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Anticipate, Innovate, Transform

Innovative Leadership: Leading Post-Pandemic & Beyond

By Erin Barry, Neil Grunberg, Maureen Metcalf,
Carla Morelli & Michael Morrow-Fox

Leadership Skills for the Post-Pandemic Era



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Today's leaders have a more significant impact on the future than in previous eras. Because we live in a globally interconnected world, decisions and actions increasingly ripple across the world and affect the next generation, especially with regard to issues like climate impact. Unfortunately, too many good people who work hard in leadership roles use skills that have depreciated, or are simply outdated. While most of us wouldn't think of using a 10-year-old computer, many of us work with leaders who use the same approach they used 10 or even 20 years ago with mediocre results. Organizations must redefine what effective leadership is and elevate the quality of their leaders to meet current and future challenges. Innovative Leadership offers a framework for earnest leaders to advance themselves and their organizations.

The most effective leaders have always been self-aware.

What Is Innovative Leadership?

Innovative Leadership originates from the idea that we must regularly innovate how we lead as our organizations change in a continually more complex and faster-paced world. When we talk about innovating leadership in more concrete terms, we look at the latest research, trends, global conditions, and the challenges we face. Then we determine how our individual and organizational leadership must change. As with continuous improvement, leaders who follow Innovative Leadership regularly elevate their leadership to meet current and anticipated conditions, challenges, and opportunities.

Drawing from the book *Innovative Leadership for Health Care*:

"Innovative Leaders deliver results by blending:

1. **Strategic leadership** that inspires individual *intentions and goals and organizational vision and culture*
2. **Tactical leadership** that influences individuals' *actions and the organization's systems and processes*
3. **Holistic leadership** that aligns all these dimensions: *individual intention and action and organizational culture and systems.*"

The Difference

The most effective leaders have always been self-aware. But self-awareness is more important than ever today, and it's a critical aspect of leader development. It requires internal self-awareness (awareness of our values, personality, style, strengths, biases, etc.) and external self-awareness (how others perceive us).

As management guru Peter Drucker pointed out, Innovative Leaders work with their followers like conductors and musicians in an orchestra. Everyone works together to create the product: music. The music's quality depends on the cohesiveness, commitment, and coordination of all orchestra or organization members, not just their skill.

The most talented conductors are themselves part of the performance, and they inspire their musicians to produce exceptional performances. Good conductors are technically skilled; brilliant conductors embody the music. The magic happens when the conductor and the musicians merge into one interconnected being — that gestalt touches and captivates the audience.

The best leaders in the world create beautiful results with their teams and organizations, given the proper practice, conditions, frameworks, tools, and followers. This type of performance requires a different focus on leadership than an average one: to be world-class, all

contributors must work together every time they perform. This requires an intimate connection with the “self” as the leader as well as trust between team members and followers.

Do you want to become a world-class leader? Are you willing to do the work? Are you ready to help your followers become world-class teams and organizations?

The Leader-Follower Relationship

Publications by our coauthors Erin S. Barry and Neil E. Grunberg have illustrated the importance of the leader-follower relationship to effective leadership. Innovative Leaders understand and enhance leader-follower relationships and the contributions of all team members. The leader is responsible for delivering on the organization’s mission by working with followers. Followers are responsible for giving their best effort toward the mission in collaboration with the leader. As with our music analogy, brilliant music only happens when leaders and followers work together — listening, learning, sharing, and supporting each other to produce the best result.

In organizations, that means leaders consider the needs of followers and make every reasonable effort to enable followers to thrive and deliver their best. While leadership is often a position, it is important to note that it exists on a continuum where good leaders become good followers, as situations require.

The Opportunity for Innovative Leadership

With the extraordinary rate of change today, leaders who lead from an obsolete perspective often unintentionally damage their organizations. If leaders make sense of the world from an old “algorithm,” their outdated equation puts them at a disadvantage, or even on the road to failure.

Having a best friend at work, for example, has a significant impact on employee engagement, yet some leaders still believe that “socializing” at work equates to “stealing” from the organization. Those leaders create less engaged workplaces.

Leaders who update their leadership algorithms to operate from the latest frameworks are more adaptable, have more flexible mindsets, and are more capable of taking considered risks. They also understand the

importance of creating a shared mutual purpose and aligning all aspects with that purpose to deliver value to their stakeholders (see Figure 1).

