

**KOSTIANTYN
KOSHELENKO**

MANAGEMENT IN TIMES OF WAR

**Leadership Examples from Ukraine's
Government and Private Sector**



Ultimate Beneficiary Publishing
Kyiv, Ukraine 2024

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This is not just a book about dealing with a full-scale invasion of a country. It's an in-depth analysis of how to maintain productivity, develop a team, and stay true to your values when the outside world is in chaos.

The author shares his own experience and also involves Ukrainian and foreign top managers to share their lessons learned during crisis situations. From sports to social entrepreneurship, from engaging with international partners to public engagement, this book will provide you with the tools and strategies to be resilient and move forward with confidence, regardless of circumstances at their most critical.

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This book is dedicated to my wife Olga and my children, Stanislav and Victoria – the source of my inspiration and support.

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FROM THE AUTHOR

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

As you came across this book, it stood among numerous notable management guides. Some newly published; others time-honored classics. Each reflects a desire for wisdom gleaned from others' journeys, a shortcut to personal experience. They result from a quest to align thoughts with those who've weathered similar storms, driven by the competition of ideas, insights, and perspectives on a subject crucial to humanity – effective management, our species' privilege and burden.

Effective management – of processes, people, organizations – is the life force of any venture, from start-ups to multinational corporations, from guiding public initiatives to leading national and global reforms. Effective management can make the difference between resounding success and devastating failure. It shapes our journey's quality, which often carries as much importance as the destination.

In 2023, LinkedIn's analysis highlighted effective management as a key skill sought by employers worldwide.¹ This emphasizes the importance of management skills in all work areas. For example, project management is essential for the successful completion of projects. It ensures they are done on time, within budget, and with quality, especially in diverse and multifunctional teams.

The 2023

Most In-Demand Skills

1. Management
2. Communication
3. Customer service
4. Leadership
5. Sales
6. Project management
7. Research
8. Analytical skills
9. Marketing
10. Teamwork

LinkedIn Learning

Interestingly, the research also reveals that marketing is no longer an isolated role but a cross-functional skill of paramount importance for sales specialists, HR professionals, and project/program managers. Marketing, in essence, is the art of standing out, whether through innovative solutions, compelling presentations, or attracting top-notch talent.

Management is a complex field requiring a deep understanding and competency in a wide range of areas. In war, this complexity only grows.

1 Jen Dewar
"The Most In-Demand Skills for 2023"



When discussing war, our thoughts instinctively gravitate towards combat operations, battlefield tactics, and strategic maneuvers. Yet there is more to war than the battles and the chaos – war also includes the struggle to maintain order, to lead effectively, and to keep the wheels of business and society turning despite the turmoil.

War tests a nation's mettle, reshaping not only political and military landscapes but also leaving indelible imprints on businesses, the economy, cultural fabric, and social ties. This book delves into the less-explored facets of wartime life, offering a candid glimpse into the challenges it poses.

War alters the economic landscape, sparking resource scarcities, transport constraints, and market shifts. However, the true test lies not just in survival, but in the ability to advance in the face of adversity, to maintain stability in operations. It's about remaining effective, competitive, and even growing under circumstances deemed abnormal. This resilience is vividly embodied by Ukrainian managers today.

This text serves as a beacon for those who refuse to be paralyzed by a world in chaos, those who view adversity through the lens of an entrepreneur, seeking opportunities and solutions among the problems.

In this book, I share an experience of a lifetime, one I wouldn't wish upon anyone. It recounts the insights gleaned by my team under tremendous pressure. We fortified the resilience of information systems and processes while driving progress in the digitalization of Ukraine's social sphere during a full-scale invasion by Russia.

War not only tested our societal resilience but also spurred the pursuit of innovative management approaches. These strategies enable perseverance and progress, irrespective of circumstances. My role at the national government level allowed me a unique vantage point to observe the diverse actions and results of managers ranging from startup leaders to directors of large enterprises and government officials.

