

# **Storytelling from the authentic leader of High Speed 2 (HS2) Ltd. infrastructure megaproject in the United Kingdom**

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## **Abstract**

Storytelling is an important means of making sense of shared experiences and sharing stories is an essential part of organising. Some stories are concerned with specific events or people, while others take a form of biographies. Stories are informed by personal experiences providing the listener with the opportunity to understand the life world of the storyteller. Stories and storytelling are the means of connecting past experiences with present and future aspirations and imaginings. This book chapter shares a life story told by Mark Thurston, the authentic leader, the Chief Executive Officer of High Speed 2 (HS2) Ltd., the UK's infrastructure megaproject. From the life story interview with Mark, we learned that personal values and authenticity are important parts of establishing self-identity of megaproject leaders and associated organisational identities. Stories and storytelling with a sense of humour are important parts of personal and organisational life.

*Keywords:* Authentic, Identity, Leader, Self-identity, Stories, Storytelling

## Introduction

Stories are important means of meaning making and sharing stories is an essential part of organisational life. Some stories are concerned with specific events or people, while others take a form of biographies. This book chapter shares a life story told by Mark Thurston Chief Executive Officer of High Speed 2 (HS2) Ltd. the UK's infrastructure megaproject. Our choice is built upon the fact that Mark is recognised as a very experienced leader in the UK infrastructure sector who has worked across a number of different projects in different organisations. High Speed 2 (HS2) is a high-speed railway infrastructure project to deliver a railway from London to Birmingham, the East Midlands, Leeds and Manchester in the United Kingdom. It is scheduled to open in phases between 2026 and 2033.

Megaprojects are unique, temporary special purpose organisations, where stakeholders involved tend to change their positions across megaprojects. The majority of megaprojects operate in a context of collaborative work between different organisations involved in their initiation, delivery and operation. The fundamental characteristics of megaprojects are: (i) bespoke or created for a specific purpose; (ii) one-off - specific end date and budget agreed, but usually long life-span throughout which managers and agreed parameters (cost, time) keep changing; at the end megaproject members separate and may or may not work together on subsequent megaprojects; (iii) alliance contracting - collaborative framework, co-creative process which promotes innovation, openness, trust, etc.; (iv) substantial risks, e.g. financial, operational, reputational, innovation and uncertainties; and (v) with different organisational cultures merging together, e.g. owners, system integrators and suppliers, which shape learning practices (Davies et al., 2017ab; Sergeeva & Roehrich, 2018).

First, we provide an overview of the meaning of stories and storytelling in organisations. We draw upon organisation studies which focus on unpacking the role of stories and storytelling in constructing identities. In the following section we critically review the megaproject leadership literature which focus on the role of stories and storytelling. Our methodological approach is then outlined, followed by the brief description of the selected megaproject case study and details on the data collection

and analysis. We present the findings in the form of a life journey experience sharing the insights from the life story interview. We discuss the findings against the reviewed literature and new relevant literature which provide explanation to the empirical data. In conclusion, we summarise the key lessons learned from the life story interview and suggest future research directions.

## **Stories and storytelling in organising**

Storytelling has a long history within the study of organising, and continues to attract interest among academics and practitioners (Boje, 1991, 2001; Gabriel, 1995, 2000, 2004). The contribution of “storytelling organization” research (Boje, 2008) is in understanding the sensemaking that takes place in pragmatic ways between storytellers and their audiences. Stories are informed by personal experiences providing the listener with the opportunity to understand the life world of the storyteller. Stories are told from the point of view of the storyteller or another individual or group. They are frequently considered as being an integral part of organising (Weick et al., 2005) and the means of connecting past experiences, present and future aspirations. Stories imply an ability to make sense of past memories, respond to new experiences in the present time and to use what has been learned in ongoing processes that shape future aspirations and imaginings.

Storytelling provides a means of making sense of shared experiences and sharing stories is an essential part of organisations. Storytelling is frequently seen as a useful soft skill that is especially valuable for those practitioners in senior leadership positions (Denning, 2011). Storytelling is understood as a dynamic process that is continuously (re)created through the elaboration, contestation and exchange of stories. Storytelling plays an essential role in the social construction of self-identities and informal roles of people themselves and in the eyes of others (Alvesson et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), as well as of organisational identities and projecting images to others (Alvesson & Robertson, 2015). Vaara and Tienary (2011, p. 370) define stories as “fragments of organizational discourse that construct identities and interests in time and space”. By telling stories individuals seek to bolster their identities, both in the eyes of themselves and others (Alvesson et al., 2008; Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Brown, 2015). Stories are inherently social and emotional in the way people may seek empathy and understanding from others when construct identities (Lord & Hall, 2005).

