



HOW WE SEE

Project Managers as Servant-Leaders

—JIYING SONG

The great challenge of this age is to change how we see, and by so doing, improve our ability to adapt.

—Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer

Servant-leadership does not and should not stand by itself as a leadership theory or philosophy. It is a new way of living, seeing, and understanding. It embraces various fields, as represented by many articles in our journal—*The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. In this introduction, I am going to focus on one particular field—project management.

With the decomposition of work, division of labor, and maximization of productivity during the Industrial Revolution, the emphasis on process rose, and human beings were viewed as cogs and wheels. Along with the manufactory line, everyone must follow the predictable and repetitive process, and take exactly the right actions to gain maximum efficiency, thus profit. In the 1950s, organizations started to systematically employ project management tools and techniques to complex projects (Morris, 2011). The Project Management Institute



(PMI) was founded in 1969 in the U.S. and the International Project Management Association (IPMA, originally INTERNET) in 1965 in Europe. In 1996, PMI first published *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)*, which are standards for the project management profession. The *PMBOK Guide* continually and accurately reflects the evolving profession through updates: the second edition of *PMBOK Guide* was published in 2000, the third in 2004, the fourth in 2008, the fifth in 2013, and the sixth in 2017.

PMBOK Guide always has five process groups (initiating, planning, executing, controlling, and closing processes); whereas the knowledge areas has grown from nine to 10, the total processes from 37 to 49, and page number from 180 to 980. Three significant changes occurred throughout these six editions. First, in the fifth edition, Project Stakeholder Management split from Project Communications Management, and became a separate knowledge area. This change shows the significance of stakeholder engagement in a project's success. Second, in the sixth edition, several process names were slightly revised—from *control* communications to *monitor* communications, from *control* stakeholder engagement to *monitor* stakeholder engagement, from *control* risks to *monitor* risks, from plan stakeholder *management* to plan stakeholder *engagement*. These careful choices of wording demonstrate humility, admitting our limitations as human beings. For people and uncertainties, what we can do is to monitor and engage, rather than control.



Third, *Agile Practice Guide* was included for the first time in 2017. Differing from traditional project management, Agile offers a framework for delivering maximum value facing uncertainties in a more complex project environment and expectations of high quality and speed from stakeholders. Customer satisfaction is the highest priority of Agile. According to a survey from 258 experienced project managers reporting on 477 finished projects, 67% of these projects employed either agile or hybrid (a mix of agile and traditional) approaches to their project management, while agile and hybrid projects had more than 20% higher success rate than traditional ones in terms of stakeholder satisfaction (Reich, 2019). The leadership theory underpinning agile approaches is servant-leadership.

Agile approaches emphasize servant leadership as a way to empower teams. Servant leadership is the practice of leading through service to the team, by focusing on understanding and addressing the needs and development of team members in order to enable the highest possible team performance. . . . Servant leadership is not unique to Agile. But once having practiced it, servant leaders can usually see how well servant leadership integrates into the agile mindset and value. (PMI & Agile Alliance, 2017, pp. 33-34)

The development and changes of *PMOBK Guide* brings more focus on engaging and serving people, rather than viewing them as cogs and wheels to be controlled. This



evolution signals the shift from elevating processes to building community. It resonates with Liu and Hanauer's (2011) appeal of replacing our machine-brain with garden-brain. Since the mid-1960s, across hard science and soft science fields, come the waves of conceptual shifts: from simple to complex, from atomistic to networked, from equilibrium to disequilibrium, from linear to non-linear, from mechanistic to behavioral, from efficient to effective, from predictive to adaptive, from independent to interdependent, from individual ability to group diversity, from rational calculator to irrational approximators, from selfish to strongly reciprocal, from win-lose to win-win or lose-lose, and from competition to cooperation (Liu & Hanauer, 2011). The project management field has been experiencing these shifts, along with many others.

As a servant-leadership scholar and certified Project Management Professional (PMP), I have been pondering on the integration of these two fields. I would like to introduce a framework of the interrelationship of ten project management knowledge areas (see PMI, 2017) through the lenses of a servant-leader. Scope, schedule, and cost management are the first golden triangle of project management. Any one of them changes, the other two have to change as well. The second triangle consists of risk, quality, and resource/procurement management to form a strong support for the project. Shifting from independent to interdependent, project managers realize that communication management is the glue to tie all project management processes together. At the center lays stakeholder



management because any expansion of stakeholder expectations will cause all other areas to expand. Integration management connects all the dots and sets boundaries for the project (see Figure 1). These ten knowledge areas work together as a whole to deliver a successful and fruitful project. Servant-leaders as project managers lead from this people-centered framework, not only to empower the team, but also to satisfy stakeholders, thus creating a better community rather than solely maximizing efficiency and profits.

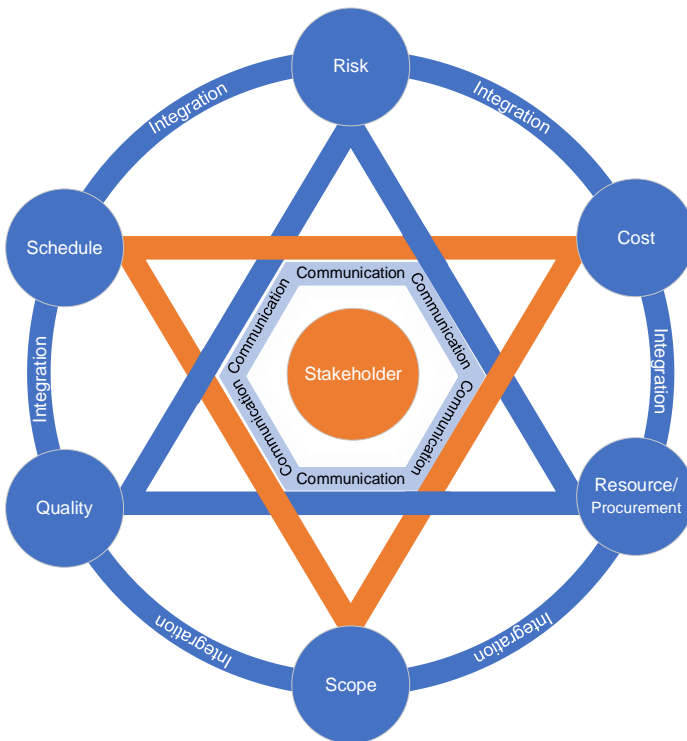


Figure 1. Interrelationship of ten project management knowledge areas.



Project management first rose as a profession for the optimization of processes, but now leans more toward people rather than processes. It moves from the sole pursuit of efficiency to the well-being of people. In our previous volume, we featured Nalini Vadivelan's (2018) *5Cs of Managerial Leadership*. She is a PMP and a previous participant of the emerging leadership program from Harvard University. Vadivelan ties together the five processes of project management and the 10 characteristics of servant-leadership. In this volume, we are going to have Joe Goss, a Senior Business Analyst, Project Manager, and group facilitator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, share with us a framework for developing and sustaining effective project teams through servant-leadership. We are grateful for their contributions in bringing project management and servant-leadership together. Furthermore, Larry, Shann, and I really appreciate all of our contributors, editorial advisors, and peer reviewers who have been walking along with us in this journey of exploring, developing, spreading, and living out servant-leadership. I trust you will find inspirations from these cutting-edge articles in this volume. Hopefully together we will see a broader world through various lenses, and thus improve our ability to adapt.

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During her career in China, she served as the Operation Director of an IT company and managed the Operation Service Center and Marketing Department for seven years. She obtained a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification and an IT Service Management certification and



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