The skills and knowledge honed during war can be invaluable for managers worldwide, applicable in crises like natural disasters, economic downturns, or global pandemics. Operating under high-pressure conditions cultivates flexibility, resilience, and adaptability – invaluable traits for leaders navigating crises.

Collaboration with international bodies during war, and the synergistic fusion of efforts toward shared goals, is equally invaluable. Managers can use the nuances of cross-cultural interaction and negotiations as instrumental tools.

I also underscore the importance of a virtues-led ethos, ethical conduct, and corporate social responsibility, particularly in turbulent times. These tenets can anchor leaders in their daily activities and decision-making, offering a far more stable guide than formal mission statements or projected forecasts.

I would love to see your feedback on social networks.



facebook.com/Kkoshelenko



linkedin.com/in/koshelenko

This book emerged not by choice but by necessity. Amidst the chaos of war, I felt compelled to record my thoughts and observations. It became a collection of reflections that shaped and refined my management practices, allowing me to adapt strategies and prepare for unexpected challenges. Gradually, these jotted notes transformed into the pages before you, culminating in a book forged in the heat of conflict.

Nevertheless, I felt there was something absent in this foundation – something that would encapsulate a pivotal phenomenon that altered everything during the full-scale war. Amidst the hell and intensity of Russia's invasion a powerful force revealed itself: the unity of diverse individuals both within Ukraine and around the globe. This extraordinary solidarity, far from being a fleeting phenomenon, continues to thrive. It expresses itself through collaborations, joint initiatives, and support actions that transcend borders, connecting continents and cultures with a shared purpose.

As a civilian leader in this war zone, I was moved to capture the tremendous power that this unity of diverse individuals generated in their shared values and solidarity against the Russian invaders. I also aimed to illuminate the striking beauty and strength found in our diversity. However, I soon realized that capturing this multidimensional tapestry was a task beyond my solitary efforts. And so, this book came to be, a testament to the collective wisdom of managers in Ukraine and around the globe who generously shared their insights.

This book is more than a compilation of advice and recommendations. It is a platform for global dialogue, a bridge connecting managerial communities worldwide.

I hope that as you navigate these pages, you won't just discover solutions to pressing issues but also witness the spirit of unity that empowers us to overcome modern world challenges together.

Though this book doesn't concern the traditional battlefield, it acknowledges that each day within your organization is a battle for productivity, values, and humanism. If you seek insights on how to make this struggle more manageable and effective, I invite you to read on.

While this book doesn't comprehensively address wartime management, it offers an essential perspective. It shares experiences, ideas, insights, and aspirations of individuals who exemplify leadership, management, and innovation.

It profiles Ukrainian entrepreneurs, top managers, and officials, who stand resolute in the face of war, not letting the conflict stifle their work, creativity or management. Leaders who demonstrate exceptional self-management – controlling their emotions, time, and energy – and show remarkable adeptness in leading their teams under extreme conditions.

Additionally, it features perspectives from our global allies, hailing from different sectors, continents, and countries. Their insights on management, leadership, personal resilience, productivity, conflict management, and more, enrich this book.

In curating their experiences, I found myself pausing my own writing, captivated by their insightful thoughts, apt ideas, and eloquent phrases. Arranging these contributions to complement and reinforce each other, while allowing readers to form their opinions, became the primary task.

Working with these top managers and expert contributors from different countries was both an enormous responsibility and a profound honor. They have given this book their voice, their experience, their lessons. They have truly breathed life into its pages.

This book is a dynamic interaction between experts, readers, and myself, a civilian leader navigating a war-zone. Beyond simply reading their insights, you will have the opportunity to engage with them in real-time discussions online. Join our open LinkedIn group, “Management in Times of War,” to dive into the discourse. Here, you will find the author, publisher, and experts eager to delve into the questions that arise as you traverse this book.



