



UNIVERSITY OF  
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Institute for  
Sustainability  
Leadership



# Leadership capabilities for the 21st century

Thriving in an age of disruption

## The University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL)

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# Executive summary



**Effective leadership in the 21st century means harnessing the current waves of ecological, geopolitical and technological disruption to drive positive transformation for societies and economies. In an increasingly interconnected yet polarised world, leaders must navigate cascading crises, eroding trust and shifting foundations for collective working, while leveraging human resilience and ingenuity. Rather than resisting change, the most impactful leaders establish purpose, vision and hope, and ride the waves of turbulence to build thriving, inclusive futures where people and the planet prosper.**

This report updates the *Leadership Capabilities for the 21st Century Framework*, published in 2023 by the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL). It both incorporates feedback on its application in practice since publishing and explores the challenges and opportunities of leadership in the current context defined by disruption. The report summarises seven reflections on and updates to the original thinking and provides a revised relevant and practical framework and capabilities to influence leadership development and impact.

Leadership is not confined to a few individuals in positions of power but is about accepting responsibility to create the conditions for collective movement towards a shared meaningful goal. *Purpose* remains central, but must be activated through strategic *performance*, while *place* is more important than ever in navigating polarisation and power, and energising change.

*Connected* leadership is vital for navigating complexity, but also to show the connection with everyday concerns, while *collective* leadership recognises the need for a healthy dynamic between collaboration and competition, bridging strategically to realise impact. *Creative* leadership generates the conditions that lead not only to imagination but also to radical innovation and transformation, while *courageous* leadership takes many forms in a complex world.

The report draws on extensive research and feedback from global practitioners, aiming to close the gap between aspirational ideals and lived realities. Collectively as part of teams, organisations and movements, we believe that this kind of leadership will go a long way towards creating the conditions for critical earth systems and the economies, societies and organisations that rely on them to genuinely prosper and thrive at this time of disruption.



# Executive summary



The *Leadership Capabilities for the 21st Century Framework* (2025) (Figure 1) has been revised to embrace the capabilities required in a turbulent age, where effective leadership uses the energy and opportunity of disruption to create more thriving economies, societies and futures. It provides a relevant and practical framework and capabilities to influence leadership development and impact.



**Figure 1: The Leadership Capabilities Framework (2025)**

## Purpose and performance

Leadership that drives strategic transformation and **performance** to realise the **purpose** of a better future.

## Principles

The core characteristics of leadership showing most potential for thriving in an age of disruption.



### Connected

Leadership that prioritises interconnection and interdependence in every way, from navigating complex systems to inter-personal dynamics.



### Collective

Leadership that enables a purposeful and healthy interplay between collaboration and competition, and bridges strategically to bring about action and impact.



### Creative

Leadership that generates the conditions for ideas and solutions to emerge, advance and fundamentally disrupt systems, building better futures.



### Courageous

Leadership that knows what it stands for and does the hard things, rooted in active hope.

## Place

Leadership that puts **place** and context at the heart of sense-making and decision-taking.



# Leadership capabilities for the 21st century

## Thriving in an age of disruption

**In a turbulent age, effective leadership uses the energy and opportunity of disruption to create more thriving economies, societies and futures.**

The world is more interconnected than ever, and increasingly vulnerable to cascading shocks and crises.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, societies are increasingly fragmented – economically, geopolitically and ideologically<sup>2</sup> – with rising trends in socio-political polarisation, a breakdown in trust and cohesion,<sup>3</sup> and growing conflict and violence.<sup>4</sup> Many of the foundations underpinning social order and collective working in the 20th century are dramatically shifting, and there are huge debates about how economies should be organised in the future.<sup>5</sup> Against this backdrop, there will be even greater disruption from either consequences of climate and nature degradation,<sup>6</sup> or from the actions that societies take to respond to them,<sup>7</sup> at the same time as artificial intelligence, machine learning and other technological breakthroughs are accelerating profound transformations that will disrupt and create new norms.<sup>8</sup>



