CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

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The growth of technology and machine intelligence has reformed society in the past decades. This newly interconnected and symbiotic world has given rise to new societal and global challenges, and leaders must face these head-on by using bold and creative solutions. The expansion of connectivity and efficiency asks innovators to bridge the gap between natural and manmade ecosystems. Disruptive leaders tackle these large-scale global issues using systemic approaches to local solutions, which require intimate and empathetic knowledge of the contexts, needs, and culture.

DEFINITION

Creative leadership is a philosophy and an act: it develops and realizes innovative ideas through the shared ambition of improving the world through enterprise formation. Those who employ creative leadership do so by forging an environment that promotes innovative thinking and mission-driven entrepreneurship.

Creative leadership as a philosophy embraces change as a given while seeking opportunity everywhere. It envisions desirable futures and unleashes the courage, collaboration, and creativity of contributors. Through a generous, inclusive purpose deeply rooted in pragmatic idealism and empathy, it gives rise to a transcendent consciousness that goes beyond individual gratification.
Creative leadership as an actor builds on those desirable futures through scalable enterprises derived from innovative strategies. Creativity, critical analysis, experimentation, big vision, collaboration, bold action, calculated risk taking, agility, and hard work all drive participative value and serve the **triple bottom line** (planet, people, profit).

**THEORIES PAST**

Leadership theories have been around since storytelling was created. Theories and principles that have withstood centuries range from Plato’s dialogue on leadership in *Republic* ("The heaviest penalty for declining to rule is to be ruled by someone inferior to yourself"); Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and Lao Tzu’s polar definitions: "It is better to be feared than loved," said one; the latter, "A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves" *Tao Te Ching*. In the advent of the industrial revolution, we see a progression from a dominant leader style remnant of the early 20th century, to a more egalitarian style befitting open democracy, in which interpersonal communication has lost its hierarchy, and value is judged on more than consumer satisfaction alone.

Scientific Management (Taylor - 1905) aimed at maximizing employees' effectiveness through specialization. *The Great Man theory* (1840s), which proposed that leaders are born, not made, was expounded in *The Trait theory* (1930s) which holds that only men with the inborn characteristics for leadership will be successful, and have the innate ability to take their natural place when crises arise.

Lewin et al. (1939) defined three organizational leadership styles: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire, with varying levels of management involvement and directive. Three decades later, Dr. Rensis Likert described the *Participative Leadership* theory in which leaders show great concern for employees, and include them in the decision-making process. Fred Fiedler (1973) believed that the best leadership style was the one that best fit a given situation, and accordingly proposed the Contingency Theory of Leadership and the Least Preferred Co-worker Scale to establish whether a manager-supervisor was a good match for his leadership assignment.

Robert House (1976) published a theory of Charismatic Leadership in which the leader is characterized as "dominant, having a strong desire to influence others, being self-confident, and having a strong sense of one’s own moral values." Gary Yukl (1971) added elements of the Participative Leadership theory, pointing to conscious joint decision, and delegation of authority. Dr. Paul Hersey and Dr. Ken Blanchard (1977) proposed Situational Leadership style based on the maturity or developmental level of the follower. Robert Greenleaf (1970 and 1977) proposed Servant Leadership, which only caught on in the mid-1990s when Larry Spears dissected Greenleaf’s ideas into ten defining characteristics of servant leaders. This latter gained more impetus in the aftermath of repeated ethical failures within large brand-name organizations within the US and beyond, in the first decade of the 21st century.

The limitations of large corporations also resulted in renewed interest in leadership associated with small enterprise development. *Entrepreneurial leadership* can be defined as the ability to anticipate opportunities, envision a new enterprise concept, work with others and maintain flexibility and initiate changes that will create a viable future for the enterprise (Kuratko, 2007).
The global outcry surrounding the rising concern about global inequality, the sustainability of the planet, and the realization of the interdependency of all things, gives rise to a need for new leadership. Einstein once offered that creativity and innovation are needed to solve the complex problems of the world, and particularly these skills are considered the most crucial for 21st-century leadership.