[linkedin.com/groups/9501126](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/9501126)

Every fourth chapter, you will find a distillation of the experiences and insights generously shared by our expert contributors. To them, I extend my deepest gratitude. Towards the end of the book, take a moment to familiarize yourself with a brief portfolio of each contributor.

Kyiv, Ukraine
October 2023

PART 1: Team and Process

1.1. Reaction, Adaptation, and Changing Approaches

“Nothing in life is more liberating than to fight for a cause larger than yourself, something that encompasses you but is not defined by your existence alone.”

– John McCain

I write these lines in the dead of night during an air raid alarm. Dozens of missiles, launched by Russia, are headed towards Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. This could have been a serene summer night, perfect for a stroll along the Dnipro until dawn. But for the second consecutive year, there are no such nights in Ukraine.

As the sirens sound, some people huddle in bomb shelters, others seek safety behind the rule of two walls in bathtubs, while a few manage to sleep through the chaos. Sleep deprivation is a constant companion in this new reality, as relentless attacks and alarms rob us of our rest.

Meanwhile, thousands are stationed at the frontline and manning air defense systems across the country. Their mission: to shield citizens from aerial onslaughts and neutralize any threat emanating from Russia. Some nights, we successfully intercept every missile. But not tonight.

Tonight, several residential buildings across various cities lie in ruins. The human toll is heartbreaking.

It is often said that people quickly adapt to the good things, but the war has shown that they adapt just as swiftly to the bad. Yesterday, you might have been an office worker demanding comfort, but today you are preparing food over a fire, learning to handle weapons, and grateful for the chance to connect your equipment to diesel generators and Starlinks when there's no electricity or communication. You find joy in the possibility of witnessing a sunrise and seeing your loved ones again.

Adaptation takes many forms. From experience, I've observed that people's responses generally fall into one of three categories: fight, flight, or freeze.



Those who 'fight' meet challenges head-on, fiercely defending their interests. Others, the 'flight' group, seek to avoid conflict, prioritizing self-preservation and

damage minimization. Then there are those who ‘freeze,’ standing still in the hope that the problem will resolve itself.

Each response is unique and natural, illustrating the range of human adaptability. During the full-scale invasion, people displayed these reactions with heightened intensity. Large and small groups alike had individuals exhibiting all three responses, requiring a versatile leadership approach to guide them through this ongoing crisis.

As a civilian leader embroiled in the chaos of a warzone, I bore witness to two reactions that are not only unproductive but also perilously contagious within a team environment: “flight” and “freeze”.

“Flight” is a knee-jerk reaction that involves escape or evasion from a problem or threat. Within a team, it can manifest as a disinclination to confront problems, avoiding responsibility, or an inability to face conflict. The fallout is that problems are left unsolved, neglected, or passed on to others. In the harsh reality of a warzone, this reaction takes on a starkly literal form as people abandon their jobs and homes, relegating work tasks to a secondary priority.

“Freeze” is another stress response that involves an individual’s inability to act or react appropriately to circumstances. Those who “freeze” often feel immobilized or indifferent to their surroundings. Within a team, this reaction can surface as apathy, a lack of enthusiasm, or an absence of initiative. Like the “flight” response, “freeze” can spread contagion-like through a team, leading to a drop in productivity, motivation, and a loss of zeal to achieve goals.