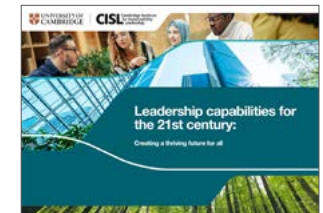
*“Responsible, effective leadership is never easy. But the challenges facing today’s leaders are of a different order than generations past. Crises no longer present themselves in isolation, but as part of an interconnected and hugely complex web.”*

Effective leadership for the 21st century is the ability to thrive in this disruption to accelerate positive progress for citizens and economies. The fundamental instinct to survive and flourish is deeply embedded in the human condition.<sup>9</sup> Humanity has shown a striking ability over millennia to adapt to diverse environments, recover from trauma and demonstrate astonishing resilience. Times of extreme disruption can be opportunities for transformation, and there are already reasons for active hope and optimism in the continued fall in child mortality, exponential growth in clean energy, and technological breakthroughs that can radically enhance human health and wellbeing.<sup>10</sup>

While the challenges are considerable, and many who have intentionally pursued a more just and resilient world over the last decades are feeling demoralised, leadership is more critical than ever. It is key to harnessing the very best of human ingenuity to ensure that technological, geopolitical, social, economic and ecological disruption is used for good rather than entrenching harms. Many will instinctively crave stability in a turbulent age – hunkering down, protecting, and resisting change. We argue however that effective leadership for

the 21st century proactively rides the waves of disruption, using the momentum to build organisations, communities, nations and economies where people and all of life genuinely prosper and thrive, now and for future generations.

**In 2023, we published *Leadership Capabilities for the 21st Century: Creating a Thriving Future for All*, which set out a framework for developing the mindsets and practices for a sustainable future – one that protects and restores the natural and social systems on which wellbeing for everyone is based.**



Since publishing, we have stress-tested the ideas with and gathered extensive feedback from several hundred business, government and finance professionals from around the world.<sup>11</sup> We have also revisited the ideas in light of recent societal, economic and political shifts, evaluating what still holds and what needs to change to reflect current contexts.

The feedback we received most often was that while many of the foundational ideas deeply resonated and can be seen in practice in some areas, the framework left people wondering what to do with the gap between the ideal and their everyday lived experience. For example, the reality of colleagues or associates who do not share the same values or vision; systems that consistently prioritise short-term gains over long-term value creation; lack of senior leadership ambition in a challenging political climate; increasingly divided societies and an inability to live well together.

As authors, we want to better support individuals and organisations to navigate current realities and challenges, be prepared for action, and develop their leadership wisdom and decision-making in a contested and complex space. In short, we want robust leadership principles and supporting capabilities that can be applied in real operating contexts.

In doing this, we have identified seven updates in our thinking about the leadership needed for an age of disruption. Some of these updates represent shifts to the original ideas; others reconfirm and strengthen our original approach. These updates have informed a revised framework, key definitions and set of capabilities, as summarised in Figure 2.



# Introducing the framework



*Figure 2: Leadership Capabilities for the 21st Century (2025)*





# 1. Understanding leadership

Leadership that accepts responsibility for creating the conditions for collective movement towards a shared meaningful goal

**THE UPDATE:** It matters more than ever how we all think about and practise leadership. We are clearer that simple stories about leadership can kill our ability to see a more complex reality.<sup>12</sup> While it is natural to gravitate towards charisma and energy, especially in times of uncertainty, societies do not need to be dominated by a simple story of the ‘hero saviour’ that strips away shared accountability and agency.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, there are many ways to be ‘agents of leadership’. Everyone has a part to play in creating the conditions for collective movement towards a shared meaningful goal. This in fact encourages decisive and meaningful action rather than, for those who have accepted leadership responsibility, being shackled by the near-impossible expectations of the hero figure.<sup>14</sup>

