

## ***Advances in Project Management Series<sup>1</sup>***

# **Communicating Project Management: A Participatory Rhetoric for Development Teams**

## **Excerpt of Chapter 4: On site with The Gardener and The Chef: Project Leadership and Communication<sup>2</sup>**

By Benjamin Lauren

There are two metaphors I've come across used to describe leadership philosophy at the project team level. The first, offered by Demacro and Lister (1999), suggests that teams can be grown, but not built. This leadership approach describes project managers who cultivate the conditions for teams to succeed as a member of a team. The second approach was described by Lammers and Tsvetkov (2008), and it positioned project managers as chefs because they must deliver successful project results consistently. The chef, they argue, uses "industry standard processes" to achieve these results. Chefs tend to have a more complicated power relationship with the team, as they are very clearly responsible for managing its processes and procedures. Leadership models in project management offer important insight into communication practices. This excerpt from Chapter 4 of my book *Communicating Project Management: A Participatory Rhetoric for Development Teams* explores leadership at the project level by embodying the two metaphors of gardening and cooking to understand how these leadership values influence the approach to communicating. Through a closer examination of two of the participants, this excerpt explains how leadership values influence communication at the project level, and to what extent they shape invitations to participate in project work.

To study the relationship between leadership and communication, the excerpt will lean heavily on examining the communication of two participants. The first participant I call "The Gardener" because she tends to communicate in ways that focus on growing and cultivating the growth of people to help a team succeed. Meanwhile, I refer to other participant as "The Chef" because he tends to focus on making and assembling, usually through industry standard practices, the kinds of resources and people needed to successfully complete a project. As the excerpt will explain, their individual positionality on the team also influenced how they performed leadership. Given these metaphors, how each participant approaches communicating project management is very different, even

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though they work toward the same goals: to complete project work successfully and to make space for people to participate.

The excerpt begins by reviewing leadership in project management. Then, it introduces The Gardener and presents the data from our work together, which illustrates her approach to growing and contributing to project teams. After, The Chef is introduced and I explain how his approach to communicating focused on following proven recipes for success. Next, the excerpt explores how their leadership approaches are linked to specific ways of communicating; how they give presence to certain values. Finally, the article ends describing the role of leadership identity as a form of rhetorical performance.

### **Communicating Leadership, Positionality, and Identity**

As a scholarly interest and workplace practice, leadership contains a broad range of topic areas. For example, there are a number of books that focus on how to best lead (such as, Asghar, 2014; Maxwell, 2007) or attempt to teach students to be effective leaders (Northouse, 2015; Kouzes and Posner, 2017). Often the published work in leadership traverses academic and practitioner spheres. Particularly useful is Higgs' (2003) work, which assembled a trajectory of leadership research in a western tradition, including the trends and schools of thought emerging since the ancient Greeks. In his article, he argued that scholarship in leadership tends struggle with its paradigm, oscillating between a focus on personality or behavior (p. 274). A focus on leadership personality asserts, for example, the importance of an individual's character and charisma; whereas a focus on behavior is concerned with how leadership can be developed as a skillset. Higgs explained, "A personality-based paradigm would argue for selection as being the main focus, whereas a behaviour-based one would argue for development. In essence this is the debate around whether leaders are born or made" (p. 274). This excerpt seeks to add to this conversation to argue that leadership at the project level is a kind of rhetorical performance that is based on a set of implicit values that shape communication activities.

In this view of leadership, communicating project management is both situational and contextual, but also reliant on the positionality of the project manager in the group. When a team shares in project management work, the positionality is different than when a person is hired to exclusively act as a project manager. As Amidon and Blythe (2008) learned from interviewing communication managers, "Those who reveal a situated, contingent notion of agency [...] understand that their ability to act often comes not from autonomy but from their position within a larger group" ( p. 21). In other words, positionality of the project manager influences how they lead, and also, how they perform their identity as a leader. While Amidon and Blythe (2008) are quick to dispel the notion that identity is fixed, they also understand it to be situated in the workplace and linked to personal and professional experiences (such as education and training). Similarly, in their study of the online forum *Science Buzz*, Grabill and Pigg (2012) explained, "identity is often synonymous with authority due to their ongoing presence in the conversation, their rhetorical skill, and their status in relation to the site" (p. 116). In other words, in online forums identity is performed "in small, momentary, and fleeting acts" (p. 101) and is leveraged to "create argumentative space by shaping how the conversation unfolds and enables the exchange of information and knowledge" (p. 101). In comparable ways,

