

Chapter 23

Innovation in a Turbulent World: The Case for Creative Leadership



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Abstract In this chapter, we begin by illustrating how leaders in turbulent times demonstrate vision, understanding, creativity, and agility to impact our fraught, fast-moving age. However, we argue that contemporary leaders must go beyond mere capabilities to seek meaning for users, organizations and society. To respond to these acute conditions, we propose an alternative leadership ontology whose purpose is to co-create the meaning required to engage members of a collective to cultivate the conditions to achieve mutual long-term goals. We examine how Creative Leaders can cultivate Creative Leadership, if they establish direction, alignment and commitment across the collective. Our call to action for learning leaders is to develop meaning-makers and innovators who can tackle the wicked, existential problems, facing humanity.

23.1 Introduction

We live in many worlds, bounded primarily by our identities and perceptions of reality (Chrobot-Mason and Ernst 2010; Goodman 1978). One world can be described as a steady state, where the raw materials are known, and the variables change only negligibly over time (Gagniuć 2017). In the steady state, we believe we can control the outcomes, using knowledge and structure to achieve common goals. We can continue to govern our lives and institutions according to known frameworks and philosophies. This world and the inherent attitudes inform our behaviours and actions. In the context of humanity, we may say that this world is predominantly in our mind (Natelson and Natelson 1975). Akin to Daniel Kahneman's System 2, we perceive a slower pace, enabling the analyses which allows for reason to dominate (Kahneman 2011).

Another world is more turbulent. It has more interdependencies, arising from the complexities of systems, stakeholders, and societal institutions. Described by the

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U.S. Army War College following the Cold War (Kraaijenbrink 2018), this volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world (VUCA) is a closer reflection of our reality. The majority of us reside in this inherently instable world. Emergent technologies and evolving wicked problems only exacerbate the challenges in the tumultuous world. The frame of mind in a turbulent world is quite different from that of the steady state—we seek rationality amid the complexity to inform behaviour.

The challenge for leadership is to operate within the nexus of these two worlds, and manage the polarities. While we seek to transform the steady-state, we seek control in the turbulent state. However, neither strategy can work in this age of unprecedented complexity and possibility. System 2 can produce poor (sometimes irrational) results, despite being conscious and deliberate (Kahneman 2011). On the other hand, the managerial mindset, finely tuned for a ‘plan-and-control’ world, cannot cope with the uncertainties of contemporary life. The challenge for humanity is existential. Already back in 2004, Harvard Business School Professor and former Medtronic CEO Bill George wrote “The time is ripe to redefine leadership for the 21st century.” (George 2003).

This chapter explores how to encourage a new type of leader, and then go beyond into a new type of leadership. In the VUCA world, leaders must be able to explore complicated situations, to create visions of what could be, to ideate potential solutions, to build prototypes to test, and to communicate them in compelling ways. However, given the complexity and criticality of solving wicked problems, innovation is not sufficient. We contend that creative leadership is the essential differentiator to create shared meaning, value and impact. Understanding the identity of the creative leader and their responsibilities to cultivate creative communities, can provide a foundation for both innovation and transformation. Since we believe that our mission is to develop leaders who can thrive in a turbulent world, ideally creative leadership will establish an agenda to inform our collective responsibility to nurture leaders’ growth, celebrate their successes (and failures), and guide their efforts to change our world for the better.

