	Design communication structures that improve transparency and accelerate decision-making across the organization.
Manage team morale reactively when issues arise.	Shape a culture where innovation and constructive dissent thrive, influencing organizational norms.
Capture lessons learned at project closeout.	Institutionalize continuous learning and knowledge reuse across projects and portfolios.
Act as the bottleneck for approvals and operational decisions.	Delegate authority within clear boundaries, enabling faster execution and building trust.

Build Influence

create structures where collaboration thrives and decisions stick



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Strategic	How?
Implement structured governance so roles and authority are clear.	Form cross-functional working groups or communities of practice to share insights and solve problems collectively.
Design communication structures that improve transparency and accelerate decision-making across the organization.	Implement collaboration platforms (Teams, Slack) with clear norms for updates, decisions, and feedback loops.
Shape a culture where innovation and constructive dissent thrive, influencing organizational norms.	Introduce “safe-to-fail” brainstorming sessions and actively recognize contributions from all levels.
Institutionalize continuous learning and knowledge reuse across projects and portfolios.	Develop a centralized repository for best practices and encourage teams to contribute insights regularly.
Delegate authority within clear boundaries, enabling faster execution and building trust.	Define decision rights and empower teams to act without waiting for top-down approval.

Evolve Your Leadership

transform yourself, transform others



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Tactical	Strategic
Focus on assigning tasks and tracking completion.	Inspire teams by connecting their work to a bigger purpose.
Jump in to fix issues yourself.	Enable teams to solve problems independently and grow their capabilities.
Share updates on timelines and budgets.	Tell the story of progress, impact, and value delivered.
Enforce compliance with processes and deadlines.	Build trust and influence decisions through relationships and credibility.
Focus solely on project outputs.	Use projects as a platform to grow leadership and skills in others.

Evolve Your Leadership

transform yourself, transform others



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Strategic	How?
Inspire teams by connecting their work to a bigger purpose.	Regularly communicate how project outcomes align with organizational goals and customer impact.
Enable teams to solve problems independently and grow their capabilities.	Coach team members through challenges instead of providing answers; create space for experimentation.
Tell the story of progress, impact, and value delivered.	Frame updates around business outcomes and lessons learned, not just metrics.
Build trust and influence decisions through relationships and credibility.	Invest time in stakeholder engagement, listening to priorities, and aligning project goals with theirs.
Use projects as a platform to grow leadership and skills in others.	Delegate stretch assignments, mentor team members, and celebrate learning as much as delivery.

Leading Bigger: The Catalysts



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Elevate Your Thinking

Build Influence

Evolve Your Leadership



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10 Actions That Helped Me **Lead Bigger**

1. **Align projects with organizational strategy**
2. **Build relationships beyond the project**
3. **Mentor and be an advocate**
4. **Use portfolio-level thinking**
5. **Build cross-functional collaboration networks**
6. **Develop influence through thought leadership**
7. **Foster psychological safety**
8. **Empower teams with decision autonomy**
9. **Move from problem-solving to empowering**
10. **Transition from status reporting to storytelling**

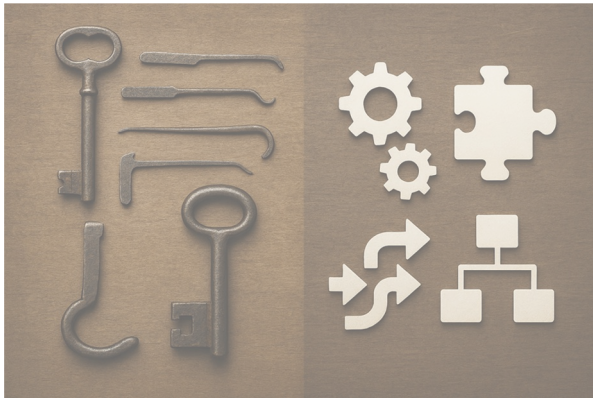


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5 Moves to Start **Leading Bigger**



1. **Start mapping your project to a strategic goal**
2. **Identify one executive sponsor to build a relationship with**
3. **Shift one weekly meeting from status to value discussion**
4. **Find a small win outside your direct responsibility**
5. **Document insights that connect your work to enterprise outcomes**



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Clues That You're **Leading Bigger**

You're invited
earlier into
conversations

Stakeholders seek
your input
proactively

Your influence
extends beyond
your project

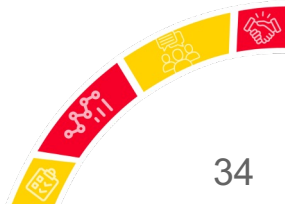
You're asked to
facilitate high-level
discussions

Your
recommendations
drive
organizational
decisions



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Lead Bigger.

***Be the leader who
shapes what matters***





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Questions & Evaluation

Evaluate Session:



Contact Information:

Kim Hobson

hobsonkk@ornl.gov

www.linkedin.com/in/kim-hobson-87598530

