Human-Centered Leadership

Behaviors, Mindsets, Attributes Required for The Future of Work
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Since 2000, 52% of Fortune 500 companies have disappeared.
THE ENVIRONMENT

As we move into the 21st century, it is no doubt humanity is undergoing a huge transformation and our businesses are in constant flux.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution characterized by the forces of globalization, digitalization and democratization is taking the world by its ears. Globalization is carrying operations to an international scale. Digitalization through artificial intelligence, robotics and "smart" technologies is powering change faster than ever. Democratization movements evolve the make-up of our workforce demographics.

Since 2000, we have witnessed 52% of Fortune 500 companies disappear\(^1\) and economic platforms report that publicly traded companies in the US alone face a 1 in 3 chance of failing within the next five years – up from 1 in 20 just 50 years ago\(^2\). It is becoming more evident that disruptive changes to current business models will continue to have profound impacts over the course of many years to come. According to World Economic Forum reports\(^3\), across a number of countries, the highest demand occupations and specialties did not exist ten to twelve years ago, and the pace of change is set to accelerate. By one popular estimate, 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that don't yet exist.\(^4\) In such a rapidly evolving employment landscape and with other unforeseen changes, the ability to anticipate and prepare for future business models and resource management requirements becomes an increasingly critical and challenging task.

Another trend being triggered and difficult to predict is where productivity measures will progress toward with a more human-focus influence.

It is clear that previous industrial revolutions have led to increased prosperity and productivity across the global marketplace. This does not guarantee, however, a win during this one. Today, from the early-in-career employee to the global customer, stakeholder networks are better informed and value chains are more capable. The pull and push dynamic of the current setting combined with increased individualism and entrepreneurship creates an intense reality where organizations may not be able to fit.
What’s at Play
Global employee engagement surveys show us that our workforce feels increasing alone, disengaged, and unappreciated in their current setting. It is reported by Gallup that only 13% of us are actually engaged in the global workplace⁴. This is concerning as engagement is a key driver of performance. The engagement scores⁴ and workplace statistics² suggest a huge productivity loss across the global network.

Further, studies⁹ report 70% of today’s leadership can no longer manage to live in the moment and 25% of them report not having anyone to turn to in times of stress¹⁰. According to World Health Organization, the number one source of depression, which is already the leading epidemic in the world, by 2030 is going to be work-related stress⁵.

It seems for some of our workforce, this new era is ushering in prosperity and the potential to creatively address some of humanity’s most vexing challenges while for others, it invites feelings of loss of meaning, insecurity, isolation, exhaustion, and fear. We are undoubtedly more interconnected than ever, yet, at the same time, this new world of work is truly stretching our global workforce’s current emotional and mental capacities to its limits.

In this new context, businesses need to serve a purpose broader than just revenue generation, organizations need to ground culture in humanity and leaders need to become more mindful of their way of ‘being’ to effectively influence a growing network of stakeholders.

To this end, it is more imperative now than ever for businesses to consider the potential gaps and opportunities in redefining and preparing a transition to end to end work experience to ignite lasting engagement.
Isolated
Disengaged
Underappreciated

70% of leaders not living in the moment.

25% don’t have anyone to turn to in times of stress.
The Research

In a collaborative research study with Stanford University’s Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE), we have identified critical indicators that make sustainable transformation and growth a possibility for businesses.

We studied a number of enduring – long lasting – organizations across a range of industries and geographies to understand which attributes, mindset, and behaviors were most successful in responding to market dynamics over the years.

It is important for us to note the organizations we researched also reported a number of positive outcomes over their peers such as lowered burnout, reduced absences, higher levels of teamwork, higher safety ratings, and a deeper sense of personal accountability for work performance⁷.

Methodology

To better understand what makes sustainable transformation and growth possible for organizations, we explored the following questions:

- What does it take to build sustainable growth?
- What does it mean to be a leader inside your organization?
- Which knowledge and skill(s) are most successful in driving change?
- Which mindset(s) and behaviour(s) are prominent in leading self and others?
- What sorts of inside-out interventions serve you in creation of environments that draw out the best in others?