23.2 Creative Leaders Lead with VUCA

enlargethispage-20ptChange and innovation are typical battle cries of leaders who seek to alter existing situations into preferred ones, to paraphrase Simon (1969). Based on over 40 years of research and experience, the Center for Creative Leadership proposes that for successful leadership in turbulent times, it is necessary to begin leading as a Creative Leader. In the spirit of our VUCA world, for the purposes of this chapter we define these attitudes also as VUCA. As Fig. 23.1 describes, in situations that are Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous, leaders should project a **Vision**, an aspirational direction of what the future will look like. They need to co-create **Understanding** amongst stakeholders by engaging in the hard work of converging on meaning. **Creativity** yields representations and experiences that encourage shared

In VUCA	Be VUCA
Volatile - The speed of forces and catalysts that spark changes in situations	Vision - imagine an aspirational direction of a meaningful future
Uncertain - The lack of predictability or awareness of issues and events, with the potential for surprise	Understand – map the ecosystem and empathize across all stakeholders to identify opportunities for impact
Complex - The lack of a cause-and-effect chain to indicate what may come to a situation an organization	Create – visually represent intentions to spark the critical conversations that iterate meaningful experiences
Ambiguous - The haziness of reality, the potential for misreads, cause-and-effect confusion	Agile - refine direction or pivot towards converging on shared meaning

Fig. 23.1 Leading in VUCA situations with VUCA

understanding and active engagement. As polarities emerge, **Agility** is required to change direction or pivot in an effective manner, which leads to iterative collaboration and social learning.

23.3 Stories of Creative Leaders

23.3.1 *Lucid.Berlin’s Innovation Prize*

To understand how creative leaders innovate and lead in our turbulent world, we recant stories of innovators. The first is about Felix Matschinske and Jan Schiele, and their company Lucid Berlin, whose Children and Armed Conflict app was awarded the Prize for Innovation in Global Security by Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). Starting with conversations with human rights experts, it became clear that the constantly growing number of thematic Security Council Resolutions were becoming the primary inhibitor to constructive negotiations. A vision emerged to provide Human Rights and Security Council experts in UN Delegations tools to sift through the complex content and apply frameworks of the Council to country specific negotiations. By spending time **understanding** the challenges of those negotiators, the Lucid team was able to draw *insights* to inspire **vision** and **creativity** and develop their award-winning solution. For them the Geneva Centre for Security Policy prize

was a recognition of their focus on *agility* when developing strategies and solutions that tackle global challenges, such as climate change, human rights, energy transition, inclusive business, impact investment or corporate climate strategy.

In conversation with both Matschinske and Schiele, they acknowledged that in a turbulent world and challenging situations, their motivation was “It just makes sense.” Lucid leadership sought to take part in reinventing global cooperation, or stay stuck in old structures and strategies. They added, as part of the “change generation,” their team will never stop innovating to provide solutions. All team members are willing to work hard because it makes sense that it is fulfilling. Their dedication, conviction, and resilience, is common and inspiration for creative leaders.

23.3.2 *Iterating the Hippo-Roller*

The challenge of obtaining clean water provides a second story of creative leaders. In addition to the challenge of finding clean water, another is actually accessing the water, particularly in remote locations. Two inventions were designed around the same time in the mid-1990s to bring clean water to rural people across Africa. Located in South Africa, Pieter Hendrikse and his brother developed the Q-drum—a plastic container with an empty shaft to make it rollable with a rope. However, the patented rotational molding manufacturing process proved to be a significant challenge. Without a producer, Hendrikse could not test and scale his design, limiting its adoption and impact (Cho 2013).

Nearby Hendrikse in South Africa, Pettie Petzer and Johan Jonker launched the Hippo Water Roller Project in 1994. In 2006, 26-year old industrial designer Emily Pilloton founded Project H Design, a non-profit that helps support, create and deliver life-improving design solutions for the four H’s: Humanity, Habitat, Health and Happiness. Project H’s first initiative was to raise enough money to deliver 75 Hippo Rollers to Kgautswane, South Africa. When Pilloton went to South Africa for a site visit, she realized that the Hippo Roller had several design flaws. She enlisted Engineers Without Borders to propose a redesign (Walker 2009). With Project H advising how to improve the original design, Grant Gibbs assumed responsibility for bringing the project to market. Despite a higher cost than the Q Drum, the Hippo Water Roller achieved broad social impact. It makes it easy to collect water in tough rural conditions, and is user friendly for all ages and sexes. With a total distribution of over 51,000 Hippo Water Rollers, offering a carrying potential 16 billion liters of water, the Hippo Water Roller has reached close to half a million people (Gibbs Interview 2014).