Self-identity often crucially hinges upon the roles which individuals ascribe to themselves (Ashforth, 2001; Brown, 2019). Järventie-Thesleff and Tienari (2016) focus on the way people in organisations engage in transitions within and between informal roles, and the implications of these transitions for their self-identities.

In this chapter we define storytelling as an activity of telling and sharing stories about personal experiences, life events and situations. We distinguish between storytelling/stories and narration/narratives, arguing that the first is more personalised, entertaining, and emotional in nature, whereas the latter is more towards coherence, stability and performative intent (Dailey & Browning, 2014; Vaara et al., 2016). Both narrating and storytelling are important parts of organisational and personal life. In this chapter we focus on the stories and storytelling in the context of megaproject leadership.

## **Stories and storytelling in megaproject leadership**

There is an emerging research into megaproject leadership and exploring the nature and the role of stories and storytelling. An early contribution of Veenswijk and Berendse (2008) is focused on project stories that provide organisational members with space to make sense and contest the new managerial initiatives and value systems imposed upon them. They argue that specific projects consist of several micro stories through which particular project developments are being discussed, contested and recounted. Veenswijk and Berendse (2008) provide analysis of project narratives and stories to encourage understanding of the social and politicised nature of organisational change processes. “We argue that this narrative is by nature ambiguous and needs to be interpreted by individuals in their day-to-day actions within. This results in the development of micro stories, which actors use to cope with the challenges that the dominant narrative creates.” (Veenswijk & Berendse, 2008, p. 81). Whilst this contribution lacks clarity in terms of theoretical framework adopted on narratives, Veenswijk and Berendse (2008) are among the first who distinguished between dominant, performative narratives and more personalized stories of everyday individual experiences in projects. In this chapter we focus on the latter.

Havermans et al. (2015) draw upon the narrative theory, and place emphasis on language at the very centre of project organising. They build upon the narrative theory

developed by Boje et al. (2004) to argue that language is constitutive of organisational reality rather than merely representative. According to Havermans et al. (2015, p. 974) “narratives are defined as any spoken or written account of connected events. Project leaders’ narratives will shape reactions to a problem. For example, whether a leader categorizes an event as an opportunity or a threat influences how others respond.” We would argue that it is the stories that are about everyday experiences and events, and leaders continuously articulate both narratives and stories for different purposes and audiences.

Enninga and van der Lugt (2016) investigate the role of narratives/stories play in leading an innovation project and the ways an innovation project leader uses stories in practice. They refer to narratives and stories interchangeably, and focusing on three different aspects: the stories, storytelling and storymaking. According to Enninga and van der Lugt (2016, p. 105) stories “entertain, explain, inspire, educate, convince, generate and sustain meaning (or undermine and destroy it), stimulate imagination, offer reassurance, justify, inform, advise, and warn”. Out of 15 stories elicited by the authors, four were fiction and 11 nonfiction stories using metaphors and analogies. They found ten retrospective stories about “what happened” and five stories that depicted the future and “what could be”. We are generally in agreement with the definition of stories, but also clarify the differences between narratives and stories.

Sankaran (2018) glean leadership lessons of megaproject managers through the life stories of four selected managers from two contemporary and two landmark megaprojects. Narrative inquiry approach using life histories published as books or in book chapters were used as main source of data. Some literature and publicly available data were also used to reinforce the findings from these life stories. Common strategies used by all megaproject managers were identified: selecting the right people and building their capability; building trust with stakeholders; dealing with institutional power and politics effectively; and having the courage to innovate. In this chapter we also focus on life story of the megaproject leader and learn from his experiences and lessons learned.