We conducted a meta-analysis of existing research thru industry leading institutions (i.e. University of Michigan, McGill University, Harvard Universities, etc.) and surveyed organizations with enduring qualities to collect, analyze and interpret quantitative and qualitative data in reach of reliable trends.

We collected data to draw out large patterns and examined the neural correlates, biological bases, antecedents and effects of intrinsic attributes, drawing from several disciplines including neuroscience, positive psychology, the biology of well-being, organizational psychology, and sociology.
Our findings represent a re-discovery towards core human attributes and specific organizational development experiences that has proven to equip organizations with new capability and leaders with expanded capacity. While some forces of change such as digitalization is a major trend today, our research validates organizations are still going to get most competitive advantage from their people. Given the workplace statistics, it is clear we need to discover new methods of leadership and apply them more systematically to unlock human-based competitive advantages in this era of constant change.

Individuals grounded in self esteem have elevated well being & performance.

Positive climate making practices elevate productivity in organizations.
Overall Findings
We have been able to confirm enduring businesses that make it through unprecedented volatility, ambiguity, and change go way beyond a singular purpose of meeting financial targets. They connect to a sense of purpose, invest in building a culture, reach for a differentiated employee experience and activate energy in leaders to leverage beyond their capital resources.

For these businesses, sustainable growth is as much about the outcome as it is about a way of living.

During our meta-analysis of existing research, we discovered two important pieces of data:

1. When individuals are grounded in a place of self-esteem and engage in trusting behaviours, their wellbeing and performance is elevated (see Table 1),
2. When organizations incorporate certain positive climate making practices, their productivity is elevated.

Through our study, we discovered two factors that enabled organizations to engage in sustainable growth:

1. **Adaptability**: The organizations’ capability to adapt and evolve its processes, procedures, etc.

2. **Resilience**: The individuals’ capacity to bounce back and recover from adversity.

In understanding the specific drivers for adaptability and resilience, we discovered five non-traditional leadership behaviors that lift up an organization and a number of new mindsets in support of these behaviors. Finally, we discovered eight core human attributes that serve as inner motivators to become an enabler or a disabler of positive climate formation.

If and when leaders reach in to pull on the bright side of the named core human attributes and in combination with the mindsets discovered, they exhibit the leadership behaviors listed and drive positive impact on the culture as well as the overall performance of an organization.
In State of Vitality & Virtue

One of the discoveries during the meta-analysis of existing research was that when individuals are invested and have a healthy self-esteem, they are able to build lasting relationships, which in turn has a positive impact on their vitality. A quick snapshot of outcomes experienced when employees are grounded in self-esteem can be found in Table 1 below⁶.

Another discovery during our meta-analysis of existing research was when organizations invest in positive practices that support self-esteem and trust, a number of organizational effectiveness indicators (i.e. innovation, quality, customer retention, turnover) are positively impacted. As an example, inside a single financial services company with over 40 business units, we recorded +79.85% increase in innovation outcomes, +18.95% increase in quality measures, +11.63% increase in customer satisfaction and -6.83% decrease in employee turnover.

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<th>In State of Vitality &amp; Virtue</th>
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<td><strong>50%</strong> higher productivity</td>
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<td><strong>40%</strong> less burnout</td>
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<td><strong>106%</strong> more energy</td>
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<td><strong>74%</strong> less stress</td>
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<td><strong>29%</strong> higher life satisfaction</td>
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Leadership Behaviors
Organizations are made up of individuals whom have a deep relationship to the organizational culture. The way individuals see themselves inside an organization forms the habits of everyday practice and those demonstrated behaviors directly shape the organizational culture.

During our study, we discovered five common leadership behaviors that challenge the way traditional organizations conceptualize the philosophy of leading:

1. Leaders sit in many chairs
Inside these organizations, we found leadership is rarely dedicated to a few at the top. Instead, all people—despite tenure, rank, title or role feel and act as a leader. They feel fully engaged, trusted, and empowered in decision making.

We can no longer afford to think about leadership only in terms of particular roles. We need the full humanity, creativity, empathy and contribution of each person in the organization to shine. Leadership is no longer just power or status—a human centered approach requires us to awaken potential everywhere.