We see the Hippo Water Roller is a more *creative* solution, based on a *vision* for a product that affords more uses, and enables improvements throughout daily life. The cap is a hygienic filter, enabling both convenience and health. The frame easily converts into a stand to enable economic activity. Turned around, the roller becomes a wheel to be used for transport. Ideas only become innovative ones if they improve daily lives, not just specific needs, and that requires *understanding* people’s day-to-

day realities, and **agility** to adapt to those circumstances. Not surprisingly, Grant now uses crowdsourcing platforms and connects to the “Empowering People Network” to match funders with good projects, demonstrating how Creative Leaders continually seek ways leverage and scale innovation (Gibbs Interview 2014).

23.3.3 Improving Newborn Health in Mumbai

Creative Leaders also learn by failure. In a New York Times article author Sam Loewenberg documented the innovative pivot of an initiative to improve newborn health in Mumbai (Loewenberg 2013). Started in the mid-2000s, the program was intended to deploy successful practices of rural communities into the slums of Mumbai to reduce infant mortality. The program facilitated discussions with expectant mothers to raise their awareness of the importance of newborn health. They set up 244 women’s groups, which met biweekly with social workers to discuss maternal and child health problems, counsel one another and work to develop solutions.

The researchers also tried using innovative approaches to engage the women, such as role-playing and discussion cards. However, in summer of 2012, researchers at Mumbai’s City Initiative for Newborn Health published disappointing results of their three-year effort to implement a community-based maternal- and infant-health initiative in the city’s slums. After going into approximately 422 sessions, the results unfortunately demonstrated very little impact, measured against any changes in infant mortality. The team realized that the transition from rural settings to a hyper-urban mega-city like Mumbai was too difficult, and even measuring improvement in infant health is much easier in rural areas than in urban ones.

Rather than stop the program, the researchers decided to take this as an opportunity to pivot, to understand and learn from what they went through, to recast the initiative. The newfound **vision** was not on educating, but providing services that would clearly fill the needs of both the expectant mothers and their newborn children, such as immunization, family planning and help navigating Mumbai’s Byzantine health and social service systems. This new **understanding** encouraged leadership to re-launch the program in a more **creative**, engaging way. In partnership with the Gates Foundation and a local television network NDTV, they produced a promotional video that took a positive approach by suggesting solutions to the problems affecting women and children. The **agility** leaders of the research team demonstrated by admitting failure enabled the redesign and reboot of the program. The creative leaders who sought to change Newborn Health in Mumbai lead with VUCA to create sustainable innovation with impact.

23.3.4 *Learning from Creative Leaders*

As Loewenberg notes “... making a difference in the world is hard, often messy.” Creative leadership starts with a **vision** to frame a direction to a “wicked problem”—a complex, inter-dependent situation that resists resolution because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements. Setting a visionary direction requires imagining an idea for a different experience or the intent of a new reality to improve a current situation. All the leaders sought a problem, or wicked challenge, that had some important meaning for society. They imagined possibilities, not accepting the way things currently were, similar to the way the Lucid team didn’t accept the way negotiators had to fumble through papers and sought to empower their negotiations. Others found a way to empathize with the individuals involved and provide a meaningful experience.

With a vision in hand, creative leaders can seek **understanding** key stakeholders involved in a situation. The consumers, organization, and the broader community need to find experience *meaning*—emotions that fulfil deeper needs of stakeholders. All of the innovators not just came up with ideas, they sought to propose and try. The leaders were able to then visualize and communicate the experience in a compelling way. When meaning delivers impact to society, teams, and people, the leader herself will be engaged to use **creativity**. Representing ideas and intentions of the new reality, using techniques like storyboarding, enable users to visual the experience towards creating shared understanding. The resultant feedback, particularly critique, sparks iteration. As Professor Roberto Verganti writes in Harvard Business Review (2016), critique sparks collaborative learning with users to encourage reflection and convergence of meaning.

