

# Reflecting on Future Leadership

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## GETTING A GRIP ON THE FUTURE IS IMPOSSIBLE

The future is a flexible, reactive creature, like a giant soap bubble. When you insist on grabbing it, it slips away from your hand or pops. We affect it with our fears, our preferences, and we vote for change with our purchases.

Our collective future grows increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous at a rate that we have not seen before. This future challenges a person to **find their own way**. Paragons are eroded. Individual experiences and practices meet collaborative approaches and innovation. **There is no longer a well-traveled leadership path which ensures success.**

Sociological and global cultural shifts will cross industries, affecting the global workplace. In the upcoming 5 years, these shifts will command new leadership skills.

To be a leader of the future, think like one. Live it. Embody it. Show me, don't tell me.

Using foresight and trend analysis for signal recognition, one can train oneself to recognize qualitative and quantitative patterns in the world. The present and the past offer clues about the future. All the data one could ever want or need is already out there.

A good example of a foresight practice in action is the Perception-Action (PDA) cycle in cognitive science. This circular, sensory-driven sequence is a feedback system in which the organism learns, observes, acts, and reviews, affecting it's the environment at each phase. It does not predict; it imagines and understands the feedback in that potential reality. The genuine beauty of a personal foresight practice is being right is much less important than trying.

*"Chance favors the prepared mind."  
-- Louis Pasteur; French biologist, microbiologist, and chemist*

**Consider these 3 Macro Movements shaping future leadership:**



### • Persona Transformation

The meaning of work is increasingly abstract. Physically, we are working from home or a towering office. Mentally, we are concerned about an aging family member or looking forward to our next holiday. Teams face enormous pressures from isolation and stress, not to mention political, educational, and health care systems collapse. All aspects of our lives blend together.

How can leaders prepare for a future demanding evermore from themselves and their teams?

It's time to think much, much bigger.

**In the next 5 years, transform yourself by investing in these 6 important qualities:**

### Empathy

Soft skills like empathy are not a new concept. Based on current research by Deloitte, the soft skills most sought after in the workplace include 'transparency, authenticity, and a leader's ability to recognize their own weaknesses. Empathy is the most important part of community building. Developing this skill will help you build a healthy, human, work environment that feels natural, improving your team's work effectiveness. Ford Motor Company has been providing empathy training for years to promote optimal, universal design and has been successful where many other car manufacturers have failed.

### Clarity

Future solutions demand long-term thinking and long-term thinking demands honesty. Imagine a complex system: the urban planning and design of a city's downtown core. Now imagine a lie was told about something early in the project; maybe a fib about the makeup of the soil substrate in the northeast corner of the city. All the modeling, purchases, and decisions made afterward will be built on incorrect information, setting off a chain reaction of failures causing the budget to skyrocket. Foundations fail, roads need to be rebuilt, people are displaced.

Exhausted by "fake news", media conglomerate greed, and the politicization of everyday challenges, Millennial and Gen Xer generation demands transparency. Trends in ethic and compliance training show an increased need for trust and transparency. This is a sneak peek at the

future world. System-wide authenticity is required for any type of buy in, whether it be the sales of ideas, products, political agendas, or employment opportunities.

### Abstraction

Abstract thinking and creativity may not seem easy to reconcile with data-driven motivations. Aren't profitable organizations at odds with artistic abstraction? Just the opposite. Utilized in cognitive and computer science, as well as art and design, the conceptual and cognitive process of abstraction seeks universal truth by exploring hyper-specific examples through pattern recognition.

Although trends signal an increase in technological silos, these model only specific knowledge, limited to the system observed. Broadening one's vision to encompass all the informational silos leads to a pendulum swing and understanding of how all the seemingly isolated data pockets are all connected.

### Resilience

To "hope for the best and plan for the worst" means to build adaptive resilience into a strategy. Despite technology demanding 24/7 professional access, professional longevity is achieved through self-autonomy and protection of a healthy work/life balance.

Building resilience can start as small as reappraisal of a current stressor in your life. Reframing a situation encourages a natural, adaptive response in the body, minimizing stress and promoting confidence.

### Imagination

Legendary futurist Jim Dator reminds us that "any useful idea about the future should appear to be ridiculous." He points out that new ideas and technologies challenge accepted norms and expand on those impacts to generate

amazing possible outcomes. Sometimes novel ideas can initially seem indecent or foolish. The Wright brothers sure looked foolish trying to fly like birds on wood and cloth.

The bigger the imagination, the more impactful the ideas. Being afraid of thinking outside of present-day constraints will limit growth. Leaders like Elon Musk who think beyond current ideologies can generate environments which foster imagination. How can you challenge the capability of your imagination?

*"We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us."*

*- Marshall McLuhan, Canadian futurist and philosopher*

### Immersion

As self-initiated, self-directed, and self-fulfilled learning increases, leaders find their own personal human purpose. Immerse yourself in new environments and try alternative ways of doing. Trust in your brain's natural ability to make new connections based on external circumstances.

Our biological system learns by being and by doing: go into the world to be and do. Recognize the physical interconnections and explore your brain's neuroplasticity.

### It's all interconnected... remember??

If this global pandemic has been good for one thing, it's reminded us how interconnected we all are.