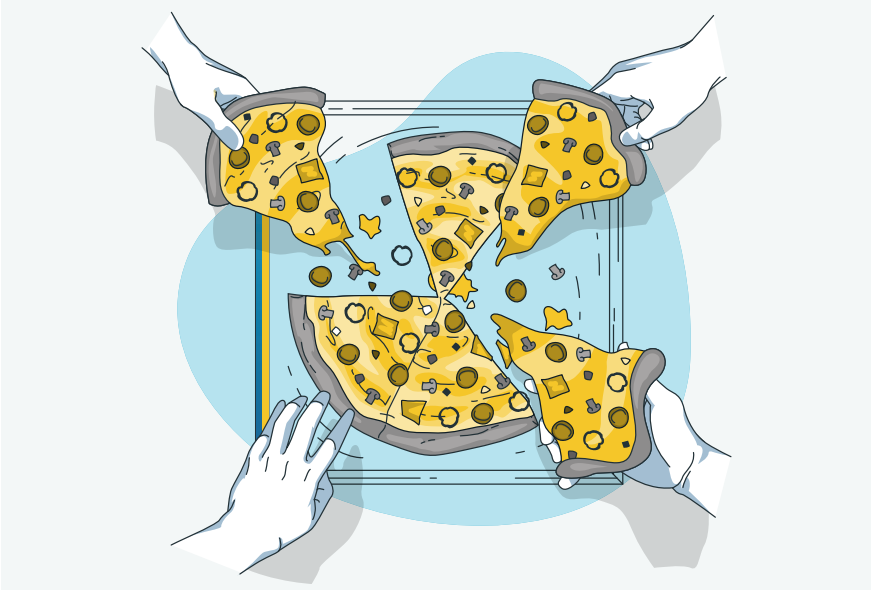
These reactions might seem alien to you if you're cocooned in a peaceful environment, far removed from the horrors of war. But look closely and you'll see that stress-induced reactions and their destructive consequences lurk in the lives of your team members too. The stressors might not be as dramatic as missiles screaming overhead, but they are equally destructive nonetheless.

The dominance of these reactions within a team can trigger a crisis. As leaders, it is our responsibility to guide our teams to respond constructively to stressful situations, rather than succumbing to the “flight” or “freeze” responses.

To achieve this, a manager's paramount objective should be to cultivate an environment of openness, collaboration, and trust within the team. This involves empowering the team to voice their thoughts and emotions without fear, assuring them that they will be heard. It also involves creating an atmosphere where team members feel supported in problem-solving, rather than being encouraged to avoid or shirk responsibility.

As a leader, I implemented strategies to enhance the team's resilience in the face of stress. These included regular stress management training, recovery time after intense work periods, motivational support from company leaders, and informal gatherings over pizza each Friday for casual discussions – the last being our team's only consistent tool throughout this period.

When a team learns to effectively manage stress and respond constructively to challenges, it can channel the potentially negative energy of “flight” or “freeze” into a positive force that fosters unity, growth, and goal achievement. Our team wasn't always successful



in this, but during our victorious periods, we delivered astonishingly powerful breakthrough results. Furthermore, during these times, our team inspired surrounding teams to follow suit, creating a positive ripple effect and broader synergy.

As leaders, we can transform destructive reactions into productive strategies by altering the team's perception of challenges as opportunities. For instance, individuals and organizations can perceive the daunting challenge of mass migration and emigration as an opportunity to stand out, take on more responsibility in the absence of competition, and gain more professional and career development opportunities. Become a hero for your country, your city, your company, and for people whose approval you cherish. This mindset can enable a significant part of the team to solve problems effectively and adapt to changes.

Leading amidst chaos is not for the faint-hearted. I won't pretend I've always been the beacon of steadfast control, never succumbing to snapping at those around me. Nurturing a culture of open dialogue and mutual support within our team is a collective effort, a shield against stress, an uplifting force that fosters a positive environment. It empowers team members, making them feel heard, supported, and, most importantly, understood. Of course, we face occasional roadblocks, but these hiccups don't deter us from our chosen path.

In the face of adversity, it's crucial to cultivate resilience. To replace the instinctive 'flight' or 'freeze' responses with proactive strategies like seeking support, problem-solving, and positive thinking. The more fervent and self-reliant your team is, the better equipped they are to weather the storm.

Transitioning to such management strategies isn't a swift, uniform process. Teams require time to adjust to this new mindset, to learn to face challenges head-on. But with patience, support, and a resilient spirit, they can transform into robust, adaptable, effective units. Such teams don't merely survive; they regenerate, they improve, they thrive.