## THE CONTEXT:

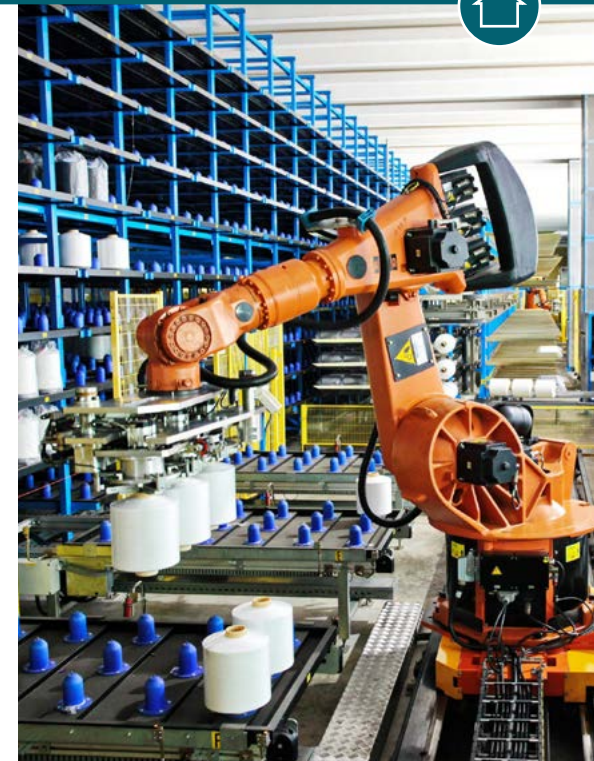
Over history, societies have gravitated to the idea that the general public is incapable of self-governance and requires strong leaders, that there are special individuals (often men) who have innate qualities for leadership, and that the success or failure of the group is attributed primarily to the actions and decisions of this leader, rather than a collective effort.<sup>15</sup> These ideas hold because they offer a simpler explanation of how leadership works than the complex reality of the interplay between people, events and their environment.<sup>16</sup> They also hold because it suits the vested interests of those already in power (and the leadership industry that supports them) and because the idea of a ‘saviour’ figure is seductive in an overwhelming, disruptive and out-of-control world.<sup>17</sup>

There is a risk however that the more people buy into the need for the saviour human (and the temptation to do so is likely to increase with growing ecological fragility, social fragmentation and technological developments),<sup>18</sup> the more it can undermine our capacity for collective action and accountability. The more we look to the stereotype of the strong authoritative leader, the more this shapes the reality of future leadership.<sup>19</sup> For those contexts increasingly dominated by ‘strong man’ politics, especially those with autocratic tendencies, to what extent does ‘following’ become simply fear-based passivity or uncritical deference, accepting the narrative that there is not the need, opportunity or agency to act? Even when there are no overt autocratic tendencies, to what extent does the ‘hero-isation’ of those who have accepted leadership responsibility (and conversely their vilification when they ‘fail’) place an unattainable burden of expectation on their shoulders?<sup>20</sup>

Research challenges the simple story of the ‘hero leader’ and confirms that there are many ways to be an ‘agent of leadership’:

*“an individual or group who accepts responsibility for creating the conditions for collective movement towards a shared meaningful goal”<sup>21</sup>*

‘Accepting responsibility’ emphasises that leadership owns and acts on the opportunity to contribute, accepts accountability for actions and decisions, and is answerable for its part in enabling collective success. ‘Creating the conditions’ highlights that leadership can be exercised through a wide range of activities, from motivation and inspiration, to direction and decision-taking, to sense-making and storytelling (supporting shared meaning and understanding), to coalition building and mobilisation, to shifting cultures, policies and processes to embed change. Leadership capabilities are not simply for the few who happen to be in existing positions of power. Leadership capabilities can, and need to, be developed in every context, at every level of an organisation, and in every part of society, to accept collective accountability for and build collective capacity for change.