project managers, via organizational networks, enact agency by shaping conversations and activities to create a space for project work to get done using analog and digital means (that is, using information communication technologies and during face-to-face meetings). A project manager's agency is awarded through interactions, through building relationships and trust via communication activities.

When leadership is expressed as a kind of performance of identity and positionality, it becomes clearer that leadership arises out of rhetorical situations that circle project work. To help illustrate this idea, I turn to Biesecker (1989), who explained "the rhetorical situation as an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations" (p. 126). Her treatment of the rhetorical situation suggests that leadership identities are not fixed—that "the rhetorical event may be seen as an incident that produces and reproduces the identities of subjects and constructs and reconstructs linkages between them" (p. 126). Through these linkages people build relationships and trust as they work on projects. In other words, by assuming our leadership identity is not fixed—that it is constantly in a state of transformation—rhetorical events or incidents can be transformative to how someone perceives their role as a leader. Biesecker's (1989) ideas connect with Drucker's (2009) thoughts that the most powerful way of communicating as a manager is tied to shared experience. It is through communicating--through designing approaches to making space--that leadership is performed. Consequently, it is also through communicating that the values of a leader are exposed.

## **Introducing The Gardener**

Project managers who lead as gardeners are cultivating conditions for teams to grow together as individuals and as a collective. They do this work positioned inside the team--as an equal member of the team. When DeMarco and Lister (1999) discussed the agricultural metaphor in *Peopleware*, they were reflecting on their own struggle to develop a prescriptive approach to creating what they called a "jelled" team. As they wrestled with how to best make teams jell, they concluded, "You can't make teams jell. You can hope they will jell; you can cross your fingers; you can act to improve the odds of jelling—but you can't make it happen. The process is much too fragile to be controlled" (Demarco and Lister, 1999, p. 143). As they asked what could be done to create the circumstances teams needed to jell, the authors noted they needed to change their terminology. "We stopped talking about *building* teams, and talked instead of *growing* them" (p. 143). As it turns out, the metaphor of gardening is also not new to professional and technical communication either. The gardening leadership model for project management values team-building and developing people, and as a result, a gardener approach is more appropriate for shared control over leadership and internal processes. In a cultivation model, project management is treated as a more democratic process that requires frequent input from people on the team.

When the research for this excerpt began, The Gardener had just started a new job at an automotive company designing infotainment experiences. Her title was "Senior User Experience Designer." When I asked how she was involved in managing or leading project work, she explained how she did so from inside the team: "Here at my new position we don't have project managers specifically [...] I like things to be really well defined and

scheduled and I like to plan and I like being able to do that as much as I want with my own parts of the project.” She did qualify this statement with an important point that she was not the team lead, though she had an informal role in how the work of her team was done<sup>3</sup>. She explained how she participated in project management: “Some of the stuff that I do naturally like scheduling things, and laying out timelines, or taking more detailed notes. I have been sharing that somewhat—almost to get a sense of how much other people appreciate it and if other people find it helpful.”

Given that The Gardener was new to the company and team, her approach made sense because she was looking for ways to add value to her surroundings. She wanted to fit in, but also make an impact inside of the organization. She explained one way she was adding value to project work—which had influenced how it was being managed—was building a shared calendar. She felt that by creating timelines in this calendar, she could help other people on the team see the dependencies of the project. She explained the team had previously used a slideshow template, but that it wasn’t visible enough. She translated that information into something she felt was more effective and thought, “hey, I can do it in this way and I can share it with them and if it’s appreciated then I can kind of manage that piece of things or it can be adopted by everybody and then we can all kind of manage that piece.” In the end, she explained that the team adopted her approach to scheduling and making dependencies visible.

