

*A series of short articles on*

***The Role of Academic Institutions in Educating and Training Project Managers<sup>1</sup>***

*Article 3 of 6*

**The Musicality of Project Management: Transparent Leadership and Sustainable Project Management**

By **Helgi Thor Ingason**  
and  
**Haukur Ingi Jonasson**

There are many ways to approach professional project management. One way is to look at it from the perspective of transparent leadership and sustainable project management, and to see the needed competences as a musicality. This we do in a two semester diploma program that we created and have developed in our consulting company Nordica Consulting Group ehf. The origin of the program can be traced back to year 2002 when we sat down to discuss the content of PMBOK and IPMA ICB, possible future trends in project management, and to explore what creative insight we might have to offer to the field of project management from our own training and education.

This turned out to be a very interesting discussion. We knew from PMBOK and IPMA ICB that for projects to succeed project leaders need to master a number of different competences. Our diverse backgrounds and shared practical vision also made it clear that to excel, project leaders might want to master things that are only—if mentioned at all—slightly touched upon in the two standards.

Helgi Thor with his background from mechanical- and industrial engineering—who had been focusing on the energy intensive industry—had a keen eye on the technical aspect of project management. Haukur Ingi with a strong background in theology, psychology and philosophy—who had been working as hospital chaplain and psychoanalyst in New York City—had a keen eye on the human and cultural aspects of project leadership. Once we came back from pursuing our PhD education we decided to see what value it might have to bring together our different backgrounds and perspectives, and the field of project management seemed a perfect area for collaboration.

Our different backgrounds might have indicated that we were an "unlikely couple" from the outset. However, we had known each other since we had been singing in a choir side-to-side many of the masterpieces by Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Verdi on stage—

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<sup>1</sup>This series of articles is by Professors Helgi Thor Ingason and Haukur Ingi Jonasson at Reykjavik University in Iceland. Active researchers and educators in the field of project management for many years, they are the authors of *Project Ethics* published by Gower (UK) in 2013. See their author profiles at the end of this article.

and through endless debates on all kinds of topics. On top of this we are both very practical guys who love to teach and counsel people, teams and organizations. We both saw our mission as educators and we wanted to “do the right things” and “doing the right things right” and encourage other people—especially people who played professional roles—to do the same.

We also called on our friend and mentor, Tryggvi Sigurbjarnarson, a senior project manager and a man who basically introduced project management as a professional discipline in Iceland. The three of us drafted a study program on undergraduate level, focusing on what seemed to be important aspects of contemporary project management, a mixture of practical tools and techniques of interest for anyone wanting to take on a project leadership role.

We knew that project management had conventionally been primarily defined as a technical discipline, but our conversations revealed a need for an increased emphasis on intra-personal and inter-personal competences in the training of future project leaders. Project management was in our mind becoming a venue—not only for planning, organizing and execution—but also a fertile ground for human growth and development. Project management was an undertaking that allowed for maturation on individual, team, organizational and social levels—and this we all found to be exceedingly exciting. Based on this we created a coherent two semester program that was introduced to the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Iceland. The visionaries at the centre accepted the program and the first students began in January 2003.

The structure of the program has been modified and changed somewhat over the years but the basic message has remained the same: practical application of methods that the students can apply at once both in their private and professional lives. The demand for the program has been steady (over 700 people have graduated in Iceland) and even during the massive financial crisis in Iceland in 2008 the demand for the program tripled.

Today the structure of the Transparent Leadership and Sustainable Project Management program is such that it consists of four courses, each course designed in line with general references for European 6 ECTS courses on undergraduate level. We have written four textbooks, one for each course, that will soon be published by Gower/Ashgate in the UK.

The course *Transparent Leadership and Self-reflection* focuses on the individual project leader and the individual project team member. It is an intra-personal journey that is based on the assumption that for a project leader to manage others s/he must have a rather high level of self-awareness.

The course *Creating a Culture of Project Communication* lays out all the basics of group dynamics, is practically laid out and put in context with project management. On top of that the course is a laboratory training in interpersonal communication and students

get training in facilitating team discussions, dealing with problems in teams, miscommunication and disagreements.