The Framework

Leaders who want to elevate their capabilities and update their leadership algorithm can do so using the Innovative Leadership framework (see Figure 2). It is not prescriptive and does not espouse a particular set of values. Instead, it involves a self-discovery process to identify purpose and values. Understanding vision and values is the foundation of leadership, so we first assess who we are as a person and as a leader through multiple lenses. We then create a plan to develop ourselves in the context of our organization. Finally, we lead — more effectively — using our newly enhanced leadership algorithm and supporting our organization in delivering its mission.

It is important to note that Innovative Leaders understand the interconnection among several organizational elements. The framework reiterates the alignment between your purpose and values, your behaviors, and the culture and systems you influence. A mistake we often see with leaders is that system changes do not include sufficient attention to shifting culture, behavior,

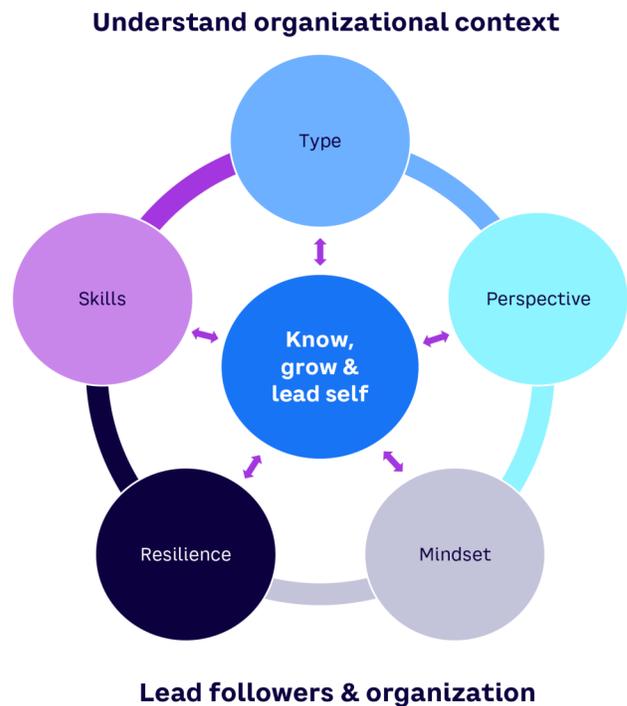


Figure 1. Innovative Leadership self

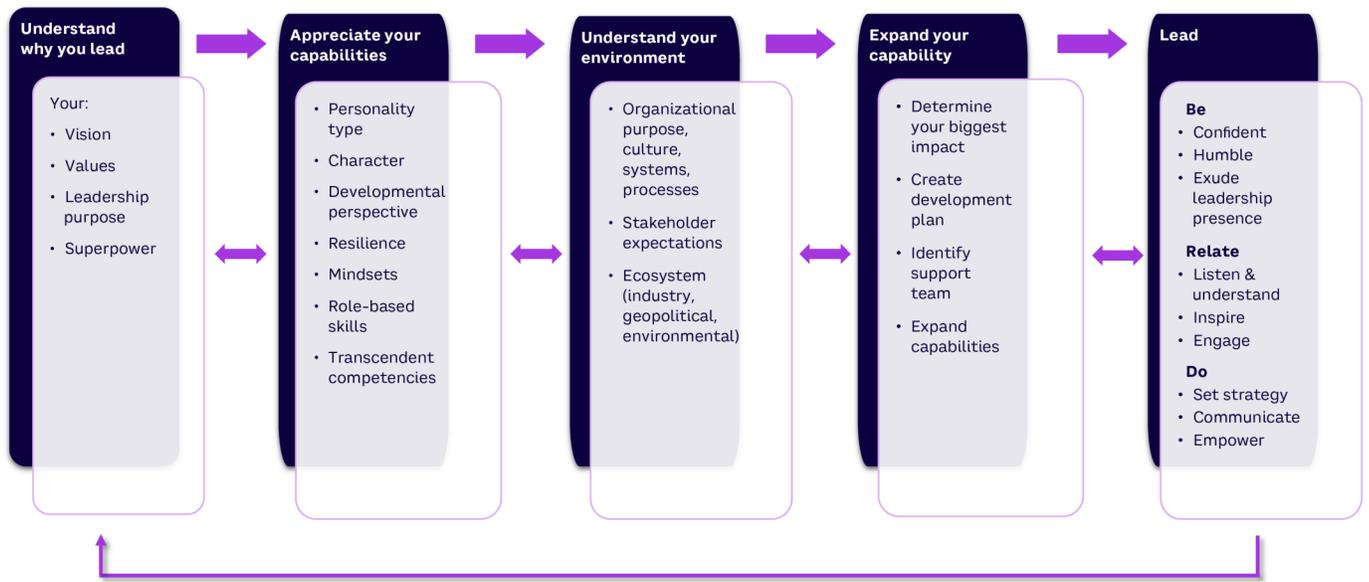


Figure 2. Innovative Leadership framework

and, in some cases, the beliefs of followers and stakeholders.