**SUPPORTING THEORIES**

Almost all leadership theories to date are described within the context of an organization in which the relationship between leader-follower are key, thereby orienting leadership inward. The three most recent theories consciously recognize the importance of higher, moral values. These are:

*Transformational Leadership* - an individual leader engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the followers, by raising followers' level of consciousness about the importance of organizational values and goals. This allows followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization, and moving toward collaboration for higher-level needs (Downton, 1973; Burn, 1978; Tichy & Ulrich, 1984). Specifically, Brown (1994) speculated that transformational leadership is needed in an evolving technological society. Society is moving from controlled change to accelerated change nearly beyond control, meaning that attitude and behavior both require the attention of transformational leaders.

*Authentic Leadership* - a pattern of behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster great self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on part of leaders working with followers, fostering self-development. “Discovering your authentic leadership requires a commitment to developing yourself.” (George, Sims, McLean & Mayer, 2007).

*Servant Leadership* - Traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid” - command and control. Servant-leaders, however, lead on the basis of shared power, put the needs of others first and help people develop and perform as highly as possible (Lao Tzu, 500; Greenleaf, 1970; Spears, 2010).

Creative Leadership is a natural progression from these theories, incorporating not just moral values, but inspirational influence, pushing beyond these into the realms of social impact, inter-enterprise collaboration, while actively safeguarding planet Earth and its resources.

Although creative leadership is not exclusive to entrepreneurs, Creative Leaders will display many elements of entrepreneurial behavior.
Creative Leadership is not industry specific, nor is it one-size-fits all. It is the individual act of a leader in the context of perpetual beta, and therefore path-dependent. In contrast to analytical forms of leadership, where the act of problem-solving culminates in one truth, Creative Leadership presupposes that the drive for a solution to a problem or challenge can have several outcomes and is to a significant degree shaped by the leader.

Creative leaders display many of the following traits:

**Explorative, independent, contrarian thinking, embracing change and anticipating the unexpected.** Creative Leaders find insights and ideas from unrelated fields, chance encounters and the unexpected. They nurture broad external networks with the expectation that this builds significant future value, and they use open dialogue to tease out perspectives and ideas from others. They are comfortable with contradicting insights, paradoxes, conflicting needs and ambiguity. They identify and challenge assumptions that underpin perceived realities. Creative leaders think in contrary directions and deliberately reject conventional, inherited parameters. They are not satisfied with the first solution and search for better concepts that bring major improvement. They view life as a journey where opportunities for learning and development are always present. Finally, they intuitively sense new opportunities that could be created.

**Visionary thought leadership, thinking big with social passion and generous purpose.** Creative leaders think globally, strategically and towards large impact. They have social awareness and holistic connectedness. They exhibit mindful self-awareness, being connected to what is happening in the here and now, demonstrate compassion for others, and exude a humble, open attitude. They are able to translate an
appealing market opportunity into an enterprise concept that is innovative against incumbent business models. They can integrate large societal impact with attractive economic returns.

* Casting and conducting of creative teams, cultivating courage, and optimistic experiment. Creative leaders are able to attract team members who raise the calibre and diversity of the collective. They are capable of designing creative processes that enable learning and improvement resulting in an accelerating rate of improvement, working toward a tipping point where change becomes unstoppable. They know what key values are important in one’s life and act authentically upon them. They are transparent and honest, with congruence between intentions, words, presence, and actions. They build an organizational culture that nurtures and cherishes the ideas of others, removes barriers and structures incentives to reinforce the change that is being sought. They provide the story, experiences, and motivations that empower the organization toward a common goal. They orchestrate the ecosystem of partners in the public, private and social sector to bring systemic change.