These situations of iterative collaboration that yield innovation by social learning are a direct result of **agility**. The leader’s ability to change direction or pivot in an efficient and effective manner is essential to *adapting* the vision and realign meaning to ensure broad feasibility. When they would try, they may fail, but then they would **learn and adapt** by incrementally improving their innovative ideas to the realities of the turbulent world. This is a fundamentally different way of leading—in the past we wouldn’t admit failure, nor admit that we can learn. Changing because something didn’t work out was the sign of a weak leader. However, in the turbulent world, change is the way to bring people together and create diverse communities. Formulating and communicating new proposals encourages coalition building. Realigning plans to reflect evolving situation and new preferences ultimately leads to revitalized personal meaning with purpose, essential for leading in turbulent times.

23.4 Creative Leadership in VUCA

23.4.1 *The Search for Meaning*

However, the success of these, and other leaders, goes beyond their VUCA capabilities. If it was just a matter of inculcating competencies, or encouraging attitudes, we

would have an abundance of creative leaders and a smaller set of wicked problems in the world. Viktor Frankl, in his seminal work *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), proposed a fundamental truth of our existence, that humans "...can only live by looking to the future." Our VUCA leaders all had a purpose, a "... call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled..." (Frankl 1946). This intrinsic motivation to realize the potential impact of their innovation was a key source of resilience to overcome the challenges the leaders in our stories faced. When leaders also seek to impact a grand challenge—like clean, accessible water or security—leaders find themselves in a place where they significantly amplify their engagement and can actualize their identity as a creative leader.

The importance of purpose, or meaning, has increased significantly across all dimensions of society. According to the 2018 Global Impact Investing Network annual survey, five-year repeat respondents increased the amount of capital invested by 27% over five years to a total of USD 35.5 billion into 11,136 deals during 2017. The rise in impact investment demonstrates that the business community has awakened to purpose and profit. In an open letter to CEOs published in January 2019, Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, wrote "Profits are in no way inconsistent with purpose—in fact, profits and purpose are inextricably linked...Profits are essential if a company is to effectively serve all of its stakeholders over time—not only shareholders, but also employees, customers, and communities."

In a world overcrowded with ideas, achieving shared meaning with multiple stakeholders is no simple task (Verganti 2017). As Wenger (1998) writes "... human engagement in the world is first and foremost a process of negotiating meaning." The leader who seeks convergence of meaning, in the form of an innovation with purpose, finds herself in the middle of strenuous tripartite polarity. Today's leaders must achieve organizational objectives and customer expectations, while simultaneously achieving some form of societal impact. Although the ubiquity of human-centered design, in its most common form called "design-thinking", may contribute to fulfilling the needs of users and decision-makers, it does not address the challenge of convergence, which is critical success criteria for leading in a VUCA environment, and is therefore insufficient to realize innovation with sustainable impact.

To realize a meaningful and motivational purpose, creative leaders must engage in the act of *making common sense*. In their book of the same title, Paulus and Drath (1994) propose to view leadership as a social meaning-making process that occurs in groups of people who are engaged in an activity together—commonly referred to as a community of practice. According to Paulus and Drath, "[M]eaning-making consists of creation, nurturance, and evolution (or revolution) of cognitive and emotional frameworks. When making such frameworks happens in a community of practice (people in an enterprise with a shared purpose or history), then we can say that leadership happening."