The course on *Strategic management: Designing the Future* focuses on strategic planning and the strategy in a project context. The fact is that many projects are defined through strategic planning, but the execution of strategy has for long been a weak spot in many organizations. The course focuses on the organisation and the strategic planning process and students are trained in how to think strategically and develop a strategic plan.

The course *Project Management: Implementing Ideas* is a traditional project management course based on the IPMA ICB and traditional approach to project planning, however, with a strong emphasis on analysing the environment, defining the scope and objectives, and developing a holistic project management plan time, cost, information and communication.

Demands have always exceeded our supply for available seats. We have thus had the luxury problem of choosing from many applicants. Our criteria for this choice has always been to create balanced groups, equal gender ratio, diverse educational and professional backgrounds, senior professionals and young people wishing to strengthen their positions in the job market, etc.

The student groups are to simulate real life, where one must be ready to work with, lead, or be led by, others that might think differently and have different backgrounds and working styles. This is a powerful educational tool, and time after time we have seen extensive transformations in the perceptions and attitudes of our students—new mental doors are opened with the appropriate shift in attitudes and behaviour.

Music is not a far-fetched analogy when talking about project management. Managing a project team is a good lesson in group dynamics; a concerted effort of performing individuals in a group—just like rehearsing, for instance, the B minor mass by J. S. Bach. In the beginning things might seem difficult—almost painful at times—but if endurance, tolerance, positive thinking, good organisation and true passion for the work persist, wonders start to happen. Good project experience can—just like a good concert—create a magnificent experience for all involved. The individual gains a lot from participating in such an undertaking; increased awareness, self-motivation and understanding of his own strengths and weaknesses, and how to contribute to the whole. We see that our students in the Sustainable Leadership and Transparent Project Management Program go through an experience of something similar.

Based on this, we can state our vision for diploma programmes in project management: project management education should not only be a shallow training in project management tools, it should be seen as an in depth laboratory encounter with something that is exceedingly meaningful. Project management is, in final analysis, the vehicle to make the world a more accommodating place.

## About the Authors



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**Helgi Thor Ingason** (b. 1965) holds a PhD in process metallurgy from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), MSc in mechanical and industrial engineering from the University of Iceland and a Stanford Advanced Project Management Certification from Stanford University. He is an IPMA Certified Senior Project Manager (B level).

Dr. Ingason is an associate professor at Reykjavik University. He is the head of the MPM - Master of Project Management - program at the university. The research fields of Dr. Ingason range from quality- and project management to system dynamics and renewable energy, production, transport and utilization, changes in the energy infrastructure and energy carriers of the future.

Dr. Ingason has reported on his research at conferences and in several reviewed conference and journal papers. He is the co-author of 6 books in the Icelandic language on project management, strategic planning, product development and quality management. He is also a co-author (with Dr Haukur Ingi Jonasson) of the book *Project Ethics*, published by Gower in January 2013.

Dr. Ingason was interim CEO of Orkuveita Reykjavíkur (Reykjavik Energy) from 2010 to 2011. A co-founder of Nordica Consulting Group, Dr. Ingason is a management consultant and a recognized speaker. In his spare time he plays piano and accordion with Icelandic jazz and world music ensembles. More information on Dr. Ingason can be found on [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu). Information about the MPM program at the University of Reykjavik can be found at <http://en.ru.is/mpm/why-mpm/>. Dr. Ingason can be contacted at [helgithor@ru.is](mailto:helgithor@ru.is).



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He is also a psychoanalyst in private practice and a management consultant at Nordic Consulting Group ehf. As a consultant, his clients have included energy companies, banks, hospitals, the government and other public and private organizations. Dr. Jonasson is also a mountain climber and a member of the Reykjavik Mountaineering Air Ground Search and Rescue Squad. He is co-author with Helgi Thor Ingason of *Project Ethics*, published by Gower (UK) in 2013. Dr. Jonasson can be contacted at [haukuringi@ru.is](mailto:haukuringi@ru.is)