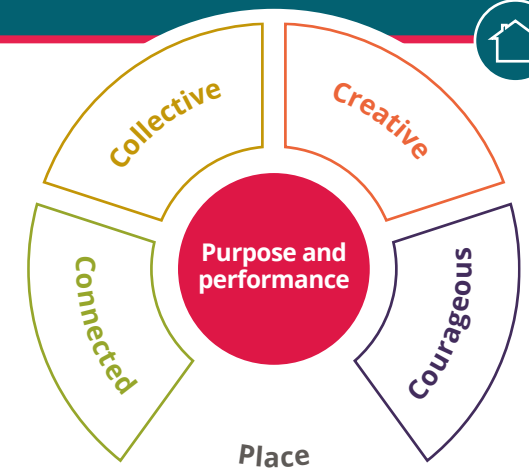




## 2. Purpose and performance

Leadership that drives strategic transformation and performance to realise the purpose of a better future

**THE UPDATE:** Purpose remains at the heart of our framework but needs to be activated in practice and performance – bringing together the desire to contribute to a better future with the impetus to build something that works.<sup>22</sup> This means that leadership is strategic – surfacing, identifying and making fundamental and difficult choices – in order to achieve vital, agreed goals in line with purpose. It also means working to change the rules of the game (such as market conditions, policy norms and success measures) so that strategic performance is aligned with the common good: thriving social and environmental systems on which society – and businesses – depend.



### THE CONTEXT:

For several years, many leadership development programmes failed to ask the critical question: “who or what is your leadership in service of?”<sup>23</sup> Without this question, those in leadership are at risk of accepting norms about what ‘good’ looks like, whether profit, growth, or election wins without critical reflection on considerations of wider significance. Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest in identifying how individual leaders, organisations, businesses and indeed the economy can make a bigger meaningful contribution to wider society beyond simply self-interest.<sup>24</sup> Many of these important contributions seek to (re)orient individual and collective purpose to an ultimate ‘meta purpose’, such as long-term wellbeing for all people and planet,<sup>25</sup> sustainability,<sup>26</sup> thriving<sup>27</sup> and flourishing.<sup>28</sup> There are different cultural expressions of what a ‘better future’ entails<sup>29</sup> – an important issue we discuss in the next section – but we use the phrase here

to indicate a shared purpose of working for the common good in a way that does not undermine the foundational social and ecological systems that underpin that collective good in the future.<sup>30</sup>

The central idea of purpose instinctively resonates with many in leadership. There is agreement that a strong sense of shared purpose can build community that can accelerate action towards a meaningful goal.<sup>31</sup> An encouragingly high number of the boards and executive teams of major organisations that CISL engages with express that they want to be working in ways that are good for societies. Most have a deep desire to build towards something ‘better’. A vague sense of purpose however is not enough. It needs to lead to clear, agreed, vital outcomes being defined.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, a strategy is needed that provides clarity on fundamental and difficult choices needed to achieve those vital outcomes – for example, where to position, when to act, where to focus innovation and investment.<sup>33</sup>

# Purpose and performance

Without vital goals and strategy, purpose quickly morphs into empty promises or naivety in the face of resistance and conflict.

For those for whom purpose has been little more than a marketing exercise with limited strategic commitment or resourcing, the reality of challenging markets, political resistance and negative public sentiment has been enough to prompt a retreat to 'business-as-usual'.<sup>34</sup> Where engagement with purpose has been more genuine and substantial, there is the risk that more creative energy has been poured into critiquing the current situation and imagining an ideal state, rather than developing strategies to make progress with the pragmatic work of building that future and getting things done. Of course, critical engagement and imagination are crucial but our original framework did not do enough to acknowledge and work with the human instinct to influence and then perform, especially in the context of business leadership.<sup>35</sup>

In this new version, we acknowledge the complex interplay of motivations that shape human behaviour. Alongside a desire for meaning and purpose, the desire for influence highlights the importance of understanding and working with power, being aware of different sources of influence, and how therefore these might be used strategically for the common good.<sup>36</sup> The desire to perform taps effectively into the agency to act, with a focus then on (re)connecting performance with a longer-term understanding of success

and pursuit of the common good,<sup>37</sup> so that the best of human resourcefulness is used to enhance (rather than undermine) our ability to succeed in the future.

