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## ***The Future Project Culture***<sup>1</sup>

### **Inspiring Leadership**<sup>2</sup>

**By Dr. Harold Kerzner**

and

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#### **Introduction**

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In an era where the focus of many global organizations shifts to handling external disruptions, and with digital being at the core of most of the key ones, the future is likely shaped by the shifts in how we lead. In our research and writing work in the book “Project Management Next Generation: The Pillars for Organizational Excellence,” we dedicated one chapter and a pillar to leadership, yet most of all the other 9 pillars address critical points related to leading or ways of working into the future. The definition of what leadership is and what good leadership looks like will likely become one of the frequently changing topics of our times. With the increasing number of external disruptions, the role of the leaders could very well become the one unique differentiator of how value is best created in the work of tomorrow and how effectiveness in decision-making is maintained.

In this article we will tackle a few elements to start the dialogue on what “**Inspiring Leadership**” could mean and why it is critical to drive and motivate future generations, including the youngest people alive today, generation Alpha. Leadership of the future is more about the art of connectedness. It is the true act of translating context in something that is relatable to ignite the focus of work teams of the future.

If you ask a project manager today, “Do you work for the team members or do the team members work for you?”, the answer would better be that the PM works for the team members and must engage them properly and build trust and strong bonds. We believe this is true servant leadership. Years ago, the PMs would respond that the team works for the PM. Inspiring leaders lean in with this mindset and exhibit a few additional critical attributes to handle turbulence in the future and deliver innovative outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> This series of articles is by Dr. Harold Kerzner and Dr. Al Zeitoun, the co-authors, along with Dr. Ricardo Vargas, of the textbook *Project Management Next Generation: The Pillars for Organizational Excellence*, published by Wiley in 2022. Learn more about the authors in their profiles at the end of this article.

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Excellence of leading in the future is adaptability to the human needs and the next generations' ways of working. We will highlight a few foundational elements from the Next Generation work and use that as the foundation to build the core elements of a future inspirational leadership competencies. Simply stated, leadership matters more than ever and true project excellence starts and ends with the fitting leadership principles.

## **Servant Leadership Matters**

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Since the 1970s, considerable research has been performed related to the link between controlling emotional labor and servant leadership. Spear ([1995], [2002]) elaborated on Greenleaf's work by identifying ten characteristics of a servant leader:

- *Listening*. Listening is a willingness to openly accept the ideas, opinions, and suggestions of workers.
- *Empathy*. Empathy extends listening when leaders can put themselves in the situation that others say they are in and empathize with them and their feelings. This is accepting people for who they are.
- *Healing*. The ability of a leader to help workers endure the disappointment and emotional pain that comes from broken dreams, hopes, and other challenges.
- *Awareness*. The ability of the leader to identify cues and signs in the environment to help workers perform better.
- *Persuasion*. Persuasion or persuasion mapping enables the leader to identify the needs of the workers and focus on the importance of their work without the use of formal authority or legitimate power.
- *Conceptualization*. The ability of the leader to think about the future rather than just present-day needs and to encourage workers to use mental models to expand the creativity processes.
- *Foresight*. This includes using intuition to anticipate and predict the future for the benefit of the workers and the organization.
- *Stewardship*. Stewardship involves preparing the organization and its members for great contributions to society thereby willing to serve others.<sup>3</sup>
- *Growth*. Working with team members, possibly on a one-on-one basis, to get them motivated. This, in turn, can lead to employee satisfaction and the worker is encouraged to perform extra work.

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<sup>3</sup> For an example of stewardship, see “Why Social Impact Matters”, *Pulse of the Profession*® In-Depth Report, 2020, The Project Management Institute, Newtown Square, PA.

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- *Community building.* Encouraging the workers to view the organization and the team as a community where workers communicate with each other to address their issues.

The ten characteristics opened the door for empirical studies and volumes of literature on servant leadership theory. Some papers discuss only a few of these characteristics. Barbuto and Wheeler [2006], addressed five characteristics, namely altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship.

## **Crisis leadership is a Difference Maker**

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Crisis leadership requires an examination of the processes that are essential for an organization and its management when dealing with crises. Even though many of these processes, and the accompanying tools and techniques, are based upon best practices and lessons learned from experience, they may not be applicable to crises-related projects without some modifications.

How companies respond to the crisis is critical. Thanks to usually excessive media coverage, the world watches how companies respond to a crisis. Based upon the outcome, the public then categorizes the company as either a victim or villain in the way the crisis was managed. What is expected to be discussed in journal articles will be the project management processes that were used and the accompanying leadership styles.