* Directing towards sustainable enterprise and triple bottom-line. Creative leaders create urgency and shared inevitability to work towards a better future for all, thereby inspiring others to act. They dare to be bold in new areas, not limited by present logic or institutions, embracing fears rather than avoiding them. They understand how to mitigate risks, with a head in the clouds and feet firmly on the ground. They are able to master execution in uncharted territory with imperfect information and limited control. They maintain focus towards longer-term social impact, while being resourceful in capturing opportunities as these arise and overcoming challenges to keep the enterprise afloat. They are good stewards of natural and manmade resources.
The more systemic and volatile challenges of today require change at the core of what leaders are doing, feeling, and thinking, and call for a tailored approach (Schwenk and Shrader, 1993; Palich and Bagby, 1992). Creative leaders deal effectively with paradoxes, intuitively combining:

- **Clash and Flow** - the best ideas are found through passionate debate, and the creative collision of perspectives. At the same time, creative leaders know how to make people feel safe, and support them to achieve their fullest potential and bring teams to a state of flow and creativity.
- **Vision and Presence** - always engaged in the present, combining a grand vision for a better future with immediate action orientation and compassion for the here and now.
- **Strategy and Serendipity** - creative leaders combine strategic planning and embrace moments of serendipity, following the energy of (market) opportunity.
- **Pride and Humility** - creative leaders work on shared bases of admiration and deep trust for their coworkers. Pride, however, doesn’t come with judgment. No one is perfect but a team can be.
- **Provocative and Tolerant** - creative leaders are independent thinkers that hold strong opinions and are never afraid to challenge others. Yet they have deep respect for diversity of viewpoints, and remain open to learn and reframe their beliefs.
- **Experimentation and Perfection** - Creative Leaders are adaptive to experimentation and appreciate the learning that comes from failure. They also strive for perfection in execution.
- **Rigor and Fun** - creative leaders strive for mastery in their practice, and embrace the playfulness of creation and fun in collaboration.
Building on the styles of Transformational Leadership and Authentic Leadership, Creative Leadership goes further by understanding the interdependency of its actions on larger ecosystems, reframing competition into collaborative relationships, and treating experimentation, failure and learning as an implicit state, rather than a reward structure. Creative Leaders feel a need for change and allow people around them to feel safe about that change.

**INFLUENCERS**

It is often the early innovators, the rogue ones ahead of their time, who set the expectations for the next generations of leadership. We can cite a number of modern influencers who, in their own way, have offered and demonstrated original thought which has fed the inevitable rise and recognition of Creative Leadership.

* **Elon Musk** Whether in his work for PayPal, SpaceX, Hyperloop, Tesla, or SolarCity, all his business efforts revolve around his vision to improve the world and humanity. His goals include reducing global warming through sustainable energy production and consumption, and reducing the risk of human extinction by making life multi-planetary with a human colony on Mars. “I think life on Earth must be about more than just solving problems. It’s got to be something inspiring, even if it is vicarious.”

* **Muhammad Yunus** Banker, economist, civil society leader and social entrepreneur, Yunus is most known as founder of the Grameen Bank, which pioneered the concept of microcredit and microfinance, enabling social and economic development, from the bottom-up.
Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud: Saudi Arabian philanthropist and entrepreneur, who served as CEO for the Al Hamra luxury corporation. Her societal mission creates positions and conditions for women in the workplace to empower and encourage Middle Eastern women to join the work force. “You cannot have half of the population not working.” Her philanthropic work includes founding the Zahra Breast Cancer Awareness Association, to increase awareness and early detection. She is recognized as one of the most powerful Arab Women in the world.

Richard Branson: English entrepreneur, investor and philanthropist. He founded the Virgin Group, which controls more than 400 companies. Since the turn of the century Branson’s activities have shifted to include social impact enterprises, such as The Elders, a small group of leaders working to solve difficult global conflicts, Virgin Startup, an official delivery partner for the UK’s Start Up Loans programme, the Carbon War Room, founded in 2009, seeking solutions for global warming and the energy crisis, and setting up of a new global science and technology prize in 2007, The Virgin Earth Challenge.

Wangari Maathai: Kenyan environmentalist and political activist and Nobel Laureate, and assistant minister for Environment and Natural Resources, Maathai was founder of the Green Belt Movement, environmental non-governmental organization focused on the planting of trees, environmental conservation, and women’s rights. She is also the first African woman and environmentalist to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

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