

The Art of Creative Leadership

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This paper looks at the way we lead teams and empower creativity. It examines methods of using an easy adaptable model in which the combined skills and tools are used to create a common vision for the people working with them.

1. FOREWORD

As a part of the workshops on creativity, a guide on „the Art of Creative Leadership“ evolved. This roadmap is intended to help leaders to stimulate creative behaviour and design an engaging environment in which creative solutions can be further developed and engaged in dynamic situations involving a group of people.

„You make a real and meaningful difference in the world when you live your life according to your highest values and make the most of who you are as a person. When you do what you love and love what you do, you become the change you would love to see in the world.“

– Dr. John Demartini

2. INTRODUCTION

In the past decades the evolution of our environment has gained in speed as in number of inventions and events that shape our social development. This gain in overall speed and interconnectedness has rendered our world smaller, and more complex at the same time.

Leaders on a global level aim to find answers and ways to deal with these complex challenges: the health, financial and economical crisis, the change of democratic led governments and climate catastrophes. Although the results of now can be heavily discussed, we like to focus on the way we lead and how we educate the leaders of tomorrow, who will be held responsible for the impact of their decisions.

The question of the writers is: How can we 'up-cycle' our concept of leadership in the areas of politics, business and education in order to create the change that we want to see in the world: Value-based societies and organisations that serve the people & planet – by creating services, products and projects that encourage equal relationships, mutual respect and profit.

The idea of openness and dialogue has become a key factor in shaping possible solutions and opportunities towards the desired: democracy, peace and sustainability. Still we are facing the greatest manmade catastrophes, where the shortcomings and short sights of the past are a major challenge for future generations.

In this context we are calling upon the development of a new leadership model, to meet the challenges for the leaders of tomorrow with creativity. How can we invite what we have most – our almost endless supply of ideas into the process of leadership and responsible decision-making? Creating change is not a one-man show. We engage and discuss in groups whether of same interest, workplace or background, which solutions might be worth the further development on almost any kind of matter: family-based or organisational.

Since the past innovations in the sectors of communication have led to the opportunity of collective and global dialogue. Empowering the people to establish a culture of listening, of learning and of taking on greater responsibility in their own role as leaders in their communities. We realize an awakening in the minds, giving room for new ideas and concepts, that can change the life not only of the few hundred millions in Europe, but of the many billions in the developing world. Change, which is necessary for the rising number of people on this planet. In these transformational contexts, we see a great potential to advance the way of thinking and organising our "Eco Business System", which refers to Economical, Ecological and Ethical balance of our Society on a whole. In this role creativity and leadership are the tool to be taught to future leaders, in order to establish common grounds for creating core values, clear visions, empowering relationships and innovative actions.

*“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”
(John F. Kennedy)*

3. LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Economic schools of thought have brought a great many theories on leadership and management to the fore. How to actually lead many great organizations. Per definition “Leadership” is about setting a new direction, about involving and motivating a group to a vision and drive towards a certain goal. Management in comparison is about controlling the resources and to maintain the status quo according to established principles and units of measurement.

We act as leaders, when we set a new goal, and the way to reach this goal (especially when other people are involved) is through the process we call Management. The aim of economic actions by management or an individual, as seen in the classical economic theory is essentially to generate benefits mostly in terms of profit. Which, in the macroeconomic point of view we learn to measure as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a whole nation. In these fine models, we tend to forget that: in every decision made, every goal set, every process created we might want to include not only the profit but also the people and the Eco-System into our calculations of benefit.

Since the Gross National Happiness and Social Impact are also taken into account on macroeconomic levels as well as the GDP by the political and economical leaders in the Western hemisphere and even longer our understanding of Entrepreneurship has expanded the benefit thought towards the inclusion of people, planet & profit.

With Christopher Columbus a big change was going to happen, when suddenly a whole society was shifting their interest of development from the inside towards the outside. The great discoverer not only found the new play grounds for the European crowns and moneylenders behind, financing their endeavours. The success of Columbus created a new gold-

rush, a search of outer fulfilment and sadly the believe, that stronger nations can take what they redeem. (compare: Galeano: Open Veins of Latin America). Today the setup has changed significantly and new solutions, new paradigms of thought are needed to sustain the growth and wealth we consider to be important for our social stability.

“We live in a time of tremendous change, the world is getting smaller. It is clear we cannot stay within our own boundaries anymore.” (Dr. Arega Yirdaw)

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The most commonly used definition of sustainability is the one of the Brundtland Report: „Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.“

In despite of major economical systems are based on growth. Some economists and business leaders are driven by the thought, that without economic growth our whole system will fail or become unstable. The need for growth can also be regarded as the last drug of capitalism.