2. Leaders lead themselves
Inside these organizations, we found a leader’s ability to influence a large network of individuals relies heavily on their confirmed levels of self-esteem and their willingness to be more self-aware.

The new world of work is also a new world of focus, self-regulation, and presence. What leaders choose not to do is often as important as what they choose to do. Human centered leadership shifts their focus on self-leadership before leading others.

3. Leaders lead to win minds, hands and hearts
Inside these organizations, we found leaders’ demonstrated capacity to connect to inner wisdom and to access a new and different way of ‘being’ unprecedented.
It’s a well-used phrase that leaders must win over the minds of those they hope to lead, but in the new world of work leaders must also consider that human beings are whole people with many choices over what they do and how they do it and aim to provide holistic experiences beyond rationale and data.

4. Leaders lead for execution and connection
In relating to their role, we found inside these organizations, leaders aim as much for high quality connections as they do for high-quality operational execution.

Most managers begin their careers climbing the ladder of success by getting a lot done. They implicitly develop a managerial style that emphasizes execution because tasks and accomplishments seem central to success. In a world, where competitive advantage comes from empathy and creativity in addition to technical prowess and execution excellence, the best leaders are those who lead with connections at the center of their work.

5. Leaders are purposeful about growth
Inside these organizations, we found leaders leverage their authority to proactively invest in capability and capacity development – both at an individual and collective level.

It is not uncommon for us to discuss ‘growth’ – in numbers, inside our businesses. In a world, where our global workforce is stretched for its mental and emotional capabilities and the change of pace is unprecedented, it becomes critical for those in influencing roles to remain committed to learning, to tap and to unleash the power that’s already within each one of us.
A New Set of Mindsets

As our human ‘being’ is rather complex, inarguably, there are a number of varying factors that go into our behavior day to day. Our deepest assumptions, beliefs serve as guiding principles, providing for us direction and meaning in life. Our perceptions of the world (external and internal) become our filters, helping us make sense of the environment, events, knowledge, past experiences, etc. Mindsets are a collection of beliefs that orient our reactions and tendencies. In framing our realities, they serve a number of cognitive functions. At any given time, they present us with a choice, empower and equip us to shape our reality inside out.

In the following phase of our study, we looked to understand which mindsets were most prominent in supporting the leadership behaviors described above. We discovered the following:

1. **Caring (over control):** This mindset enables individuals to carry a sense of virtuousness towards what they get in contact with and develops an aspiration to become what they would be at their best.

2. **Abundance (over scarcity):** This mindset enables individuals to carry a sense of on-going responsibility and supports development of confidence to better take in, process and utilize information and other resources more wisely.

3. **Wellbeing or Benefit (over welfare):** This mindset makes better relatedness a possibility between individuals and supports formation of context that offers equal opportunity to belonging.

4. **Productive (over defensive):** This mindset enables individuals to keep a future-focused and shared reality and motivates better allocation of resources for solution-building.

5. **Interconnectedness (over self-orientation):** This mindset provides grounding on intersections and raises interest in connections over self-making.

6. **Collective (over individual):** This mindset enables individuals to care equally about group goals and accomplishments over a single, dedicated task.

7. **On-going learning (over fixed):** This mindset supports the process of discovery and injects hope towards growth possibility.

8. **Practice (over action):** This mindset puts emphasis on consistency and time over immediate action and short-term results in reach of continuity.
Core Human Attributes

Since our way of showing up in the world is highly influenced by social attribution⁸, in the next phase of our research, we looked for patterns in attribute – quality of a characteristic - that motivate positive experience and climate formation inside these organizations.

We were able to name **eight core common human attributes** that inform our social perception, choices, organization of goals and our behaviors.

These core human attributes, which we see as the genetic code of organizations include **purpose, courage, foresight, emotional insight, wonder, wisdom, compassion and mastery** (see Table 2).

