

The Future of Leadership

Leading in the face of uncertainty

The context seems clear. Many senior leaders “off the record” talk about a crisis in leadership, with no-one knowing where the future will take us. Nevertheless there is a need to find a way forward in a complex, interdependent world.

To navigate through this uncertainty and complexity, we need to let go of many of our old ways of thinking and adopt new frames of reference. The prevalent idea about leadership – that one person can know the right way or that a team of experts will help us work out the answer – is an excellent approach in certain contexts. But that’s the very problem, it’s not necessarily fit for purpose in a VUCA world.

We need to be open to other ways of framing leadership – what if it’s more about finding the right questions and fostering the collective intelligence of many perspectives to find potential ways forward? However, even that idea is all too often based on a sense of separation from the “system” that we’re trying to change. **Instead, what if we operated from a place of attempting to liberate the brilliance of other people AND seeing ourselves as agents within the systems that we inhabit – what does leadership look like then?**

5 reframes for leadership action in an uncertain world

We believe 5 reframes can help us start living the future of leadership now, a future where people choose their leadership approach based on context and are humble enough to see themselves as potentially part of the problem (and hence the solution). This is not an exhaustive list, but a good starting point as we co-pioneer with our clients what leadership looks like in a messy VUCA world.

- 1. Seeing yourself as part of the system** - This is one of the biggest “blind spots” around leadership. The question that so many of us avoid is “what’s my part in what’s happening?” Omitting this question means we may miss an obvious leverage point – ourselves.
- 2. Challenging your own beliefs** - Recognising your beliefs, how they drive your own behaviour and being able to hold them loosely enough to be open to other’s perspectives. How prepared are you to shake your own foundations?
- 3. Pattern spotting/interrupting** - Noticing the patterns at play around you and choosing NOT to play that particular game anymore. You don’t even need to know the alternative, sometimes it’s enough to just stop, allowing space for something else to happen.
- 4. Ecology of purpose** – Seeing purpose in a broader and deeper sense, both personally and organisationally. What are you/your organisation REALLY in service of? Which stakeholders have you excluded from your thinking that might be important in your future?
- 5. Liberating Brilliance** - Being generous enough to believe in the potential that lies within other people. Furthermore the potential that lies between people when we create space to exchange and build the way forward together. The way you interact with people IS the message. Are you modelling this or are you telling people to be more innovative via a PowerPoint presentation from a stage?

This list does not replace the basics – each of us has a responsibility to develop our own personal capabilities so that we are able to notice what’s needed and decide to take appropriate leadership action. These foundations include fostering personal resilience, relationship building, negotiation, dialogue, listening, emotional intelligence and remaining a lifelong learner.

Reframing leadership in this way points beyond the individualistic and heroic patterns that so many of us are working within.

What if we dare to interrupt these patterns, what happens to leadership then?

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