The Gardener described the approach to project management at her company was waterfall, but with some Agile elements practiced only by her team. This structure made sense because The Gardener worked for an automotive company, and much of her team’s work had to do with people’s experience in the car—perhaps the most flexible space of an automobile. The Gardener explained, “we do design thinking as an approach to problem solving, and there have been discussions with my team in particular about trying to incorporate some of the methods of those methodologies,” such as a Kanban board. To potentially help facilitate some of this transition, The Gardener practiced using a Kanban board to guide her own work, but did not introduce it as a collaboration tool with her team during data collection.

## **Leadership Values of The Gardener**

The communication I observed via experience sampling were events like negotiating buy-in to project timelines, defining scope of a user interface, beginning a community-based project, assembling a team presentation, and discussing design outcomes. These communicative events did not define The Gardener, but they did illustrate her values as a leader: to cultivate the conditions that would lead her team to individual and collective growth. That is, for her team to “jell,” to use DeMarco and Lister’s term. And she approached that work positioned as an equal member of her team, taking the lead where and when it made sense for her to do so. Importantly, participating in this way was intuitive for her because it aligned with her personality, but it was also a reaction to her situation as a new employee and to her perception of the organization as a context for

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<sup>3</sup> Leading parts of projects and initiatives is something we saw reflected in the interviews because some products involve multiple project teams.

project work. Further, the data showed there were clear communication practices associated with the values of The Gardener as a leader. I describe the values here and provide examples from the communication events she reported. While these values are not all encompassing of gardeners as leaders, they demonstrate how one person inhabits the role in the ways she communicates with people on project teams.

## **Value 1: Teach Methods of Effective Collaboration**

The Gardener frequently mentioned the importance of modeling behavior or teaching others how to effectively collaborate on her team and those surrounding her team in the organization. For her, modeling desirable behavior was an instructional act, which she did by demonstrating specific kinds of action and occasionally embracing inaction to construct effective boundaries. She further explained during an interview that “I am a firm believer in that you teach people how to treat you.” Several reporting events demonstrated The Gardener working to teach people how to treat her or how she hoped her behavior would influence others. For example, she reported receiving an email request about a feature of a product from a coworker who had authority over her in the organization’s hierarchy. The email asked her to immediately give feedback to a proposal. The Gardener felt the request was unreasonable, and responded she would get to it soon as she could, but did not make promises about when that would be. Since her response was written as an email, she used a polite and diplomatic tone, but remained firm that she did not have the time to get to this specific request at the moment. Her thought about responding in this way was “I didn’t want to teach him that he could get me to react by communicating in that way.”

## **Value 2: Learn About Teams and Organizations**

A focus on learning about her team and organization also proved important as a means for understanding how to navigate, engage, and lead as a member of her team. The audience of a communication is The Gardener’s essential consideration in how she communicates as a leader. Supporting learning about the audience was her background as a user experience professional. She noted that learning about customers had always been a high priority for her, but more recently had turned that training toward learning about the people on her team. For example, during one of our interviews, she noted that the timing of project work seemed more relaxed at this company than at other places she’d worked, which would require some adjustment for her. Timing of work significantly mattered to The Gardener, and her efforts at learning about the organization helped her think about ways to improve how her team approached project dependencies. She explained it in this way, “I could really manage a lot more than I am right now, but I know I don’t know everything I need to know to understand where the boundaries are. So, I’m kind of backseating a little bit just to see how things play out—to get a sense of the culture.” Examples of learning surfaced throughout the sampling period in many situations. In one, The Gardener overheard a group of people discussing a project team she knew something about, so she popped her head up from her cubicle to offer some information to the group. The group turned and looked at her as if they were surprised, and did not say anything. She read their individual facial expressions and body language and sat back down feeling somewhat dejected. Her goal was to build rapport with the people in the group, but she learned from the

interaction that even conversations in common spaces in this organization could be somewhat exclusive.