I often draw a parallel with high-performance sports, particularly Formula 1 racing, to highlight the significance of adaptability. Under ideal conditions, all drivers zoom at similar speeds, adhering to established tactics. Yet, when it rains, the game changes. The unexpected conditions breed opportunity – some drivers falter, unable to adapt to the shifting landscape, while others seize the moment, their adaptability propelling them ahead.



This principle rings true for wartime management. In a landscape riddled with unpredictable events, managers adept at quick decision-making, who can navigate the shifting sands of circumstance, can turn these challenges into opportunities. This section of the book equips readers with insights and tools to hone their adaptability, to thrive in the face of uncertainty.

Often, managers are ensnared by the illusion that effective processes or cutting-edge technologies are the crux of their work. But the truth is, the most critical, intricate task is nurturing agility and adaptability within the team. If this is achieved, the team will instinctively devise effective strategies and harness the power of technology.

Let's pivot to other aspects of wartime management:

- Flexibility in decision-making is paramount when conditions shift rapidly. Managers need to be

nimble, ready to change tack swiftly as new information unfolds and conditions evolve. They should be prepared to leverage novel tools, approaches, and strategies, deftly mobilizing their teams to adapt to new realities.

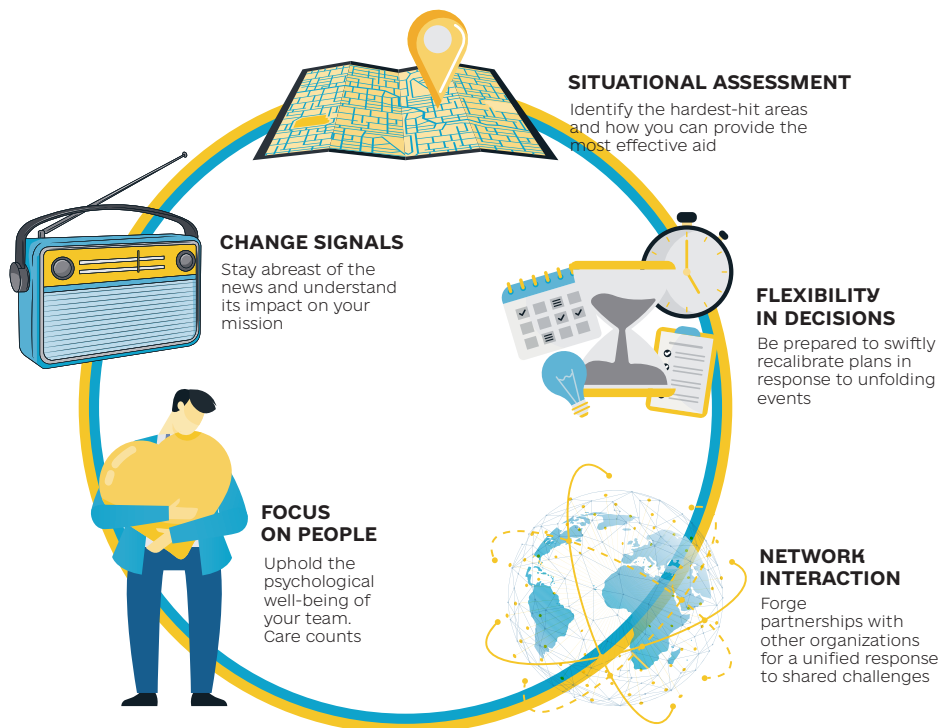
- Resilience is the bedrock of reliability. Those who can bounce back from life's blows have always been entrusted with important tasks and positions, earning the trust of clients, shareholders, and partners. Decades of effectiveness can crumble in the face of a major crisis or disaster without this skill.
- Communication takes center stage during war. Managers must ensure clear, timely, and open communication with their teams and stakeholders. Transparency is key – addressing current challenges head-on, discussing the company's strategic plans, and keeping everyone aligned on the path forward.
- As a civilian leader in the heart of a warzone, I am acutely aware of the challenges my people face and the resilience they must muster to overcome them. Our victories, no matter how small, are essential beacons of hope, bolstering morale and fostering unity. Communication is the lifeblood of our team, providing a vital conduit for ideas and concerns to be shared openly.
- Innovation is crucial in adapting to rapidly changing war conditions. Although not every new situation