## **Methodology**

In consistence with previous interpretive studies on storytelling (Brown et al., 2008; Kembaren et al., 2014), case study approach has been adopted which includes a life-story interview of the CEO of the selected High Speed 2 (HS2) Ltd. megaproject and publicly available materials about this megaproject. The rationale for the story life interview method is that it enables the interviewee to reflect on personal and working experiences, life events and share stories with the interviewers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2001). We employed storytelling to engage with a leader of a megaproject based on a common type of qualitative research (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). By using life-story interview, the researcher can reach areas of socially constructed reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, utilising other methods (McLean et al., 2016). Of particular note is that identity work is often revealed in career stories through which leaders seek to make sense of their career progression and share lessons learned (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Such stories can yield important insights into how leaders relate to individual and organisational identities and images and the actions they take. Their inherently retrospective nature helps provide insights into how changing contextual conditions might consolidate leaders' sense of identity throughout the course of their careers.

Both authors have conducted the life-story interview with Mark Thurston – the Chief Executive Office of HS2. The interview lasted just over an hour. The authors decided to interview Mark because he is perceived as a well-known leader in the UK infrastructure sector with experience of leading large project-based firms and megaprojects. Both authors have established professional relationships with Mark through their research and have known Mark for a number of years, and have conducted interviews with him few times in the past for different research projects. During the interview, Mark was asked to share his experiences and life story about how he makes sense of the past, present and envisioned the future, and lessons learned about leading the HS2 megaproject.

### **High Speed Two (HS2) Ltd. megaproject**

High Speed 2 (HS2) Ltd. is a high-speed railway funded as a £55.7billion infrastructure project to deliver a railway from London to Birmingham, the East Midlands, Leeds and Manchester in the United Kingdom. It is scheduled to open in phases between 2026

and 2033. High-speed trains will travel up to 360 km/h (225 mph) on 3400 miles (550 km) of track. HS2 will be the second high-speed rail line in the UK, the first being High Speed 1 (HS1) which connected London to the Channel Tunnel. HS2 trains will serve over 25 stations connecting 30 mln people. The key benefits proposed by HS2 organisation are: “HS2 will form the backbone of our rail network”; “HS2 will directly connect 8 out of 10 of Britain’s largest cities”; “HS2 is an investment in Britain’s future”; “HS2 will create 30,000 jobs”; “Our design will put people first”; “HS2 will treat local communities with respect”; “The environment”; “HS2 will be a catalyst for economic growth”.

## **Life story of Mark Thurston – The CEO of High Speed Two (HS2) megaproject**

### ***Childhood and values***

Mark was born and raised in a working-class family in South London, England. His mother was driven to help Mark and his brother gain entry to the local boys grammar school –a state-funded school which selects pupils who demonstrate particular academic ability. Gaining entry to a grammar school was the first “tipping point” in Mark’s life, which helped to shape some of the values that remained with him later in life.

The concept of “family” has remained a guiding value to Mark during his professional career as well. The word family not as the noun but as an adjective that describes the fact that his mind-set as open, inclusive, caring, to naturally be collegiate, to think about others as much as you might think about yourself, if not more, invest in others as well as yourself. Mark described his personality as an extrovert with natural preference to be open in terms of thinking and behaviour:

“My firm belief is that people work for people, and they want to feel part of something. There is an almost emotional sense of reward and good feeling that comes from being part of something that people enjoy. In my experience, if you can find people with a shared outlook you can then spread that ethos. At HS2 I’ve tried to spread that way of thinking about our project, that people are going to follow us and be advocates for our culture and values - the way we do things. If that happens then you’ve got a chance

of changing and aligning a whole sector, creating that sense of purpose behind one single endeavour or mission. We've spent some time identifying that sense of family in the organisation, which has always been very strong in me.”

All through Mark's 20s, he played football and one of his takeaways and reflections from that time is that success is all about the team effort. As captain his focus was on trying to get the best out of everyone on the team, rather than individual glory. It was not about how he played, but it was about how the team played together. As Mark reflected:

“Sport played an important part of my early life and shaped me a lot because it was all about teamwork. I don't play football anymore but I love playing golf now. I'm at my happiest when playing as part of a team in golf because I love the camaraderie and the team spirit. It's always nice to go toe to toe in golf and beat someone individually, but that's not as much fun as being in the team. That's why the Ryder Cup's is such an exciting event to watch, it captures the imagination of golf followers more than say the British Open or the US Open because the team dynamic is just so powerful.”