An environmental speaker from China made the following point: The economic boom can be compared with a car that is driving at high-speed and nobody dares to brake, although they know it is heading towards a cliff. In fact the huge need of energy is matched by a high number of dam-projects, which will reshape the landscape for many remote villages, displace a few million people and even more creatures.

A good example for what might happen to cultures driven by the goal of endless growth is the history of the Easter Islands. It was a perfect micro cosmos that could at large resemble our planet. The tribe-leaders, who were constructing giant heads of their glory, were ultimately forced to fight over the last available resources to secure their mere survival and led to the eradication of their culture. When western sailors discovered the

islands the giant monoliths were the only testimonies of the former existence of any civilisation that by then had itself already extinguished. The concepts of sustainable development aim to learn from nature:

- Nature does not produce any waste, everything is re-used/ recycled
- Nature lives from solar, geothermal & electromagnetic energy and transforms it
- Nature respects and profits from bio-diversity
- Everything in nature is connected: one species relies on the other
- Nature is transformational, seasonal change is part of life-cycles

5. SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In recent years there was a shift at the microeconomic levels of leadership and management. Socially and Ecologically friendly products have found their way onto the shelves and into the minds and interest of the consumers and reshaped certain paradigms, especially the one of credits. Character based lending evident in various forms of Micro credits, lead by the approach of Muhammad Yunus were soon translated into profitable business models, and subsequently adapted by competitors.

Also examples of micro insurances, or collective farming and home installed renewable energy production, global education and local empowerment, revolutions backboned via social media and crowd funding offer a shift of power towards the people themselves.

An emergence of social entrepreneurs who create change through rethinking and rejoining the established solutions and offer new ideas for old problems: for example how to have light to read and study. Social Entrepreneurship means to rather teach how to install solar panels or fluorescent light bulbs out of bottles than to create dependencies through service contracts.

Many of them receive support in their effort to give something back to society and to save the endangered Eco-System by foundations, NGOs and crowd-funding tools. Finding the means like money and time to realise their proof of concept and face everyday and global challenges.

We, the creative leaders, believe in the power of social empowerment. As to the way we think of our economy, of our view of established models of growth, value and wealth creation, and of how we approach people, cultures and global politics. We've borne witness to the power of the people to overthrow "sole emperors", seen for our selves how modern media helps to organize and disseminate information to and among the masses. We have observed that our dependence on oil and other non-renewable resources cause more trouble in the long-term. We share the dream of those people who want change, and who are looking for a small (r)evolution in our own thinking and understanding of common leadership.

We realize that there are ways in which we can discover the most valuable means to serve one each other. Maybe it is just a matter of divergent thinking – of creative thinking.

How can we 'up-cycle' our understanding of leadership in the areas of politics, business and education in order to create the change that we would want to see in the world: The creation of value that serves the people – products and projects that encourage equal relationships and mutual respect and invite what we have most? – Our almost endless supply of ideas.

"Genius is one per cent inspiration, ninety-nine per cent perspiration."
– Thomas A. Edison

6. CREATIVITY & INNOVATION

Creativity is mostly associated with Marketing & Design – the creation of new products. In the past years creativity has also contributed and been used for "pragmatic problem solving" in the poorest regions of our world. In Indonesia a man called Solar Demi improves the lives of the people in his neighborhood by building lamps from plastic bottles, water and bleach. Creating products that create value is no magic, it is a

recombination of preexisting concepts, which can best be described by: “Copy, Transform and Combine.”

Creativity is to posing the right questions then eliciting a possible set of answers. Teaching creativity to business and politic students at university also means putting forward the question: “How can we educate responsible open-minded Leaders?” To answer this question would mean to allow for re-thinking, listening and to create room for dialogue with the students themselves.

Creativity could be best described as an attitude of a creative to be open to life, to appreciate its beauty and translate it into the bravery to go new ways and create with what you can do best.

New ideas can be compared to little seeds, that you plant and take care of. You supply them with water, soil in a pot and wait for them to spread out the first roots. Still in early stages very fragile, soon with enough care and patience you will be able to sit in its shadow.

Now the question is, how can seeding small ideas lead to the big trees, that have fruits and give shelter. A question of leadership, and to be more definitive: creative leadership.

7. CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

In these days Creative Leadership became an opportunity for shaping a shared sense of purpose – e.g. a sustainable future – and could be used as the approach to discover the most valuable ways to serve each other.

Creative Leadership, as we see it, is a style of looking at a dynamic system of small scale events in the long-term view, and foreseeing the possible evolutions instead of a keeping a static view on life, economy and people.