### **Value 3: Communicate to Include**

A clear leadership value of The Gardener was to communicate in ways that included people. In the previous sections we saw how she enacted inclusion by teaching effective collaboration, modeling behavior, and prioritizing learning about her team and their context to intentionally find areas where she could lead from within her team. She operationalized these motives to be inclusive of the people on her team, and to find ways to make space for people to participate. She explained how her goal of inclusion played out in different kinds of communication events at work. For example, she once sent an email to her supervisor notifying him that she'd be off site at a training. The email was meant to be purely informational, but she also chose an email on purpose to protect her supervisor's time. She felt a more formal face-to-face discussion would have been disrespectful of her supervisor's time for such a simple notice. In The Gardener's view, there were formal and informal methods she used to communicate to include. She defined informal methods as strategies she individually developed and adopted and were perhaps less visible to people. She explained informal as pertaining to her individual practices, such as "making sure that everybody has a say and can be heard as part of the collaboration process or our team meetings," or circling back to those she'd mistakenly interrupted "so that it didn't feel like any one person was dominating the conversation or the design process." Meanwhile, formal strategies had been developed and adopted by the team (e.g., developing a communication plan or workflow) and as a result were more visible. She explained formal methods as "really [m]aking an effort to communicate how I think that we should share ideas in terms of providing rationale and more detail around why we're making certain decisions throughout the design process."

### **Value 4: Be Responsible to the Team**

As the examples so far have shown, The Gardener intuitively communicated and acted in ways that demonstrated a loyalty to her team over the project. This loyalty was rooted in the belief that effective teams lead to successful project work. Project work was high priority for the Gardener, but in the social spaces of work, she often prioritized the team over the project. When an individual would break from the team, The Gardener felt as though it violated some sort of unspoken rule that required explanation. The emphasis on being responsible to the team was also about making sure people were contributing and collaborating in good faith. One example from a community project she'd worked on showed how The Gardener viewed the importance of celebrating individuals in the context of teams. The Gardener was part of a group of people who were working to resurrect a chapter of a local professional's association. To honor one of the senior people on the team, she advocated for creating an emeritus role to keep the person engaged and give them an opportunity to participate with the group.

## **Value 5: Empathize with People**

Building from the previous examples, one of the most important leadership values for The Gardener was to empathize with people. She saw it both as a strength and weakness of her leadership. At one point she explained, “I probably practice a little too much empathy. I feel like I let people get away with things in a productivity sense a lot more than I should.” Later, she further explained the importance of balance: “There’s a balance between empathizing with others and setting them up for success—however that plays out—and then balancing that with your own needs.” She had been taken advantage of before because of her ability to empathize with people on her team. Empathy was important to The Gardener’s leadership philosophy because she believed it helped put others into a position to succeed. One way this surfaced in her communicative activities was in the importance of withholding judgement in the face of uncertainty or ambiguity. She described moments where she had asked her team to try new or unfamiliar ways of working as a means for facilitating growth. In this way, she needed people on her team to empathize with her as well.

## **Introducing The Chef**

Chefs, as the second epigraph suggests, purposefully assemble industry standards to consistently create a tasty mix of the resources and people needed to help a project succeed. In the article the second epigraph comes from, Lammers and Tsvetkov (2008) discussed the 80/20 rule of project management, which broadly focuses on maximizing return on investment<sup>4</sup>. When they turned to the metaphor of cooking in the article, they refer directly to the Project Management Institute as a “cookbook” of industry standard practices. These practices are formalized into a body of knowledge that can be used in different organizations to deliver effective results. That is, a chef can bring their cooking skills in just about any kitchen. As well, chefs generally have training (The Chef in this excerpt is certified as a Six Sigma Black Belt). In a cooking model, the project manager tends to emphasize the importance of the project over individuals. If gardeners tend to work from within the team, then chefs are the opposite, working more deliberately as a de facto team organizer (whether or not people follow is a separate issue). In other words, Chefs deliberately work to develop and curate the management system teams use to stay organized, and some chefs will do that work with the team.

During the sampling period The Chef was working as a consultant for an organization that worked in health care. He was specifically brought in to help the organization solve problems that had boiled over and had created a lot of tension across the team. He described the department he worked for in the organization as experiencing a huge influx of work that they were struggling to manage. He explained it this way: “they’re trying to shift away from just reacting to all of the inflow of work that’s coming in towards being prevention-oriented.” His role was to help coach the team to become more productive and to simultaneously help them limit the amount of work going into their area. As he reflected on his role, he talked about how a lot of the work he’d done in health care was complex.