Most companies today capture best practices and lessons learned from projects during execution and at closure. The best practices look at what the company may have done right and wrong. However, what has been lacking until recently, thanks largely to the pandemic, is a detailed look at the effectiveness of the leadership style that was used and how team members responded. The more in-depth look specifically at crisis leadership can give companies guidance on what type of individuals are best suited to manage crisis projects in the future.

Project managers have become accustomed to managing within a structured process such as an enterprise project management methodology. The statement of work may have gone through several iterations and is now clearly defined. A work breakdown structure exists, and everyone understands their roles and responsibilities as defined in the responsibility assignment matrix (RAM). All of this took time to do.

This is the environment we all take for granted. But now let us change the scenario a bit. The president of the company calls you into his office and informs you that several people have just died using one of your company's products. You are being placed in charge of this crisis project. The lobby of the building is swamped with the news media, all of whom want to talk to you to hear your plan for addressing the crisis. The president informs you that the media knows you have been assigned as the project manager, and that a news conference has been set up for one hour from now. The president also asserts that he wants to see your plan for managing the crisis no later than 10:00 p.m. this evening. Where do you begin? What should you do first? Time is now an extremely inflexible constraint rather than merely a constraint that may be able to be changed. Time does not exist to perform all of the activities you are accustomed to doing. You may need to make hundreds if not thousands of decisions quickly, and many of these are decisions you never thought that you would have to make. This is crisis project management. What leadership style is best for this type of environment?

Historically, many companies were poor at understanding risk management, especially at evaluation of early warning signs. Today, project managers are trained in the concepts of risk management, but specifically related to the management of the project, or with the development of the product. Once the product is commercialized, the most serious early warning indicators can appear and, by that time, the project manager may be reassigned to another project. Someone else must then evaluate the early warning signs.

Early warning signs are indicators of potential risks. Time and money are a necessity for evaluation of these indicators, which preclude the ability to evaluate all risks. Therefore, companies must be selective in the risks they consider.

*Future leaders will practice crisis leadership fluidly.*

## **Inspirational Leadership**

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Looking into the future of inspirational leadership, we will highlight a set of attributes that paint the picture of those leaders. Figure.1 highlights 8 competencies that will help future leaders connect better and drive transformational change in their organizations. These competencies are drivers to the future project culture.

**Purpose clarity** is the first of those competencies. Future leaders will put a much higher emphasis on leading with purpose. These leaders will apply the concept of "slowing down

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to go faster.” Taking time to ensure clarity of purpose and that the project teams fully comprehend the reasoning behind their projects, is a critical leadership muscle to build. This will enable cutting losses and increasing efficiencies associated with many of the future transformation initiatives.

The second competency has to do with **transformational skills**. This is central to the project way of working and the recognition that projects and programs are about creating change. Transformation competencies build on resilience and adapting and a strong sense of the aspirational potential of initiatives. This connects nicely on the purpose clarity and enable the leader to be consistent in the drive towards transformation outcomes. The 3<sup>rd</sup> is about leading with speed as exemplified by the decision-making process. This is not sacrificing the quality of the decisions, yet it is about taking more valuable risks and handling uncertainty well. This is an attractive quality of future leaders that connect them well to the inspirational effects they intend to create on stakeholders.

**Change management** as the 4<sup>th</sup> is a central competency that future leaders have to master. The change journey that stakeholders follow the leader on, will not always be a comfortable ride. People will be at different stages of readiness for change or willingness to take that on. Leaders have to operate with heart in order to inspire change. **Empathy** is a nice 5<sup>th</sup> and complementary competency that allows the leader to relate well to the future generations, what they need, how they best work, what motivates them, and most importantly how to keep them energized and connected to the mission.

**Value focus** is the 6<sup>th</sup> unique characteristic and it goes full circle back to purpose. This is becoming one of the most important focus areas for leaders. Bringing projects back to value and redirecting teams' efforts towards value is a leadership quality that continually brings attentions back to the “so what.” In a world that continuously deals with distractions and gets overwhelmed with action-focus, it is critical that value stays at the center of how leaders focus and prioritize their decision-making process. The 7<sup>th</sup> is **communication skills** which is probably the most covered characteristic in the topic of leadership. It is amazing how much more potential this competency has. Intentionality of that communication towards inspiring future generations is growing in importance. The clarity of the communication, its design for impact, its connection to purpose, all come together to enable leaders to inspire change making.