Understand Why You Lead

Exceptional leaders and teams earn their success, which starts with the individual leader understanding their life’s purpose. As Simon Sinek emphasizes in *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, knowing our why is crucial. This self-understanding informs who we are and what we do. It is our North Star, and it is essential to communicate it to our followers if we want tangible results. Elite teams work from a shared mutual purpose.

As leaders, clarity — communication of our purpose and vision — can inspire others. It is the foundation of our being as a leader. The best conductors, for example, merge with their music and convey their passion and connection with the music to their musicians. This dedication, however, does not mean they are unbalanced and have no life beyond the music. Instead, the healthier a person is in life, the better their performance as a leader or conductor. Leaders who lost their way and harmed their organizations likely were not following a well-balanced vision and values.

Knowing our North Star helps us decide where, as a leader, to best invest time and energy. Clarifying vision, aspirations, and values allows us to define how we contribute to the world in a way that authentically honors who we are and what we value. This clarity

lets us see what we want to accomplish over time, regardless of whether that time frame is short (e.g., one to five years) or much longer (e.g., decades). In addition, clarifying our unique personal vision lays the foundation for our internal-change process, providing the basis for personal goals, which can also help align behavior with aspirations.

When undertaking the envisioning process, it is essential to consider the context of our leadership role, organization, community, culture, and global involvement. When we are clear about our vision, we can evaluate where and how we fit within the organization. If our vision differs significantly from what we do and how we work, that additional knowledge can guide us in finding a better-fitting role or setting. Being grounded in vision and aspiration also provides information that helps align the energy we invest in our work.

At a minimum, vision should consider the time horizon that meaningful decisions impact. If, for example, a leader is setting a policy that has a substantial environmental impact, such as building a power plant, their vision should take that impact and its corresponding time frame into account. Although organizations have not always required successful leaders to think this way, ethical leaders consider the impact they make beyond the tenure of their role, accounting for the health of all their stakeholders, which often include the planet and future generations.

Intention and motivations fuel our personal and professional goals and give meaning to our lives. Actions aligned with values and objectives drive the impact we create in the world. The combination of vision and drive enables leaders to maximize their potential; conversely, without sufficient passion, solid vision, and understanding of current capabilities, we struggle when progress becomes difficult.

Appreciate Your Capabilities: “Leader, Know Thyself”

Appreciating our capabilities starts with a frank, unbiased assessment of ourselves and what we do well. World-class leaders want information about their performance across multiple axes. An organizational leader likely uses a balanced scorecard to monitor their organization’s success. As leaders, we need a balanced scorecard of ourselves as a person and of our leadership performance.

Let’s return to our image of the elements of an Innovative Leader (refer back to Figure 1). A truly comprehensive assessment measures each of these elements:

- **Type.** This includes personality, along with physical and psychological makeup such as ethnicity, gender, age, and demographics that impact who we are, including predispositions, beliefs, and biases.
- **Developmental perspective.** This is our inner meaning-making, or how we make sense of the world. Taking on more complex meaning-making is also known as “vertical development.”
- **Mindset.** These are beliefs that shape how we make sense of the world and ourselves. They often fall across a continuum and align with developmental perspectives.
- **Resilience.** This is the ability to stay flexible and focused when facing a challenge.
- **Skills (or competencies).** These are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors required to perform as an exceptional leader.

Analysis across these elements allows us to evaluate our capabilities relative to our purpose. It also helps identify opportunities and limitations. And while type is unlikely to change significantly over time, we can

develop the remaining facets of ourselves as leaders using a deliberate process.

Most leadership frameworks use one or more assessments to map our current state to our desired future. Innovative Leadership builds on this approach by integrating developmental perspectives, including mindsets and resilience, to deliver a richer, more robust view of the leader.

Unlike personality type, which remains relatively stable for most people, vertical development holds that people can progress through maturity levels as they evolve.