23.4.2 *Direction, Alignment, Commitment: A New Ontology of Leadership*

Traditionally, Leadership is said to exist when there are leaders, followers, and shared goals. Dubbed the “tripod ontology” by Warren Bennis, in his introduction to a special American Psychologist issue on leadership, he wrote: “In its simplest form [leadership] is a tripod—a leader or leaders, followers, and a common goal they want to achieve.” (Bennis 2007). In this paradigm, leaders and followers are in turn recognized by their respective roles in an asymmetrical influence relationship. However, in a VUCA world, where leadership is called to become increasingly peer-like and collaborative, the tripod imposes limitations on leadership theory and practice.

To respond to new conditions, The Center for Creative Leadership developed an alternative ontology based on the view that leadership encompasses a full range of human activity (including leaders influencing followers) whose purpose is to bring members of a collective into the conditions required for the achievement of their mutual long-term goals (McCauley 2019). These conditions are **Direction** (agreement on the collective’s overall goals), **Alignment** (the coordination of work in the collective), and **Commitment** (mutual responsibility for the collective), or **DAC**. In other words, leadership is said to exist when direction, alignment, and commitment are present among people with shared work. As illustrated in Fig. 23.2, DAC enables Creative Leadership in a VUCA world by encouraging:

- **Direction**—The exploration and emergence of new perspectives to co-create the meaning of the collective and shape its overall goals.

Fig. 23.2 How the search for meaning stimulates creative leadership



- **Alignment**—The on-going mutual adjustment among system-responsible people to coordinate the work within the collective.
- **Commitment**—The desire to be engaged in developing a community with a strong sense of mutual responsibility for the collective.

DAC is a relational framework, which is socially constructed. It can be purpose-driven, creating meaning for a shared outcome. This emerging practice of Creative Leadership requires the development of a theory of how leadership cultures develop to deal with increasingly complex challenges.

23.4.3 *Creative Leadership in India*

To explore the integration of such practices aimed at developing individuals who simultaneously seek changing organizations and communities, we will examine the case of RB (Reckitt Benckiser). India is one of the world's fastest growing economies. While no one can doubt its increasing influence on the world stage, it also faces the uncomfortable truth that many people still struggle with life on the poverty line. The paradox is that India is a technological leader and home to titans of industry, yet millions still live in the most basic conditions with inadequate sanitation and healthcare.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not shied away from this reality. In October 2014, he launched Swachh Bharat Mission, the "Clean India" Mission. At that time, virtually every second person in India had to defecate in the open, more people had a mobile phone than a toilet and every third person was drinking unsafe water. This could no longer be tolerated. Modi set a target date of 2 October 2019 for achieving the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the 150th anniversary of Gandhi's birth. Reckitt Benckiser (RB), one of the world's largest health and hygiene companies, wanted to help make the Clean India Mission a success. RB believes that ensuring healthy lives and happy homes for everyone means assuring everyday hygiene for each person. RB found a natural fit with the Indian government's *Swachh Bharat Mission* and decided to align with the call for a clean and hygienic India through the its *Banega Swachh India* campaign which was aimed to drive positive behavioural change towards hygiene and sanitation habits across the country by providing innovative solutions.

Patty O'Hayer, RB's Global Head of Communications and Government Affairs told us major public health issues are nothing new, and we often look to governments to solve them. According to O'Hayer, RB has learned that these issues are more successfully resolved when the government partners with other stakeholders such as businesses, media and NGOs. RB's *Banega Swachh Mission* is one of those successes.

O'Hayer described how RB approached the government and proposed that the company become a partner in Prime Minister Modi's Clean India initiative. Working with RB headquarters, Ravi Bhatnagar, who joined RB in 2015, put together a part-

nership framework and developed the strategy and tactics. According to O’Hayer, timing was also a key element of success. RB got in on the beginning of the government initiative, which gave the project a clear mandate and helped attract important partners. Securing the support of the two biggest India media companies—NDTV and Dainik Jagran—boosted Banega Swachh’s reach to millions of people across the country. Banega Swachh is thus an excellent example of RB’s purpose-driven ethos.