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<sup>4</sup> The 80/20 rule suggests project managers spend 20% of their time on project management activities that will lead to an 80% return on investment in the future.

Most of the complications arose from healthcare being view as a business, and The Chef believed too many companies would often write off work, instead of filing claims (and making money). Additionally, The Chef was positioned as a contractor the organization hired to help address business problems from a project management standpoint. He told me that the problems had been developing over several years and were neglected for so long, and he identified the unfortunate result: the team had developed many bad habits that would have to be reversed.

When I asked The Chef about the kind of project management methodologies used by the organization, he noted that it was elusive and did not really fit a traditional definition of Waterfall, Agile, or Lean. He said that the issue for the project he was managing is that there was literally no system in place. He explained, “even the concept of waterfall and talking about flow just is not even part of the lexicon.” The group had worked with the rest of the company to buy a project management technology solution to help centralize communication and create awareness of the intersection across all the different departments, but the adoption of that system was more about creating an improved customer experience across business units. He noted his role was partially to help address this issue: “this is me coming in after the fact and telling you my impression of it—a combination of company culture along with the product that they bought [...]”. During the research, The Chef focused intently on the social aspects of communicating in a high-tension environment that was focused on making productive change. He worked to invite participation across several layers of the organizational network--from executive management to individuals on his team.

## **Leadership Values of The Chef**

Given this context, the communication that I observed during the reporting period with The Chef focused on developing a system for managing project work. There were meetings with individuals, teams, and at the executive level where issues related to organizational and team culture clashed and made it challenging for him to do his work as their project manager. At the same time, there were clear tensions across project managers in other areas of the company as how to solve these problems (or even agreeing on what the problems constituted). Working through these issues was challenging for The Chef because he felt that the organizational issues made it near impossible for him to do the job as he wanted to do it and believed it needed to be done, and it also clashed directly with how he understood the role of a project manager. The Chef wanted to develop a system with the team that would be useful for them moving forward, and encouraged senior leadership to participate in that process by outlining clear goals and outcomes to support his efforts.

### **Value 1: Keep People on Task**

An important value for The Chef was to keep people on task, particularly during meetings. To support this motive, he frequently acted in ways that would help make each meeting as productive as possible. He devoted a great deal of time preparing for meetings and learning from previous mistakes. Too often he felt blindsided by people’s reaction to information he had prepared and presented. At one point, he told a story about a past experience where this happened with a Vice President. In preparation for that meeting he

asked around how meetings with this person tend to go. He asked what kinds of reports the Vice President wanted to see. The Chef explained this approach as “I try to come up with a sort of hypothesis of what’s driving them and then I actually test it during interactions.” He noted a variety of strategies he used to keep people productive, most of them driven by reflecting about people’s personalities and about his own mistakes working with teams in the past. He called this approach “loss avoidance,” where you avoid losing productivity or harming a relationship because of a preparation error. In this way, The Chef put a lot of pressure on his own personal performance to deliver successful projects.

## **Value 2: Assign Roles to Individuals and Teams**

The chef also believed in the importance of everyone playing their role on the team, which included him as project manager. Of his role, he said, “I am exactly in the middle of everything because I own nothing except the progress of the project.” He would use several communication practices to show people that sticking to their assigned role was important to the success of the project. For example, he would arrange meetings, send follow-up emails, and embrace serendipitous check-ins to make sure people were aligned with the project. In these moments, The Chef would remind his team of the importance of roles in terms of the goal for the project. In reflecting on this during one of our interviews, he noted encouraging executive leadership to give a clearer charge to the team as it would make implementing a system a far more productive process.

## **Value 3: Communicate to clarify the goal**

In addition to keeping people on task and assigning roles, The Chef communicated in ways that would clarify project-related issues. For The Chef, clarifying information was as much about productivity as it was about not surprising people or catching someone off guard. In moments where there was communication bottlenecks, The Chef moved quickly to remove the roadblock to get people back to work on the project. Sometimes these issues were interpersonal in nature, and at other times it had to do with clarifying the goal of the project for people on the team. He believed that in this particular organization, a lack of clarity about the team’s role was a deeply embedded issue that he continually needed to overcome to help the team be successful.