## Connections

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the study of systems and connections was already on the rise. The movement grew in business spheres through systems thinking and futurism skill sets. Team collaboration software became increasingly sought after. Cultural workplace systems needed to support their own end goals, thus healthy, leadership-supporting culture became necessary for the development of impactful and adaptive leaders. Organizational structures were reformed, favoring flattened structures like holacracy. With a focus on efficiency, supply chain optimization discussions moved out of the factory and into the boardroom. Complex systems science became 'water cooler conversation' when we collectively learned that trees have been communicating with each other all along.

This powerful movement will continue on its all-encompassing trajectory for years to come. We are evolving our understanding of how the universe is connected. We use the terms global, systemic and collective more frequently. The virus has pushed even the staunchest defenders of individualism to observe the world's interconnectivity.

Two neuroradiologists, facing the challenges of the pandemic, recently responded to an article for the American Journal of Neuroradiology, closing with a reference to a poem:

*"No man is an island,  
Entire of itself;  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main." 8.9*

*John Donne penned this passage in  
1623.*

This timeless message is irrefutable: as strong, capable, and scrappy as we are, we can accomplish **nothing** alone.

## Look to the past to see possible futures

Foresight practices regularly tap into the

great wisdom of the past. There is a 100% chance that someone in history has faced a problem very similar to whatever you are facing today. Sure, past technology might seem old to us, but it was completely new to them. Using a conceptual, qualitative framework: how different is a robot from a steam-powered engine? Our ancestors were just as worried about their future livelihood with the emergence of the steam engine and needed to adapt to survive.

In our hunger for high-speed advancement, we have separated ourselves from the value in other wisdoms. As the global pandemic sent shockwaves through our routines, we looked for deeper meaning. Enrichment away from the office led to North American flour shortages as we re-learned to bake bread. Communities shared garden produce and protected the vulnerable.

Globally, we seek stable roots. Inescapable wisdom can be found in a child's novel approach and a grand-parents' traditional practices. These are human-ities ties, so universal that they will be a cornerstone in our collective future.

## Collective Wisdom

Crowdsourcing is a practice which utilizes the wisdom of a group for a common goal. A method commonly used by politicians, marketers, and tech firms, it's also linked to the gig economy and the recent uptick in open source software, app-based design, and other technology movements. As momentum within this space builds, how might other businesses tap into this approach?

In the fashion/ home/ product/ retail sphere, the World Hope Forum has formed a global community with a unified focus. Their Manifesto calls on

organizations and individuals to put people before profits and produce products that are essential and appropriate. Tapping into an existing intra-organizational, global community of specialists, they encourage collaboration and innovative solution sharing. They operate within the framework of a common vision.

Momentum builds by starting small. Start with the collective of your immediate team, tapping into their collective intelligence for a project you are working on. Promote skill sharing partnerships and mentorship. Observe as the positive impacts ripple outward, like a rising tide, lifting all boats.

## Evolution of Diversity

An increasingly challenging world demands the best thinkers, movers, and leaders. To seek unabashedly for these rare people will mean looking everywhere. The best companies can't afford to have racial, minority-based, or



stereotypical blinders on any longer. It simply isn't good for business.

Empathic thinking increases when a team is composed of diverse experiences, perspectives, and viewpoints. Ensuring your team is as diverse as possible creates an organically developed ethically empathetic culture.

Today's increased call for transparency from employers means companies failing to think bigger than gender,

ethnicity, and the neurotypical will have nothing to hide behind.

Leaders who seek to represent the future, can start by representing the values of the future. Be the change that starts from within the organization by growing your own awareness, asking questions, and opening doors within the organization that might have traditionally remained closed. Speaking to the team's value is important, but having their values championed by top leadership is critical. Any new challenge can be overcome through education and openness to new ways of thinking.

### Diversity Done Right

Team's of the future are connected through more than shared office space. Common goals, open communication, diverse representation, and community values are the way forward. Deloitte found in a recent study that “an inclusive culture is a crucial component for a sense of advancement.”

To see the efficacy of this principle in practice we need look no further than New Zealand. Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, has unified a population of over 4 million diverse New Zealanders effectively through the coronavirus pandemic, terrorist attacks, policy changes, and challenging social culture. She often utilizes the collective wisdom of students, recognizing eagerness to see leadership with a diversity in “age, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and also leadership style”.

To optimize your team's effectiveness and motivation:

- Cultivate teams with diverse skills, life experiences, and backgrounds to solve larger challenges than just their assigned role.
- Connect yourself and your team to inter-organizational thought leaders. The more different their skill sets and ways of doing things, the better.
- Facilitate intra-organizational cooper

ation, rising above competition to improve technological and build industry-wide momentum.

- Champion those who lead by example providing advancement opportunities aligned with their personal goals instead of forcing them to stream into a traditional structure.
- Develop a foresight process as a part of monthly collaboration sessions, using it like a preparedness action plan.

### Hey, Global Humanity: This is a Marathon, Not a Sprint.

The new normal is continual metamorphosis. We must also transform. The only constant in our interconnected and diverse world is change.

You are strong and can weather any storm, but that's besides the point. This is not about simply bearing witness to the storm. This is the time to adapt, innovate, fail, succeed, create, and inspire. Take the long view. Invite your

community come with you on the journey.

We are going through a global pandemic. Everyone reading these words has made it this far. You have adapted. You are finding a path through this collective trauma. Take a moment to realize the power in that and be proud of it.

You are on your way to being a future leader.

“Show me, don't tell me.”  
- My great grandma

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