***"In short, we need to design out the prevailing tension between profitability and sustainability. This can only be addressed by consistent, long-term government commitments and effective delivery plans that drive all businesses to act, creating thriving markets for climate-neutral, nature-positive and circular products, and punishing those who fail to act. Such ambition, with the policy and regulations needed, will only materialise if a critical mass of business leaders actively demand it."***



In a business context, this means better understanding how change happens in complex systems<sup>38</sup> and using every lever of power to shift the rules of the game – influencing peers, investors and policymakers to shift market conditions in favour of environmentally and socially beneficial solutions.<sup>39</sup> Such leadership is not just about any single individual's or organisation's sense of purpose, but is also about working proactively and strategically to drive market change that facilitates greater alignment between commercial performance and a 'better future'.

Leadership for purpose and performance also has a strong commitment to impact, using a wide range of data sources to evaluate if sufficient progress is being made and if not, adapting strategies in order to achieve vital outcomes.<sup>40</sup>

**Leadership that drives strategic transformation and performance to realise the purpose of a better future.**

## Purpose and performance capabilities

- Turn the desire for a meaningful 'reason to exist' into a pragmatic commitment to building and shaping the future through strategic action.
- Use existing power to influence the rules of the game, so that strategic performance is more closely aligned with environmentally and socially beneficial outcomes.
- Accept responsibility for impact, adapting strategies when needed based on a wide range of robust evidence.

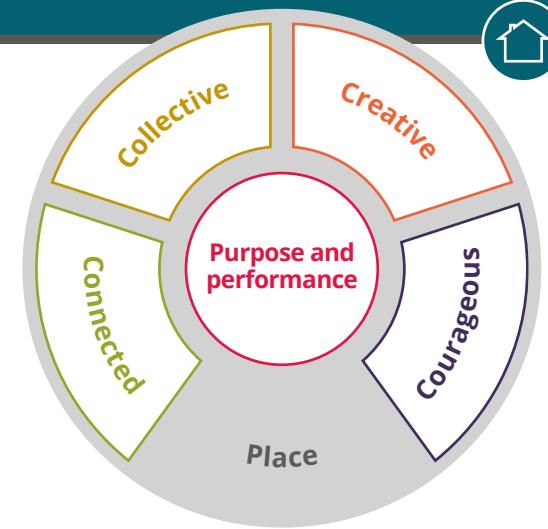




# 3. Place

Leadership that puts place and context at the heart of sense-making and decision-taking

**THE UPDATE:** We have become more convinced than ever that understanding and working with the 'place' of leadership is crucial for effective leadership in the 21st century. When leadership loses connection with place, legitimacy and trust quickly erode. Paying attention to place means really seeing and grasping what 'is' in particular contexts and understanding the backstories that sit behind this, in order to better understand and navigate issues of social polarisation. It also means tapping into the collective hope and energy for change that exists in particular places. Place-based leadership moves from high-level commentary and abstract ideals, to driving real-world impact at local and regional levels.



## THE CONTEXT:

While there are common core foundations to human flourishing,<sup>41</sup> it is also the case that there are strongly polarised views on what it means to thrive and prosper – especially around who is included in the sphere of care and concern.<sup>42</sup> Many people find the visions of a thriving world being advocated by others to be dystopian, because they emerge from a very different 'place'. More than that though, many of the 'noble lies' of our time<sup>43</sup> – deliberate myths to create social stability and harmony such as meritocracy, equality of opportunity, universal human rights, the benevolent state and trickle-down economics – are simply not available to everyone because of their 'place' in the world – geographic, social, economic, technological and/or cultural.<sup>44</sup> What is deemed to be 'good' often represents the interests of the powerful who make decisions and conceive of policies at a distance with little regard for local experience and community realities.