The 8<sup>th</sup> and integrating characteristic, is **program management**. This attribute of future inspiring leaders is a must-have. Program management is an integrated value system. This is the strategy connecting competency where programs can be the vehicle for leaders to engage future talent in change initiatives that matter.

While all these competencies are important individually, integrating these in the style of leading in the future brings the inspiring impact of leading to the next heights of impact.



**Figure 1. The Inspirational Leadership Competencies**

## THE PATH FORWARD

Shifts in how we lead is a must. In a future where projects are becoming the norm and where digitization will change everything we do, how we live, how we work, and how fast one ingredient remains intact, the **human ingredient**. Investing in creating the growth mindset that leaders need to build these 8 competencies, is a good starting point. It is critical however to stay open to any changes to these buckets of competencies. What inspires today's generations and how they work into the future, will likely be disrupted on the path ahead.

This path forward requires boldness and awareness in leading. It assumes that by having a growth mindset, we will continue to learn different ways of leading and adapt to the changing dynamics in how we work and live. This is another way the *Next Gen* of leaders would continue to inspire and create the most impactful future transformational changes.



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## About the Authors



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**Dr. Harold Kerzner** is Senior Executive Director for Project Management for the International Institute for Learning (IIL). He has an MS and Ph.D. in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering from the University of Illinois and an MBA from Utah State University. He is a prior Air Force Officer and spent several years at Morton-Thiokol in project management. He taught engineering at the University of Illinois and business administration at Utah State University, and for 38 years taught project management at Baldwin-Wallace University. He has published or presented numerous engineering and business papers and has had published more than 60 college textbooks/workbooks on project management, including later editions. Some of his books are (1) Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling and Controlling; (2) Project Management Metrics, KPIs and Dashboards, (3) Project Management Case Studies, (4) Project Management Best Practices: Achieving Global Excellence, (5) PM 2.0: The Future of Project Management, (6) Using the Project Management Maturity Model, and (7) Innovation Project Management.

He is a charter member of the Northeast Ohio PMI Chapter.

Dr. Kerzner has traveled around the world conducting project management lectures for PMI Chapters and companies in Japan, China, Russia, Brazil, Singapore, Korea, South Africa, Canada, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Poland, Croatia, Mexico, Trinidad, Barbados, The Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Venezuela, Columbia, United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, England, and Switzerland. He delivered a keynote speech at a PMI Global Congress on the future of project management.

His recognitions include:

- The University of Illinois granted Dr. Kerzner a Distinguished Recent Alumni Award in 1981 for his contributions to the field of project management.



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- Utah State University provided Dr. Kerzner with the 1998 Distinguished Service Award for his contributions to the field of project management.
  - The Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Project Management Institute gives out the Kerzner Award once a year to one project manager in Northeast Ohio that has demonstrated excellence in project management. They also give out a second Kerzner Award for project of the year in Northeast Ohio.
  - The Project Management Institute (National Organization) in cooperation with IIL has initiated the Kerzner International Project Manager of the Year Award given to one project manager yearly anywhere in the world that demonstrated excellence in project management.
  - The Project Management Institute also gives out four scholarships each year in Dr. Kerzner's name for graduate studies in project management.
  - Baldwin-Wallace University has instituted the Kerzner Distinguished Lecturer Series in project management.
  - The Italian Institute of Project Management presented Dr. Kerzner with the 2019 International ISIPM Award for his contributions to the field of project management.

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In his position, as the Executive Director for Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation, Abu Dhabi, UAE, he was responsible for creating the strategy execution framework, achieving transformation benefits, governance excellence, and creating the data analytics discipline necessary for delivering on the complex country energy mission roadmap.

At the McLean, USA HQ of Booz Allen Hamilton, Dr. Zeitoun strategically envisioned and customized digitally enabled EPMO advisory, mapped playbooks, and capability development for clients' Billions of Dollars strategic initiatives. Furthermore, he led the firm's Middle East North Africa Portfolio Management and Agile Governance Solutions.

With the International Institute of Learning, Dr. Zeitoun played a senior leader and global trainer and coach. He was instrumental in driving its global expansions, thought leadership, and operational excellence methodology to sense and shape dynamic ways of working across organizations worldwide. He speaks English, Arabic, and German and enjoys good food, travel, and volunteering. Dr. Al Zeitoun can be contacted at [zeitounstrategy@gmail.com](mailto:zeitounstrategy@gmail.com)

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