## **Value 4: Be Responsible to the Project**

One of the major values of The Chef was to continue productivity toward the goal of a project in his actions and interactions with people. He would spend time investigating and learning about the existing project as a system to discover any issues that could easily be fixed. His training in Six Sigma certainly helped in this respect and he noted the importance of process improvement during our interviews. And, since The Chef was also trained in user experience, he had a strong sense of how touchpoints in a management system could influence how people participated in project work. To get a view of these touchpoints, he would engage with people across different units to learn how information was coordinated. His goal for doing this work was to make sure people were honoring deadlines and understanding the dependencies of project work. He explained of his co-

workers in different departments and of his teams, “You need them to understand for the business to do things, a deadline has to be a deadline.”

## **Value 5: Empathize to Motivate Action**

The Chef confessed he had a very difficult time with the concept of empathy. Not intellectually, but ethically. He felt that since his application of empathy was to make progress and motivate action—that because it was goal oriented— it somehow was less genuine. That said, The Chef did employ empathy as a leadership value, but his aim was to make progress on the project. He seemed to believe any emotional output that did not lead to productivity was bad for the project—and anything bad for the project was bad for the team. He also felt discussing emotions and people at work was dangerous. The Chef would almost always rather discuss the system of managing work, and would tolerate feelings if it led to action. The system, in his view, was safe to talk about. In regard to empathy, he concluded that, “If you want my opinion you’ve got to put an action on it.” This view makes sense given The Chef’s interest in evaluating productivity and metrics in general. The importance of measuring success directly correlated with his training in Six Sigma.

## **Comparing Communication Values of The Gardener and The Chef**

So far we’ve seen how The Gardener and The Chef embody two different leadership identities in the context of project management. Their values are important to acknowledge because they demonstrate how being a gardener or a chef influences project management communication and how they perceive making space for people to participate. The Gardener focuses on her audience first and the project second, whereas The Chef focuses on the project first and then the audience. Both believe in encouraging participation, but The Gardener is positioned to cultivate it from within her team by communicating her values to people. Meanwhile, The Chef took a different role of making space by focusing on creating and iterating a management system for the project to succeed, which would ultimately benefit the team and the business.

Table 1 is a comparison of the values discovered across the two leadership profiles in this excerpt. I present these values not to position one approach against the other as more or less desirable, but to demonstrate how values influence how leaders communicate. I placed each of the elements in relation to each other to make comparisons easier to make.

**Table 1: Comparing Value of The Gardener and The Chef**

<b>The Gardener's Values</b>	<b>The Chef's Values</b>
Teach methods of effective collaboration	Keep people on task
Learn about individuals and organizations	Assign roles to individuals and teams
Communicate to include	Communicate to clarify the goal
Be responsible to the team	Be responsible to the project
Practice empathy	Empathize to motivate action

The unique positionality of The Gardener and The Chef also demonstrate an important aspect of their leadership values and agency as project managers. That is, The Gardener also acted in specific ways because of her role on the team. The situation and context helped to determine how she perceived this role. At the same time, The Chef was brought in as a consultant because of his training and experience. His role was to act as a chef. From what we've learned from The Gardener and The Chef, leadership communication can be understood as a rhetorical performance that builds from the project manager's positionality and is refined through interactions with the team and extensions of the team. Leadership values are linked to the rhetorical context and situation. Furthermore, a leader's identity is not fixed, but it is value-centric. Identity is constantly shifting. The Gardener and The Chef show how leadership identity is formed and reformed through rhetorical performance. In other words, leadership identity can be formed through interaction and participation, but an individual's values are far more reliant on other factors, such as training, education, and other professional experiences. These values are sense-making guideposts for The Gardener and The Chef, and help them shape approaches to communication.