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<th>TABLE 2. CORE ATTRIBUTES OF HUMAN-CENTERED LEADERSHIP</th>
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It is important to highlight that **these attributes are innate** to all humans regardless of geography, levels of income, education or experience. We all are born into them – the problem is we grow out of them and we need to reverse that.
For each attribute, we discovered one can engage in its bright side or its shadow side, determining one’s individual way of ‘being’, which has a consequative impact on the formation of a particular climate.

Whether exercised consciously or unconsciously, depending on which side (bright or shadow) one pulls on, we learned each attribute supports either the expansion or shrinkage of individual capacities and informs development of specific leadership behaviors. The kind of leadership behaviors then motivate a number of positive or negative outcomes that can enhance or diminish organizational capabilities.

While these attributes might seem “known” in their prominence in the most ancient of world traditions, they are new again in the scientific discoveries about their power in ‘being’ and importance in (1) driving positive relationships, (2) creating effective organizational cultures, and (3) driving bottom-line business impact. Though contemplative and wisdom traditions treat these as values, we also now know that these leadership attributes, when put into practice, have profound effects on the human brain, psychology and physiology.

The key remains in the **intent to choose how to work with these dynamic attributes.**
A Few Examples
Because this paper aims to provide a summary to the research and a primary introduction to our collective experience in supporting organization development activities, we consciously choose to provide only two examples of the why, what and how of the attributes below.

Purpose
Purpose is the first core attribute mentioned in our research.

A purpose is a core belief or an aspiration as to what we do or why we exist in the first place. In an individual and organizational context, purpose may be thought of as an understanding for the WHY (of a behaviour or a situation) and/or a specific mission in service.

In scientific terms, purpose is defined as a ‘meaning-making’ experience embodying significance and sense-making.

There are three facets to purpose:

1. to have significance beyond the trivial or momentary,
2. to have purposeful core aims and aspirations,
3. to comprehend one’s life as coherent and making sense.

In the art of leading, purpose is key because when we know our purpose, we are able to align all of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ accordingly. It embodies a core effort or an intrinsic motivation that helps us overcome common ‘inertia’ and serves as an existential reason for ‘being’, helping us better make sense of our environment.

Purpose also awakens the subtleties of our inner humanity. By allowing ourselves to see a ‘reality’ beyond our own being, it presents us with a choice in each moment, injecting in our minds the possibility of achievement and in our hearts hope; hence, supporting courage (another attribute).
Through our study, we have been able to validate that in environments, where leaders were reportedly connected to a purpose – meaning leaders knew about their personal life mission and could put it to use effectively through their role – and from there, they could connect their leadership mission to the company vision, they were able to narrate inspiring stories to ground employees in a specific mission. As a result, organizations experienced better meaning formation as a whole.

We also found the opposite to be true in lack of purpose.

In those environments, where leaders were reported to be lacking a clear purpose – either leaders didn’t know/understand or they couldn’t connect to their life mission, they struggled to bring that mission to life. They were unable to narrate stories of inspiration consistently and were ineffective in grounding employees in a specific mission. Therefore, organizations had a harder time experiencing inspiration and meaning formation as a whole. Instead, we recorded a sense of lacking in the climate (see Table 3).
Wonder

Wonder is another core attribute mentioned in our research.

Wonder is a sense of curiosity and connectedness presented in a given moment. In an individual and organizational context, wonder may be thought of as having a beginners’ mind to consider options and to build a valence experience.

In scientific terms, wonder denotes the ability to find, recognize, and take pleasure in the existence of something.

There are three facets to wonder:

1. the ability to find, recognize, and take pleasure in the existence of goodness in the physical and social worlds,
2. an active engagement with and responsiveness to artistic, moral, and natural beauty including the excellence, skills, and talents of others,
3. an active responsiveness through both cognition and emotion, engagement from both mind and heart.

In practical terms, wonder may be considered as the curiosity or an appreciation and expression of awe for vastness, moral excellence, beauty and social skill.