Although trained as an engineer, Mark felt his future lay in a different direction during his late 20s. Mark became more interested in project management, recognising his strength in working with people and the leadership of teams – echoing his love of team sports. From his perspective, megaproject leadership is actually about achieving success through others, rather than what you do on your own. He feels much more comfortable in a space where he is trying to get others to come together to achieve something collectively, rather than what he has done individually.

During his time at grammar school, Mark felt stretched and rewarded. He discovered that he was good at maths, physics and art. His brother is a graphic designer, running his own business. Mark felt drawn into engineering or construction and his uncle's advice at the time was not to go into construction. His decision was to go into engineering because of the new and growing technologies emerging in electronics and computers. Mark's uncle was trained as a heating and ventilation engineer who went on to work for Mace, the construction-contracting firm in the UK.

### ***Middle age and career path***



Mark chose not go to University; instead, he completed an apprenticeship at Transport for London and as an electrical technician. During his four-year apprenticeship, Mark did a HNC in Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Following this Mark became a Maintenance Technician, which involved mostly shift work responding to faults on communications systems (e.g. CCTV, Public Address Systems, Train Radio and Telephone networks). Mark reflects on how these practical, hands-on skills shaped his systematic way of thinking in the organisational and the project management context, naturally breaking down complex situations into their component parts intuitively. He worked with some exceptional colleagues who helped him develop good habits such as keeping a notebook, making a record, having manuals and drawings and schematics. Mark still carries around a notebook with him today and takes notes and makes reminders. After nearly two years as a maintenance technician Mark pursued an opportunity to move to what was then the drawing office. During this phase of his career, in his mid to late 20s, Mark realised that actually engineering was not quite for him. And if he has one regret about those first ten-fifteen years of his career is he did not stick with engineering long enough to get chartered. He could go back and get it now but he questions the value of it. Mark transitioned at the end of his 20s and early 30s into project management. He looked for a move away from Transport for London and took a risk thinking: "I wanted to do something that felt very alien, such as going to work in a geography or a city that I didn't know". Mark moved to KBR in Birmingham. Working away from home was a very maturing exercise for him. Mark's wife, Amanda, played an important role in the decision, supporting him to make this move. At the time Amanda was pregnant with their first child Amelia and they completed their family with their daughter Isabelle a few years later.

### ***Leading a megaproject***

Mark came back to London after nearly 2 years and worked in various different places including Railtrack, Metronet, The Nichols Group, London Olympics, Crossrail and CH2M Hill before becoming the CEO of HS2. This move away from Transport for London set his career on a different trajectory, and the subsequent moves during the next 10 years were mostly unplanned. Mark has completed distance learning Master degree in Engineering Management from Loughborough. Mark has reflected on his experience over this period:

“It was not particularly planned, but I have to say the diversity of company, the diversity of opportunity, the diversity of mentors and role models, the diversity of the work I was responsible for and the people I was leading have all helped shape me and had a bearing on where I find myself today”.

“One of the things I often say is there are much smarter people than me, but I learn quick and I adapt quickly, and this has become an acquired skill... One of the things that I’ve never forgotten though is the way I was brought up. It’s about being respectful and kind and not taking yourself too seriously; having the humility and sense of humour to help you to adapt to different circumstances”.

Mark sees himself as an authentic leader who is true to himself. He emphasises his learning journey and experiences through the diversity of different jobs he has taken throughout his career, working with different people in different environments. He also believes that personality of key individuals are critical to managing successful businesses. Mark sees himself as trustworthy and credible at both a personal and professional level, and the organisation he now leads has become a sort of “extension” of himself. Mark hopes that his personality will be associated with HS2: “You have to realise early on that your persona, your personality, your DNA will become associated with HS2”. His vision is that *“HS2 needs to become a trusted and credible organisation.”* Leading a project like HS2 is a dynamic process where people have to adapt as it goes through various stages in its life cycle. Mark emphasises the notion of “teams of teams” and he is actively engaging the senior leaders at HS2 on this concept:

“We want this to become a company that we can be proud of, that is trusted and credible, and that’s going to deliver something that is unprecedented in living memory. We’ve all got to look after each other and be prepared to go that extra mile and back each other up, but it requires us all to be absolutely committed to the task and that is a leadership challenge that we share.”

“I think, as a CEO or a leader, you need to be prepared not just to engage the next level down, but to speak to all your people across the whole organisation to understand them and relate to them.”