demands innovative solutions, their presence enables effective action. Fostering a culture of innovation helps organizations thrive, not just survive, during war. Managers play a pivotal role here, encouraging creative thinking and openness to new ideas and approaches. Creating an environment where experimentation is safe and learning from mistakes is encouraged is essential.

- Delegation of responsibility becomes increasingly necessary in wartime management. It's challenging for leaders to handle all tasks alone, especially under the heightened pressures of war. Letting go of authoritarian leadership is harder in such times, even when the desire for a peaceful vacation with family is strong. Despite the potential decisiveness or fatality of each action, delegating responsibilities and involving team members in decision-making processes is vital. This approach not only lightens the managerial load but also engages and motivates team members, boosting their commitment and morale.

In war, creativity takes on a new, empirical form. It's akin to what Jim Collins and his team described in 'Great by Choice' as the 'first bullets, then cannonballs' approach. Here, 'bullets' are low-risk, cost-effective experiments with minimal impact on resources, while 'cannonballs' are larger, full-scale projects. They come in two types – calibrated and uncalibrated. The former are launched after gaining empirical confirmation from initial 'bullet' experiments, while the latter, if misfired,

Navigating Civilian Leadership in War Conditions

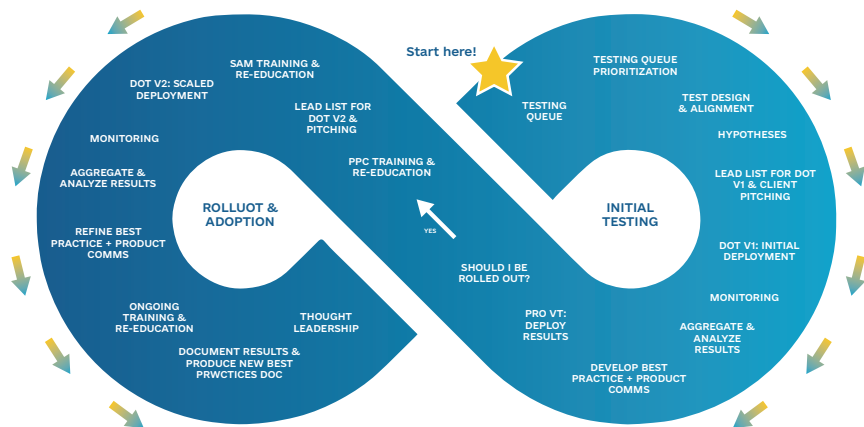


can result in disastrous resource and time wastage. It is paramount to tread cautiously, transitioning to full-blown ‘cannonball’ projects only when the return justifies the risk.

Every organization has an innovation threshold, a baseline level of creativity necessary for survival. Striking the optimal balance between risk and innovation is crucial. There are no guarantees in war, so empathy,

vigilance, and a flexible, test-and-learn approach are vital for success.

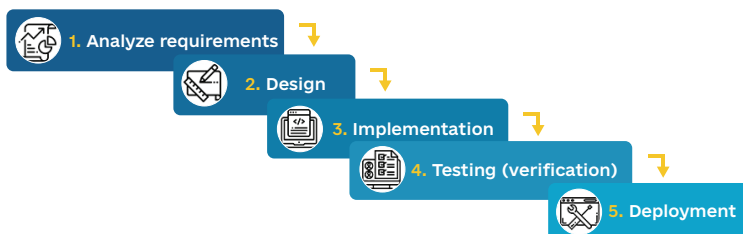
TESTING FLYWHEEL



Agile and Scrum methodologies are well-regarded in Information Technology. These topics are worth exploring in-depth, given their prevalence in successful companies. While not all team members may be familiar with these methods and the waterfall project model² is more common, it is essential to embrace flexibility and adaptability in our current context.