The result is a sense of alienation, growing populism and outrage, and undermined delivery of national objectives, particularly among the 'places that don't matter' to those in power.<sup>45</sup>

The reason for this backlash however is that place *does* matter to those who live there.<sup>46</sup> In fact, place is crucial in how people make sense of the world. It provides a sense of shared meaning, identity and attachment,<sup>47</sup> as well as a sense of pride,<sup>48</sup> which if effectively mobilised, can lead to ambition, action and 'getting involved'.<sup>49</sup> Re-engaging with place through devolved, accountable and often citizen-led governance and decision-making can begin to rebuild a sense of connection, engagement and movement.<sup>50</sup>

Place-based leadership capabilities begin with listening;<sup>51</sup> tuning in beyond the echo chambers (often reinforced by social media) to the realities of different places and perspectives.

# Place



This might involve techniques to 'walk in the shoes of others' in order to stretch understanding of different perspectives and experiences.<sup>52</sup> Understanding the 'backstories' – the past injustices, the current situation, and fears for the future that are particular to different contexts – is a critical skill in navigating what has become termed an 'age of outrage',<sup>53</sup> and goes some way to rebuilding trust in institutions and leadership. When we do not take history into account, we risk reinforcing historic power imbalances and injustices.<sup>54</sup>

Place-based leadership also values local insights and knowledge, builds capacity for co-creation and co-governance, and provides insights into how to reconnect with public purpose.<sup>55</sup> This might mean

harnessing community knowledge to complement big data and satellite imagery, for example in flood management,<sup>56</sup> or incorporating the multiple ways in which communities 'value' non-human nature into policy and decision-making.<sup>57</sup> It may involve building trust and a sense of belonging in specific urban settings, gathering local communities to bond with each other and with local natural systems through nature-based solutions.<sup>58</sup> In short, place offers a meaningful lens through which people can make sense of the idea of systemic change,<sup>59</sup> and can lead to practices that deal more effectively at local levels with thorny issues such as social justice, climate change, nature regeneration, alternative energy and economic inequality, in ways that are contextually appropriate.<sup>60</sup>



Leadership that puts place and context at the heart of sense-making and decision-taking.

## Place capabilities

- Tune in to what 'is' in different contexts and places, and work with that reality as its starting point.
- Bring the 'human' back into leadership strategies, seeking to understand past injustices, current realities, fears for the future and the desire to belong.
- Move from abstract ideals to harnessing people's sense of identity, knowledge and collective energy for change in specific places and sectors.

With purpose, performance and place front of mind, we now turn to the four principles in the original framework that reflect the characteristics of leadership most likely to work for a sustainable future: connected, collective, creative and courageous.

Much of our original thinking has proved enduring, but feedback has prompted us to consider how these characteristics might inform the process of leadership decision-making, as leadership is usually exercised through difficult choices and consideration of trade-offs in complex conditions.





## 4. Connected

Leadership that prioritises interconnection and interdependence in every way, from navigating complex systems to inter-personal dynamics

**THE UPDATE:** We have further deepened our conviction about the importance of navigating complex and interdependent systems through connected leadership. It is critical for organisational survival and leadership effectiveness in a turbulent world. Such leadership accepts the reality of complexity as 'normal' rather than something to be resisted, develops capabilities for systemic analysis and foresight, and is 'systems intelligent' about synergies and trade-offs. We emphasise more strongly however that connected leadership also works hard to connect meaningfully with everyday concerns, and invests in quality relationships and interconnections at every level.