23.4.4 DAC at Banega Swachh

RB focused on fundamental issues of cleanliness and scaled them to a mass level. The company’s leaders at UK headquarters and in India drafted a five-year vision which helped set the **direction** and committed resources through dedicated specialists. RB’s staff in India employed their creativity to come up with innovative tactics to tackle their ambition. In every step, employees, partners and specialists were **aligned** with Banega Swachh’s direction and approach.

RB targeted communities with 85 thousand families to get directly involved and push for behaviour change by introducing a three-year Hygiene Curriculum in 125,000 schools. Understanding cultural habits and beliefs as well as the role education could play in changing behavior was key to development of the curriculum and winning celebrity support. Opinion leaders and influencers from diverse fields including television and films, sports, and politics were recruited to support the Banega Swachh India campaign and advanced its credence.

23.4.5 Engaging Partners and Employees

RB has always believed that transformational change can be successfully achieved with shared responsibility. The success of such a huge initiative as Banega Swachh India depended on finding the right partners to lend their expertise in shaping it. They had to buy into the societal meaning and purpose of Banega Swachh, and more broadly, Prime Minister Modi’s Clean Indian Mission. This was the **commitment** phase of the programme.

Aiming towards mass outreach across the country and to provide better living to as many people as possible, RB partnered with two of the biggest Indian media companies—NDTV and Dainik Jagran. RB was joined by influential and popular actor, producer and TV host Amitabh Bachchan as campaign ambassador.

RB also partnered with the Central and Local governments along with the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation and the Ministry of Urban Development. Reputed non-profit organizations and international aid agencies such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Aga Khan Foundation, XSEED, Butterfly Fields, Jagran Pahel, NDTV and the Swades foundation, FICCI (India Sanitation Coalition) gave valuable inputs and support.

Additionally, the entire RB India workforce pledged over 20,000 h to clean-up drives and organized neighbourhood clean-ups.

23.4.6 RB's Impact

RB's VUCA-driven innovation, framed by DAC, was focused on new ways to build capacity and spread behaviour change to large populations. The impact has been phenomenal because of concerted efforts from people across the country who shared RB's purpose. Two hundred villages are now open defecation free, with 35,000 new toilets being built. Handwashing behaviour has risen to a great extent in the six targeted states and all of it simultaneously contributed towards a healthy growth of the company along with better market shares.

By spearheading a campaign for change, leaders injected new vigour within RB, one that comes from making a difference. Deploying some of the company's biggest brands in a nationwide drive has had a positive impact on profits, outlook and vision as well as on RB's commitment to core values, strengthening passion to even further drive business with purpose.

23.4.7 Learnings from Creative Leadership

Before embarking upon Banega Swachh, RB leaders in India and at corporate headquarters, including CEO Rakesh Kapoor, had to collectively *envision* a meaningful **Direction** before they could agree on aspirations and goals. Working with government officials and NGOs, they shared a joint exploration of a wicked problem: poor sanitation, and the life-threatening diseases such as diarrhea and cholera that result.

Quickly RB's team moved to develop shared *understanding* across the collective to **Align** resources and coordinate effort. RB India achieved agreement with corporate HQ on how to mobilize and deploy resources, and also worked with local and international partners. This collaboration among diverse participants seeking systemic change yielded coordinated and consistent impact.

RB's team on the ground used *creative* tactics and communicated a compelling beneficial outcome for each person involved. They enabled the community to experience the growth and success of their joint efforts, thereby increasing participant engagement and **Commitment** across the community. For example, women were empowered with the knowledge of best hygiene and sanitation practices, and this in turn opened up economic opportunities for them in their communities.

In order to demonstrate personal *agility* and encourage others to cross personal, organizational and community boundaries, RB staff working on Banega Swachh upped their individual **direction, alignment and commitment** skills, increasing the impact for ordinary Indian citizens, the organization, and society. One of those was Ravi Bhatnagar, who is now RB's Director External Affairs and Partnerships, Africa,

Middle East and South Asia, who attended CCL's Leadership Development Program (LDP)® in Brussels. Bhatnagar cites the direct positive impact the program has had on his work on Banega Swachh. In 2017, he joined the high level technical team of the public/private Hygiene Index, and became part of the effort to help 100 million Indians lead healthier lives by 2020. That helped him to stretch into a more proactive and collaborative leadership role.