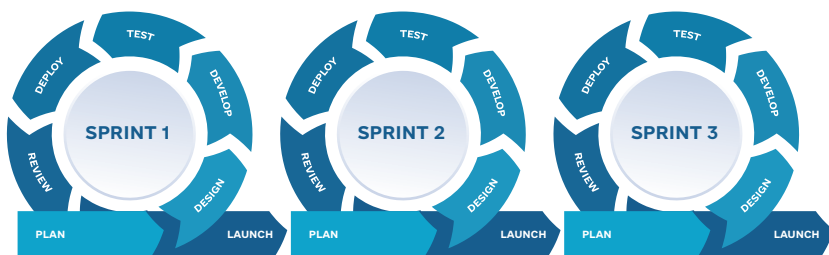
² The Waterfall methodology, also known as the cascade methodology, is a traditional, widely used, and logically structured approach to project management. The waterfall model entails a step-by-step progression of a process that is divided into stages or phases. It is typically employed for projects that can be broken down into sequential and logical components.

WATERFALL SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT LIFECYCLE



It did not take long for everyone to realize that the flexible approach, which we referred to as the “hellish military agile” of wartime, was the only one that could function under the circumstances. I will make these tactics clear in subsequent chapters.

AGILE



In ordinary circumstances, progressive leaders embrace a culture of flexibility, where mistakes are tolerated as stepping stones to innovative solutions. I adhere to this philosophy. Yet, in a warzone, the room for error diminishes. It’s not that mistakes are forbidden; simply, their consequences are amplified exponentially. Here, the cost of error transcends mere career progression or

quarterly bonuses. It pertains to the welfare of millions and the stability of an entire nation.

Perhaps it may seem grandiose or amusing, but my father once imparted wisdom I later discovered echoed Steve Jobs: ‘Work smart, not relentlessly.’ And I could never quite achieve that. In the face of intense competition and time constraints during peacetime, I had always put in extra hours, all the while allocating time and activities for recovery. But achieving something monumental requires more than individual effort, and so I rallied my core team to ‘burn the midnight oil,’ even though not everyone was equally enthusiastic. This ethos intensified during the invasion, as we collectively pushed our limits further.

My drive was fueled not merely by the prospect of transforming the nation but also by the privilege of collaborating with those who genuinely believed in its possibility. My team was a diverse mix of unique individuals and strong collectives, akin to a bee swarm, each person performing their role with a deep understanding of their pivotal role in our shared mission. This book aims to capture the spirit of this hive, pulsating with the powerful energy of collective effort amidst the perpetual stress and uncertainty, pursuing seemingly insurmountable objectives.

I am confident that the combined insights of the book’s expert contributors offer a comprehensive perspective that will inspire innovative ideas and approaches for your own leadership practice.

A dark winter night. Black silhouettes of buildings loom ominously against the night sky. No lights in any windows.

Treacherous ice on the road illuminated only by the headlights of passing cars.

This is the reality Ukrainians faced daily during the 'blackout', as our energy system faltered under missile strikes, necessitating rolling blackouts to prevent total grid collapse.

Inoperable elevators posed a significant issue, not just for those required to ascend multiple floors, but for those trapped inside awaiting power restoration or the scarce technicians.

Yet, a few weeks after the initial blackouts, the scene transformed. At night, windows glowed faintly with candlelight, flashlights, and battery-powered lamps. Kitchens were lit by gas camping stoves, and internet providers and mobile operators employed batteries and generators to maintain service. The streets of Kyiv hummed with the sound of small generators near shops and cafes, resembling a hive of industrious, defiant bees.