Vertical development is our ability to take on increasingly complex perspectives about situations and ourselves and is required to lead effectively. It influences how we see our role and function in the workplace, how we interact with other people, and how we solve complex problems. Leaders with a more mature developmental perspective take a broader view of situations. As a result, they are more flexible and insightful, especially when faced with challenges. Developmental perspective is crucial because meaning-making influences all our thoughts and actions; incorporating it as part of our inner exploration is critical to being an Innovative Leader.

Unlike personality type, which remains relatively stable for most people, vertical development holds that people can progress through maturity levels as they evolve. The more mature or evolved a leader’s perspective is, the more effective they will be at leading complex organizations in times of change. For example, individuals with an earlier perspective rely on rules to determine a course of action, whereas later-stage individuals use their values to guide appropriate action. We are more effective leaders when we incorporate an understanding of developmental perspectives into our understanding of ourselves and others. It also enables us to produce the best outcome for all involved by bolstering self-awareness and relationship awareness.

Another unique element of the Innovative Leadership framework is resilience, where we look at ourselves through the lenses of physical health, mindfulness (our ability to manage our thinking), heartfulness (our

motivations and emotions), and our connection with others. These four factors together forge a leader’s inner stability. Resilience allows us to build and sustain our ability to be flexible and focused, regain balance after disorienting situations, and inspire others. It includes fluidity and endurance, and it is essential. From a leadership perspective, it is the ability to adapt in the face of change without compromising outcomes or values, be adaptable in approach, and still drive toward attaining strategic goals. Addressing all aspects of resilience is critical to managing stress and increasing our baseline capacity to function in stressful environments. Leaders must maintain their physical, psychological, and emotional health to have the resilience that underpins real success.

Understand Your Environment: Situational Analysis

Leadership is contextual. A leader is authentically the same person in different situations, but how they lead and which facets of themselves they bring forward varies by context. Going back to our conductor analogy, the world-class conductor giving a Pops concert at an outdoor picnic will conduct the orchestra differently than when those same musicians are indoors performing a classical program. Elite leaders similarly understand the culture and systems they are leading. Leaders in senior roles also understand the changing

ecosystem and continually refine their leadership to address changing organizational needs. The nature of today’s global, interconnected economy causes these changes to occur more and more often.

There is mutual interaction among the four dimensions of self (physical, emotional, mental, and character), culture, action, and system, depicted in Figure 3, that influences every moment of our experience. All four exist in every experience we have. Situational analysis evaluates this four-dimensional view of reality, enabling one to understand the context and adapt accordingly.

In an organizational setting, situational analysis cultivates simultaneous awareness of our inside-self, our effort, the organizational culture, and organizational systems. Evaluating, balancing, and aligning all four dimensions without favoring any one is essential for an Innovative Leader. At their peril, leaders can take a partial or narrow approach to change by overemphasizing the changes with little or no consideration to organizational culture or how their personal views, inner emotional state, and actions shape that change’s content and success. By contrast, a multidimensional approach provides a more comprehensive, accurate picture of events and context.

Innovative Leaders succeed by optimizing their efforts to deliver value to all key stakeholders, so once