In the above quotation there is a demonstration of Mark’s vision for building an

organisational identity of HS2 as a “trusted” and “credible” organisation. His role is to share the vision among the team by communicating to people. Mark places emphasis on storytelling as an important means of his leadership role. Stories and storytelling have an important element of humour and entertainment. Mark often uses humour, either some self-effacing comment, or by drawing attention to the funny side of a serious issue, to ease tension or lighten the mood in what is often a very serious discussion. His experience of this, when done effectively, can help people be more relaxed, which in turn can make them more effective and impactful.

Mark has shared his personal story when he became the CEO of HS2:

“I remember at Christmas of end of 2016, I was just turning 50, sitting with my brother at my 50<sup>th</sup> dinner and then talking about this job, and my final interview was in two weeks’ time and he asked: ‘Are you going to go for it?’ I said: ‘Well, I’m going have the final interview’. He said: ‘Do you want it?’ I said: ‘Well, I think so’, and he said: ‘But, Mark, that’s a massive job, that’s a big deal isn’t it?’ I said: ‘Oh yeah, you’re right, it’s a monster, it’s enormous’. So he said: ‘Why would you want it then?’ I said: ‘Steve, someone’s got to do it, and they might just think I’m the best person for it and if they think and the Chairman thinks I’m the best person for it, then why wouldn’t I do it? It could change my life’. And soon after I got it, I went to an event at the London Transport Museum and a very senior and well known executive from the rail industry saw me and he said: ‘Mark, I was delighted to see you got the job, it was an inspired decision. It will change your career. The last time we built a railway was, as you know, in Victorian times. If you make a success of this, you’re going down in history, right, this is profound’.”

Although it was widely accepted that there is only a small pool of talent with the personal and professional qualities to lead a megaproject, Mark was informed that he was selected for the job. There is a high expectation about what HS2 is going to do for the UK, and Mark has the responsibility and privilege of leading the organisation that has got to make that happen:

“It is not about what I or High Speed 2 Limited do, this is a national endeavour, this is the biggest thing the country has done in a generation. If you think about the mobilisation of people, resources, money, political will, community spirit, the country’s

not come together on something of this size and complexity since we rebuilt our country after the second world war.”

Mark and his chief of staff work closely with the company secretariat function on agendas, as this drives the conversation closer to their broader objectives. Time management is the important skill that Mark is exercising very well in leading the HS2 megaproject:

“The thing that I get most exercised about is my time. I try to manage it in 20-30 minute slots, as my time is the one thing I’ve got at my disposal. I am very disciplined about how I allocate my time because that is when I can have impact, whether it is with our staff, whether it is making the key decision, whether it is with stakeholders; I’ve become very aware of the power that comes with a role like this and the impact you can have. I say to myself: Am I going to have impact today? Am I going to make a difference somewhere?”

From the above quotation we can learn the need to pay careful attention to self-organising and managing time wisely, understanding and focusing on impactful activities when leading the megaproject. Mark has further reinforced storytelling and a sense of humour as important parts of his personal and professional roles:

“We do values moments at the beginning of every meeting. So, I’ll often ask who’s going to do the values moment today? And it’s hard to do for some people as it’s often quite personal and we bring values to life because we talk about them. You can often tell when people are struggling with it, those more introverted or the people that are uncomfortable talking about themselves, so some people prepare in advance or do some research online with their values moments. It’s much easier for them to talk to something in the abstract or in the third person than talk about themselves. But what’s important is this idea that as we start to tell stories, we get to know each other more, the authenticity of the individuals become more apparent.”

Mark explained that they consciously rotate who does the values moments, so all members of the senior team get to “open up” on a particular subject that they feel comfortable talking about.

Through stories and storytelling, there is a better understanding of the personality and authenticity of individuals. Some people are better than others at telling stories; stories about themselves or other people and life events and experiences. By telling and sharing stories people get to know each other better. In the context of temporary organisations, it becomes even more important.

Mark sees himself as honest and authentic leader:

“I see myself as authentic; I don’t pretend to be something I’m not. Of course I adapt, there’s a style that you adapt for different circumstances, but in every circumstance, I’m authentic, I can’t pretend. So if I engage with the Secretary of State or an Apprentice, or yesterday with the Chief Executive of a City Council, I’ll be authentic. I’m not pretending, I’m not masquerading, I’m not doing it for effect, and although my style might be different for a different set of circumstances, still it’s authentic leadership.”