23.5 The Case for Creative Leadership

Unfortunately, in today's turbulent world, humankind doesn't lack opportunities to benefit from the potential of creative leadership. The UN has identified 21 global issues, including Aging, Big Data, Climate Change, Gender Equality, Peace and Security and Refugees (United Nations 2019). Worryingly, the World Economic Forum states: "Humanity has become remarkably adept at understanding how to mitigate countless conventional risks that can be relatively easily isolated and managed with standard risk-management approaches. But we are much less competent when it comes to dealing with complex risks in systems characterized by feedback loops, tipping points and opaque cause-and-effect relationships that can make intervention problematic."

Given there is much opportunity for self-actualization, and increasing appreciation of its financial value, where are all the **individuals** *willing* to step to these opportunities? More importantly, how can we develop **individuals** who are *able* to step up to these opportunities? In our experience, **co-creating** new meaning, for organizations, customers, and communities, can accelerate developing innovation leaders. Within this triangulated space, leaders find within themselves with the passion to look into the future, the inspiration to create meaningful directions, and the resilience to struggle against the challenges of bringing shared value to the world. In this space they must overcome many boundaries—between individual identities, and between those identities and collective (Chrobot-Mason et al. 2009). Given the breath and depth of boundaries, creative leadership is dependent on social integration as the driver for transformation (Pasmore 2015).

When leaders are given an opportunity to create propositions that bring together the needs of those three pillars, they are enabled and empowered to have significant impact for the daily lives of those they serve. As their vision and mission—how to get there—becomes apparent through co-creative, "designerly" activities of iteration, critique, and dialogue, their passion and resilience to make an impact can increase exponentially (Cross 1982).

Searching for meaning is an engaging way to accelerate the development of creative leaders, because the search is, at its core, is an act of self-actualization (Maslow 1943). By positioning leaders and their development within this space, we see significant personal, organizational, and societal impact. By co-creating shared meaning, engagement evolves in an implicit and complicit way that is essential to bring meaning to the world. By providing leaders the opportunity to create a vision that gives

them passion, intrinsic motivation to solve the problems of society, meet the strategic objectives of the organization, and contribute to the benefit of all individuals in the collective community.

23.5.1 Our Responsibility to Cultivate Creative Leadership

From the personal to planetary, change is upon us. Increasingly, change is forced upon organizations because their leaders lack courage and imagination to envision an alternative set of futures ahead of the curve. When the disruptive forces strike, including technology and competition, the unprepared are left scrambling to reinvent their organisations, in hopes of reclaiming their position in the marketplace.

When people seek innovation together, they seek to make sense, or meaning, of an existing situation to inform a preferred situation. The process of participating in collective making meaning—the striving to make situations make sense for the community—makes leaders out of people. As Bennis (1991) states: “A leader creates meaning. You start with vision. You build trust. And you create meaning.”

As learning leaders, we propose it is our responsibly to frame the spaces where leaders can explore, define and negotiate meaning. By setting out this space and asking leaders to set a vision to specify what their mission is, with very specific and concrete propositions, we are able to significantly contribute to their development as leaders in general, and specifically innovative leaders. As a learning leader, all of us should not be hesitant about challenging participants with finding that meaning. As Frankl writes, ‘We should not be hesitant about challenging man with a potential meaning for him to fulfil.’ Unfortunately, too often we shy away from this meaningful mandate. Encouraging creative leadership is a shared responsibility. If we are all able to lead creatively, then we will certainly impact the VUCA in our world. We will also create experiences and the communities to thrive with shared meaning.

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