People are by no means static beings like machines. People are of the most transformable species on earth, as learned from our personal and global history. Why not channel this gift of adaptability to the benefit of the world in which we live? They have everything at hand to learn new ways of thinking. In order to think about the way we lead, we suggest following model.

THE 5 STEPS FOR CREATIVE LEADERS

I. Appreciate and Encourage IDEAS

– Give room to share and exchange the expectations and ideas of your coworkers and the people around you. Create and cultivate a regular base for dialogue and open discussions in your group, encourage them to raise the right questions. Remain open for new approaches and embrace the possibility of failure, and even what you can learn from them.

In this early stage of idea creating it is crucial to remain positive and constructive. Too fast potential ideas are critiqued and people having them feel personally devastated. An ideal way to create ideas is by allowing only positive feedback in the first stage. In the story around Walt Disney, he had to ask over 100 banks in the beginning and nobody was wanting to give him a loan to finance his vision. Now we could not imagine a world without Walt Disney. He incorporated a rule, that when having a brainstorming he would use 3 rooms. The first one was for all the personal ideas of the people, just pinned on the walls. The second one was where those ideas were combined into a story by a group. The third one was about critics, only here it was allowed to criticise ideas – which by then have already become group ideas and no one felt critiqued personally. Share your ideas to get initial feedback from friends and co-workers. Even the opinion of your boss might get you valuable information on how your idea is perceived. Even though many great ideas have been regarded as mad or just unrealistic, they have become reality. Some of them sooner and others 400 years later like airplanes that Leonardo da Vinci scribbled long before its realisation.

II. Create a shared VISION

Create a "WE" from the "ME" – The exchange of Ideas and the connection of the minds creating them will lead into a group thinking, which can be called the 'Mastermind' (Napoleon Hill, 1927). Creating a common vision

on how a given challenge can be solved means to involve the many. Don't expect all the answers to be perfect at first, sometimes the most vague ones offer the greatest value if further developed. Sharing ideas needs a base of confidence and openness, so ideas are shared without immediate judgement.

III. Acknowledge and improve the SKILLS of your Team

Everyone who is involved in the process has certain strengths, skills and power of observation. The Creative Leader helps to identify and strengthen the skills of his associates. In the process of leading development people themselves are the ones who are best equipped to best resolve real solutions. Animate for exchange of knowledge, skills and abilities on a broad range in order to develop more skills and empower the people to find new commonly generated solutions and combinations of personal skills to face the set challenges. Take ownership of your craft and allow others to do so.

There are different types of people, who have varied skills and can profit immensely from collaboration. The partnership of a Dreamer and a Doer is an important example in the process of creation. While the Dreamer thinks of new possibilities the Doer splits them into make able action steps.

IV. Use and incorporate TOOLS

In China the kitchen board offers the most necessary: one knife. Therefore the Chinese say: "If you are skillful enough, the tools don't matter."

In many areas this is the same, you can achieve a lot without much but by the power of thinking on which tools to employ. For any greater project the most common tools will always be Time (your time), Money (if your father is no millionaire mostly from investors, funders or buyers) and physical resources.

Creative Leadership does not only mean to achieve a set goal with minimum of non-renewable resources but to challenge future resource shortages and waste creation already in the moment of the product design. At one point in time almost every tool becomes obsolete. Recently this momentum was rather designed to happen earlier than later, which by definition is good for corporations who need to sell more tools, but contra productive in the sense of responsible usage of the given resources. Especially in the fields of communication one of the most powerful tools are social networks: tools like facebook, blogs and forums have helped to establish a dialogue of inspiration even on a global basis, beyond political and cultural boundaries. People can share their ideas and call to action. Invite others to join or contribute on a common base and spread news & media on a global level and gain support for the created projects. The use of blogs makes it easier to have a presentational platform for your ideas and projects for others read your story and spread it through their circles.

V. Create VALUE in services, products and projects

Find solutions that create value for the entire societal culture. That is sustainable and can be sustained by those who are in charge of it. Eligible products and projects serve the many: and add to the happiness of the people, the sustained health of the planet and the profit of the organisation conveying the solutions - so they can continue to do, what they do. Even when you have finished a product or project you can always ask your clients, partners or co-workers if there is anything, they would have done differently. The circle of creation is in completion.

Once an environmental lawyer told me, before one project is about to finish, make sure you have a next one right at the start. This way you can keep up the energy level. But as I learned in Dragon Dreaming, every project has 4 crucial phases: the dreaming, the planning, the realisation and the celebration. The Celebration should be the end of every project, where you cherish what you have build, may it be a party, a theatre play or just a large feedback round for all the co-creators and participants.