Mark has shared another story about the interview question he got when was applying for the role of the CEO of HS2, and his lessons learned:

“When I had my interview, one of the Board members who was on the panel, he said to me: Mark, how do you get work life balance? What are your coping strategies? How do you deal with the pressure of a job like this? And I said, Well I know what the job is, and I can imagine it’s tough and I take what I do very seriously. I’m serious about this stuff, this is important work, I care about what I do. What I don’t do is take myself too seriously, making that distinction by taking what you do very seriously, but not taking yourself too seriously, makes it easier to relieve that pressure and not take it personally when you’re in the media or, when people want to write stories about you in books...”

## **Discussion**

Authenticity of Mark is evident through his personalised and reflective life stories. Mark was seemingly honest and genuine in recognising the context within which he operates and the ways he is leading a major UK infrastructure project. Authentic leadership continues to attract attention among academics and practitioners (Avolio et

al., 2004; Avolio & Garner, 2005; Cooper et al., 2005; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2013). It is commonly understood that authentic leaders are “original”, “real” and “true to themselves”. The ways leaders are being true to themselves are central aspects of authentic leadership. It is of course tricky, if not impossible, to know what is the “true” or “real” self (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Being “true” to oneself calls to draw on the very essence of self-identities, values, beliefs, principles and morals. Leaders often struggle with authenticity for various reasons (Ibarra, 2015). Whilst they are expected to construct a clear and firm sense of self to make everybody in the organisation to buy-in and sustain a vision; at the same time, self-identities are multiple, fluid and dynamic, and socially constructed through unique, personalised stories (Alvesson, 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The ways leaders socially construct and present themselves – not just as executives but as people with their personal interests and stories – has become an important aspect of authentic leadership. The specific theoretical contribution of the book chapter lies in understanding authentic leader identity through personalised stories. It is reflective stories of personal experiences and life incidents with an essential sense of genuineness which makes megaproject leaders authentic. Top executives of course need consistent strategic narratives, but it is humanistic stories constructed to themselves and others which are at the core of authenticity.

It is commonly accepted that one of the key distinguishing characteristics of authentic leaders is that they are anchored by their own deep sense of self (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2003). They are self-aware about who they are, what they believe, what their values are and they can act upon these beliefs and values. The theoretical foundations for a number of existing studies on authentic leadership and followership development are grounded in the literature on the self and identity. Personal identity concerns the meanings that individuals reflexively attach which are developed through processes of social interactions (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brown, 2015, 2019). This book chapter following this stance of work, resting on the theoretical position that authentic leader is a socially constructed identity that can be explored based in individual perceptions of leaders’ own selves (Peterson, 2005). A life-story is at the core of authentic leadership. Life-stories express the storytellers’ identities which are products of life experiences.

CEOs of construction/infrastructure megaprojects operate in the context of projects, programs and portfolios - innovative and uncertain adventures involving complex problems solving (Morris, 2013; Winch, 2010). At the same time, these industries are often perceived as inherently conservative with institutionalised practices which are slow to change; and largely male-dominant. These industries provide an intriguing context to explore authenticity struggles and paradoxes.

We have found a strong connection between the self-identity of the leader and the organisational identity. It is evident through the ways that Mark Thurston envisions that his self-identity will be associated with the HS2's organisational identity. We hence argue that there is a strong connectivity between the self-identities of CEO of megaprojects and their organisational identities. It is not surprising given that the role of CEO is the highest position in the organisation who shapes its culture and overall performance.

## **Conclusions**

Stories and storytelling play important roles in the context of organisational life. This chapter shares a life story of Mark Thurston, the CEO of the HS2 Ltd., who sees himself as an authentic leader with strong sense of values with the broader audiences. Leading a megaproject is a very challenging and exciting task and experience. The key lessons learned from Mark in leading HS2 are:

- Personal family values
- Authenticity of leadership
- The importance of stories and storytelling, and a sense of humour
- Constructing self-identity and organisational identity, and the alignment between them
- Maintaining work life balance

Further research could go deeper into exploring self-identities and informal roles of megaproject leaders and associated organisational identities, as well as key processes associated with leading a megaproject.

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