### THE CONTEXT:

Many of our current leadership challenges are caused by living the 'fantasy of separation' in a world that is fundamentally interconnected.<sup>61</sup> Critical decisions have failed to recognise the profound interdependencies that exist between people, and between society, nature and the economy, and have therefore not built these relationships into critical decision-making.<sup>62</sup> Leadership has often failed to reckon with the reality of complex living systems, under-estimating the non-linear nature of systems change and its sometimes sudden and disproportionate impact,<sup>63</sup> and experiencing the frustration of unintended consequences and unpredictable 'side-effects' of siloed thinking.<sup>64</sup> Examples might include the removal of natural habitats like mangrove forests to make way for commercial aquaculture, resulting in greater vulnerability to storm surges, coastal erosion and flooding, and therefore huge economic

and social costs;<sup>65</sup> or intensive farming practices for economic gains that have undermined soil quality and the number of pollinators, compromising future yields and economic returns.<sup>66</sup>

Since our original report, several publications on the theme of regeneration and its application to business have emerged.<sup>67</sup> These emphasise the need to consider 'whole system health' across environment, society and economy,<sup>68</sup> and also challenge false binaries between – for example – environmental protection and economic growth, through exploring how investing in ecological and social health can support economic prosperity and long-term business resilience, especially in light of multiple competing demands for finite resources.<sup>69</sup> Contributions from the field of complexity science provide insight into navigating complexity without seeking to artificially reduce or compartmentalise.<sup>70</sup>



# Connected

This includes awareness of how systems tend to behave, including carrying capacities, tipping points and 'points of no return'.<sup>71</sup>

Connected leadership therefore develops capabilities in systemic analysis and foresight – evaluating strategies against multiple possible futures.<sup>72</sup> It engages in thoughtful, 'systems-intelligent' approaches to identifying and navigating potential trade-offs and synergies, taking into account different time frames and contexts,<sup>73</sup> and embraces rapid testing and learning.<sup>74</sup> For example, an organisational board embracing a nature-positive strategy would assess critical impacts and dependencies on nature across the value chain, identify potential trade-offs and synergies between ecological restoration, operational efficiency and long-term resilience over different time horizons, and use this to inform strategic decisions, being willing to adapt and learn as evidence accumulated.<sup>75</sup>

It is increasingly apparent that these capabilities are not just 'nice to have'; they are indispensable leadership skills. Such leadership lets go of the instinct to control and instead looks for more effective strategies for navigating and thriving in complexity. One such response is to develop individuals and teams that are themselves increasingly 'sophisticated',<sup>76</sup> 'mature'<sup>77</sup> or 'complex' (in the best sense of the word)<sup>78</sup> – multi-faceted, diverse, broad, and inter-dependent in terms of their thinking and judgement. Just as

complexity in living systems builds resilience to external shocks,<sup>79</sup> so too does connected and complex leadership enhance the likelihood of making sound choices.

At the same time, connected leadership is the ability to connect with a range of people and communities in ways that resonate and are credible. Advanced systemic thinking might be a necessary leadership capability, but if it leads to confusion, paralysis and alienation from everyday realities and concern, it will remain a technical skill with limited leadership impact. Too little has been done for instance to connect trends in climate, nature and inequality with pressing concerns around national security, geopolitical stability, economic resilience, movement of people, community cohesion, organisational survival and quality of life, when in fact these interconnections are fundamental.<sup>80</sup>

Connected leadership will therefore craft compelling narratives that draw out the strong threads between environmental, social and economic issues in ways that make sense for people.<sup>81</sup> These are not simple stories, but they are stories that meet people where they 'are' (not where we want them to be or think they ought to be), connect with their concerns and lived experiences, and then make sense of these concerns in ways that bridge to more interconnected ways of thinking and acting. For example, this might include connecting energy independence through renewables

with national security and economic resilience,<sup>82</sup> or framing retrofit programmes as a way of tackling fuel poverty,<sup>83</sup> or promoting agroecology initiatives as a way of improving the yields, income and resilience of smallholder farmers.<sup>84</sup>