### **Leadership Identity as Rhetorical Performance**

If the communication practices of project managers under a participatory paradigm focus on making space for people, then what we learn from The Gardener and The Chef is that leadership philosophy influences how space is or is not being made through communication. Leadership as a practice is rhetorical because, to be effective, it requires consideration of context, situation, and positionality before acting. We can also understand these considerations by extending the concept of terministic screens. Herrick (2009) described terministic screens as "any set of terms used to describe an object, event, or person simultaneously directs attention *toward* some factors and *away from others*" (p. 228). For example, the language The Gardener and The Chef used to describe communication events were key in revealing how they perceived the event. For example, The Gardener described the "pain" she felt for someone else as she worked to access the scheduling system. Using the term pain signaled her value of empathizing with people on the team. Meanwhile, The Chef described a meeting as "running rampant" demonstrating

his value of keeping teams on task. Leadership values, in essence, also help illustrate the philosophies underlying choices made about communicating. Both The Gardener and The Chef hope to extend invitations to participate, but their values help to determine what sort of participation they find productive.

However, just as development methodologies should not be applied as a template over people, leadership values are not implemented devoid of situation and context. The language used to describe the communication events can only help illuminate what someone is paying attention to at a given moment—what they perceive in that moment as most important. For example, let's turn to back to an example with The Gardener. She noted that a new coworker instant messaged her about accessing the team's scheduling system. The Gardener stopped what she was doing and saw an opportunity to model the kind of interaction she wanted to see occur more often across the team. The Chef, we can speculate, might have identified there was a problem with the system and tried to work with this person to isolate the problem to improve it. The Gardener and The Chef may have experienced the same moment, but turned their attention to different aspects of that situation, producing different outcomes. The reason that leadership approach matters so much at the project level is because it produces different kinds of outcomes. As Drucker (2009) said, "Leadership is a means. Leadership to what ends is the crucial question" (p. 268).

Suffice to say, the communication events discussed in this excerpt also suggest that a project manager's leadership philosophy seems shaped quite a bit by their positionality in the group. These factors appear far more implicit. That is, what is charismatic in one context appears brutish or crude in another. Prescriptive leadership approaches decline to acknowledge the role of the social in enacting leadership at the project level. While the cases in this excerpt suggest an alignment across individual personalities, beliefs, and values, they also emphasize the rhetorically responsive nature of leadership as informed by situation and embedded in context. Simply put, The Gardener inhabited the role of a gardener on her team because she was hired in that role. In addition, her personality tended toward sowing seeds and helping them grow. The same goes for The Chef. He was contracted by an organization to come in and cook. So that is what he did.

In the context of this excerpt, the production of identities and social relations is important because it helps to further illustrate the effects of a paradigm shift from efficiency to participation. That is, the identities, or knowledge, of individuals and teams are not fixed. As such, communicating for participation also means making space for growth, what Biesecker calls "radical possibility." Project teams that approach communication events as identity-forming can still focus on exigence, such as discussing a disagreement about a new feature of a mobile application. However, what Biesecker's argument suggests is that leadership is socially coordinated through and by participation of the team. Communication on teams is transformative. So much of the knowledge-work today focuses on individual and collective learning, either through structures unique to a project, like a project retrospective, or through professional development activities, such as certification or training. When leadership works as a means of facilitating this participation, project managers have to make space for people. The values of leadership can give space to certain ideas while, perhaps unknowingly limiting space for others because of what a project

manager perceives to be most important about a given communication event. In this way, leadership values at the project level can also be a constraining construct, giving presence to certain concerns and behaviors while diminishing or potentially silencing others.

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## About the Author



### **Benjamin Lauren**

Michigan, USA



**Benjamin Lauren** is an Assistant Professor of Experience Architecture in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University, where he serves as Assistant Director of the MA in Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing and as a HUB for Innovation in Learning and Technology Fellow. His book, *Communicating Project Management: A Participatory Rhetoric for Development Teams* was published in the ATTW Series by Routledge. The book makes an argument that project managers must communicate to facilitate participation in project work, particularly in the context of networked organizations. Ben's work has been published in journals such as *Technical Communication*, *Transactions on Professional Communication*, and *Computers and Composition*.

[For more about the book \*Communicating Project Management: A Participatory Rhetoric for Development Teams\*, click here.](#)