We have been able to validate in our research that inside environments where leaders reportedly exercising wonder – keeping an openness in mind, taking in and appreciating beauty all around, employees marked their curiosity expand. For example, employees recorded their mind being more active than passive, living more “in the moment,” reaching towards relevant facts and feelings, searching for feedback.
We discovered another benefit to exercising wonder. When leaders engaged in a sense of awe, we recorded a physical experience in a shrink of ego. In this state, we found people not only felt happier and their wellbeing got elevated, they became more invested in a bigger good at the same time.

As a result, the organization experienced a raised orientation toward continued discovery and learning.

Once again, we also found the opposite to be true in lack of wonder.

Where leaders were reportedly not exercising wonder, we found employees recorded a particular attitude develop. They marked behaviors associated with people feeling validated in having the right answer for everything, acting on assumptions, behaving unaware of biases, etc. As a result, organizations experienced more cynicism in context and the process of creativity has come to a stop (see Table 4).
In approaching the implementation of these insights through our work, we leverage some core theory of change ideas including the following:

**Organizations are fundamentally human (living) systems.**
Individuals inside an organization can be considered as active ‘cells’ and teams as ‘connective tissues’ grouped together to perform specific tasks. By taking a system’s approach we enable organizations to reconnect to their core for ‘being’ and unlock the full potential for renewed and sustained success.

**Emotions are at the center of our cultures.**
Even though emotions have been traditionally pushed out of business, we find them essential to distinguish individual and collective values and initiate content themes espoused by employees to inspire collective behavior. As culture consists of patterns of meanings that link these manifestations together, it is imperative that we focus on both the attitudes and attributes that trigger particular emotions, which in time create behavior change for individuals.

**Change can be initiated from top and bottom**
Companies are often faced with a dilemma about whether the change initiatives must be driven from the top or they should be organic from the bottom up; we believe there needs to be deliberate effort to bring two together.
“If the only tool we have ultimately to use is our lives, so we use it in the way we can by choosing a way to live that will demonstrate the way we feel and the way we know.”

Hillary Rodham Clinton
THE PROGRAM

Dependent on the organization’s need, we offer a customizable program aimed at discovering a new way of ‘being’, ‘relating’ and new ways of ‘doing’ the work of leadership in 21st century organizations.

The list of activities we offer are purposefully designed to take participants out of their daily world, reconnect to self and others and rediscover the human motives beneath their conscious and unconscious state(s):

**Experiential learning and interactive sessions with a mix of styles of information delivery and self-mastery practices**

**Evidence-based learning that is grounded on the latest research in:**
- Neuroscience
- Bio-physiology of compassion and well-being
- Positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship
- Organizational behaviour and leadership development

**Highly engaging and curated to present a healthy mix of theory & practice:**
- Pragmatic exploration of research
- Real-time skill building
- Deep connections with others

During content development (for example, in helping organizations rethink leadership strategy or culture transformation), we provide a blend of creative, interactive and reflective learning modalities that reinforce and extend beyond traditional, instructor-led practices.

Further, to best support sustainability and scalability, we design for methods of delivery that are highly inclusive, flexible, scalable and measurable.
Key Experiences
There are a number of key experiences we provide uncovering attributes that takes us to self-awareness, self-exploration, self-mastery and connection learning the research behind these concepts.

A sample of key exercises include; but not limited to:

- Rethinking leadership story
- Uncovering leadership reality
- Deepening emotional insight
- Activating empathy (on the road to compassion)
- Understanding culture formation
- Architecting organizational structure (roles, networks, routines, etc.)

Please note some of the experiences may require a deep level of connection to thoughts, beliefs and discovery of unconscious biases, at times triggering unexpected emotion.

Benefits
Throughout our academic and practical work, we hold a large, cross-boundary, relevant and time-critical vision of making work a more human experience.

Our mission hinges on building transformative leadership skills that will support design and development of environments that inspire individual and collective thriving. As businesses look to prepare their leaders for the future and rethink employee experience, we are invested in helping them focus on a number of individual and organizational outcomes.