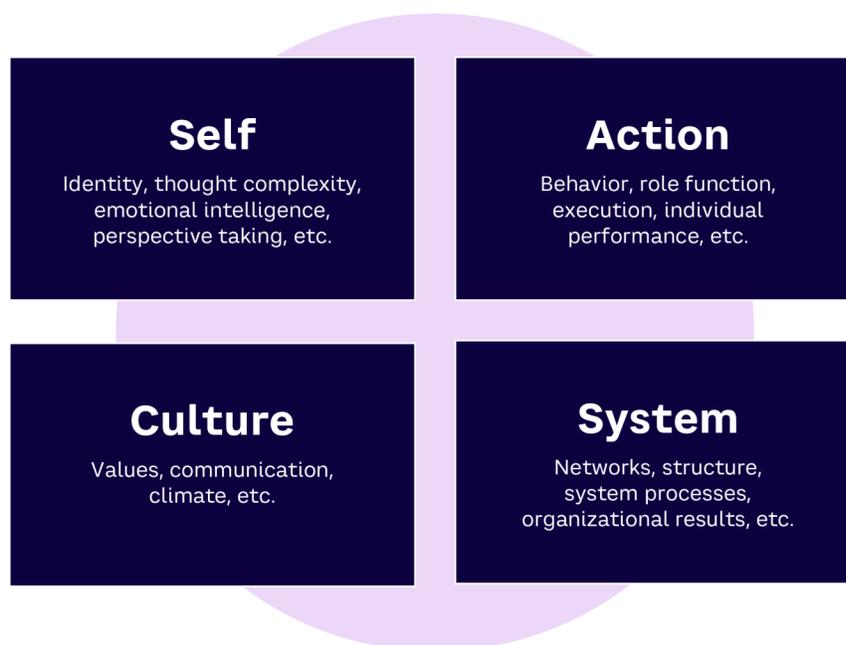


Figure 3. Situational analysis

understood, the organization's internal context further aligns with its external stakeholders. Innovative Leaders do this by understanding the interconnectedness across their ecosystems, including the implications of their decisions and actions on sustainability as measured by the environment, social, and governance impacts.

Expand Your Capability

Let's return to the balanced scorecard. Assessing our capabilities gives us a clearer view of all facets of our leadership, including where we excel and where we need to either build our skills and capacities or augment them through our teams. The conductor and orchestra, for example, become exceptional by using deliberate tactics, including practice, coaching, mentoring, formal training, exchange programs, and stretch assignments. Leadership development requires a similar approach. It starts with a clear understanding of what we are trying to accomplish and a step-by-step plan to close our gaps and build on our strengths.

The Innovative Leadership framework uses a structured development planning process that is highly flexible and can include specific areas of development that advance one's goals. The field of leadership has many valuable frameworks; Innovative Leadership offers leaders a way to incorporate concepts they have found helpful into this more comprehensive model. The principles and behaviors of servant leadership or shared leadership, for example, can be easily folded into a development process. The same is true of other frameworks — with the critical caveat that any incorporated elements should be aligned and cohesive overall.

After identifying development goals, it is vital to identify a support team to provide expertise, be an accountability partner, and give feedback on progress. Support partners can help us think through whose jobs will change as we change and how we will practice new behaviors inside and outside of work. When considering who is part of a development team, it is crucial to consider both mindset and availability to support growth. When trying new behaviors, for example, we want a team that can provide support in a manner that we value. Some people want direct feedback. Others prefer gentle recommendations. The goal is to know what is needed from each team member and craft explicit agreements to get what we need.

Scorecards help monitor progress, but plans rarely go as expected. We often receive feedback or learn about an

unintended consequence of our growth/change that requires a revision to the plan. It is essential to set up a process to review and revise goals to reflect what we are learning about ourselves (and our environment) as we develop.

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Lead: Be, Relate, Do

Be

When defining our vision and values, we set the foundation for who (vision) and how (values) we want to be. If you imagine the most influential leaders you admire, how would you describe their essence? Highly effective leaders generally demonstrate a balance of professional humility and confidence. They are innately collaborative, and they inspire followers and stakeholders. They are ethical and trustworthy. How would you describe your essence? What would you like to change about your essence to optimize your impact?

Relate

Grunberg and his colleagues have championed a model highlighting the interconnections of effective leaders. A leader's ability to relate across the following four psychosocial contexts creates an engaging and empowering environment:

1. **Personal** — connect with and be aware of our purpose, values, type, developmental perspective, resilience, mindsets, and competencies
2. **Interpersonal** — relationships involving two people that include building trust and shared agreements about a range of topics involving how they work together
3. **Team** — a work group's arrangements about how they will accomplish their work, including communication, accountabilities, and decision making

4. **Organizational** — the vision, culture, systems, strategic initiatives, and impact measures involved in a division, business unit, or organization

Do

Innovative Leaders, in particular, do the following:

- Set an inspirational vision of success and guide the organization based on both performance and the value of the organization's positive impact.
- Leverage the team for answers as part of the decision-making process.
- Behave like a scientist, continually experimenting, measuring, and testing for improvement and exploring new models and approaches.
- Constantly learn and develop self and others.
- Motivate people to perform through strategic focus, mentoring and coaching, and emotional and social intelligence.
- Pay attention to strategic goals and measures like profit, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, community impact, and cultural cohesion.

Summary

The most effective and influential leaders are authentic to their purpose and values. They also understand their followers, including their followers' values, and they create a shared purpose that guides their work and motivates their efforts. They appreciate their broader, mutually interdependent context and understand that aligning all system elements (including themselves) and evolving them together is what generates long-term success. Genuinely Innovative Leaders continually elevate themselves, their followers, and organizations to serve their stakeholders and the greater good.

Disclaimer: The opinions and assertions contained herein are the sole ones of the authors and are not to be construed as reflecting the views of the Uniformed Services University or the US Department of Defense.

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