Embodying these research insights as part of business and people strategy formation bring upon the following benefits:
Individual outcomes:
Preparing leaders to take on more complex roles, including equipping leaders:
   • With knowledge and skill necessary to expand inner and outer capacity,
   • To become recognized as role models of individual “growth” across the world,

Preparing leaders to innovate in high-pace, volatile and ambiguous environments, including equipping leaders:
   • With a refined understanding of a new era of leadership and how it differs from previous eras,
   • To become recognized as masters of unlocking others’ potential across the world,
   • To deliver social impact in conjunction with business value creation,

Preparing leaders to become leaders of change, including equipping leaders:
   • With increased self-awareness as a leader and the connection of self to the system,
   • With practices for self and other-oriented renewal and thriving,
   • With practices and tools necessary for mastering effective change and culture transformations.

Business outcomes:
Organization is recognized as ‘distinguished’ place for leadership development,

Organization is recognized as ‘exceptional’ and ‘timeless’ in driving value in a highly volatile, ambiguous environment of constant change and in providing competitive advantage.
CONCLUSION

To transform into agile 21st century organizations, businesses must grow capabilities, gain capacity while also building a profound legacy of better good. We know sustainable change is not external nor normative; instead, it requires a delicate balance with high degrees of agility and starts with continuous inner development of the leaders.

We visualize work environments of authenticity, free of apathy, allowing people the necessary space and independence to remain connected to their humanities. Through all of our culture transformation, leadership development, employee empowerment practice efforts, we want to engage new age leaders in a regenerative process towards re-envisioning the future and building constructive energy towards making of work experiences that emphasize:

**Self-acceptance**, leading to more holistic human experiences, energy creation, and connection,

**Unconditional love**, leading to synergy, respectful and empathic co-existence, and better sponsorship,

**Better distribution of power**, leading to equity, equality, safety, and co-ownership through greater clarity,

**Practice of white space**, leading to successful reflection, calibration, renewal, and increased creativity.

Transformation is about awakening consciousness, whereas transcendence is about reconnecting to power inside. As business and organizations progress in their path to sustainable growth, we believe not only a human transformation is possible, it will serve as a key differentiator for success.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following people, all of whom participated in the theory formation, research conduction, business sponsorship, design and content development of our program and the formation of movement towards ‘Human Centered Leadership’.

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Professor of Medical Neurophysiology

**Monica Worline**  
Work Research Scientist and Co-Director, CCARE

**Emma Seppälä**  
Science Director, CCARE and Faculty Director, Yale School of Management

**Aslı Aker**  
Global Leadership and Organizational Development Expert

**Carol Bubar**  
Global Strategy Expert and COO, SESIL PIR Consulting GmbH

**Sesil Pir**  
Organizational Psychologist and CEO, SESIL PIR Consulting GmbH
ABOUT PARTNERSHIP

Stanford University’s Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) is recognized as one of the world’s leading centers for research and education focused on the neuroscience and physiology of compassion, altruism, empathy, and other essential qualities of human social connection. Founded in 2008, CCARE has developed evidence-based curriculum and compassion training for individuals as well as conducting research and teaching focused on these qualities in both leadership and organizational development. The mission of CCARE at Stanford University is to drive research and practice related to empathy and positive qualities of the human mind that have been under-emphasized in traditional neuroscientific research. Within this mandate, CCARE investigates methods for cultivating compassion and promoting empathy and altruism within individuals and institutions across society, employing a combination of rigorous research, scientific collaborations, public awareness events, educational endeavors, business partnerships, and academic conferences.

SESIL PIR Consulting GmbH is a boutique firm passionate about creating fulfilling experiences for every member of the global workforce. Since founded in 2015, it has been serving organizations of all sizes across a variety of sectors and disciplines and collecting stellar references, challenging the status quo of work and workplaces. We are proud to share that its growth has not gone unnoticed – its founder, Sesil Pir, has been recognized in 2017 as one of the EU 40 Young Leaders Under 40 and in 2018 as one of the 101 Employee Engagement influencers worldwide. To compliment on our scope, the company has established a non-profit sub-entity (Whirling Chief) and has been sponsoring valued collaborations with top academic and research institutions around the world in the focus areas of leadership, employee experience and the future of work.

In 2017, CCARE and SESIL PIR Consulting GmbH formalized a partnership to study and teach new approaches to developing leadership.
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