In this task of crafting narratives that connect, there remains an important place for the empathy talked about in the original report as a critical leadership capability for strengthening insight and understanding, demonstrating relevance and credibility, building confidence and trust, and ultimately



enabling shared action.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, in a polarised and fragmented world, where divisions over politics, values and truth seem more evident than ever, healthy relationships serve as the connective tissue that holds society together, humanising the 'other' and creating space for understanding and trust to grow.<sup>86</sup>

**Connected leadership prioritises interconnection and interdependence in every way, from navigating complex systems to inter-personal dynamics.**



## Connected capabilities

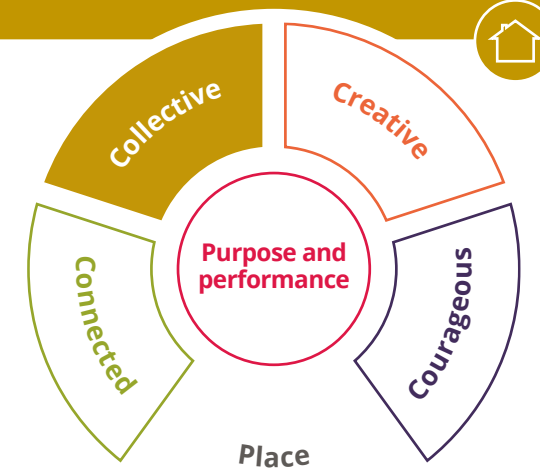
- Normalise complexity and engage in 'systems intelligent' approaches to analysis, foresight, surfacing and navigating trade-offs, and decision-making.
- Craft compelling narratives that join up trends around the environment, society and economy with real-life everyday concerns.
- Develop quality relationships by building empathy, trust and shared understanding.



## 5. Collective

Leadership that enables a purposeful and healthy interplay between collaboration and competition, and bridges strategically to bring about action and impact

**THE UPDATE:** We have recast collaborative leadership as *collective* leadership in order to more fully reflect the different dynamics that shape collective progress. What matters – especially for business leadership – is the dynamic interplay between collaboration and competition that can energise collective effort towards a meaningful goal. Such a healthy dynamic often depends on a level of co-ordination and governance that does not over-orchestrate or concentrate power in any single individual, organisation or group, but results in distributed agency and responsibility.



### THE CONTEXT:

It is hard to imagine making progress on critical global challenges or indeed being successful in a business or organisational context, without some measure of collaboration. The ability to work effectively with a range of stakeholders across functional, organisational, sectoral, geographic and/or cultural boundaries is clearly a key skill for the 21st century.<sup>87</sup> Collective working is not all collaborative however – markets are one key structure that can drive aligned efforts towards a common goal across a range of otherwise disconnected actors through competitive dynamics.

In natural ecosystems, there is a dynamic and healthy interplay between competition and co-operation that leads to ecological resilience and thriving.<sup>88</sup> In a similar way, both competition and co-operation are an integral part of how organisations, economies and societies function, and leadership will be

shaped by a dynamic and healthy interplay between the two.<sup>89</sup> Co-operation levels the playing field, pools resources and expertise, defines shared purpose and ambition, and shapes standards that define 'success'.<sup>90</sup> The original roots of the word 'competition' mean to 'strive with', rather than to work against.<sup>91</sup> For business, a healthy interplay between co-operation and competition that 'strives with' would involve collaborating on pre-competitive issues such as policy frameworks or critical infrastructure to drive market transformation, so that companies acting on sustainability thrive in those markets at the expense of those who neglect it.<sup>92</sup> For example, the remarkable growth of renewables required collective action by a broad coalition of actors working towards a shared goal, from policymakers to business, investors, researchers and communities.<sup>93</sup> It also was the result of competition to meet that goal, with winners and losers – between both private businesses and national economies.





# Collective

*“For businesses, knowing where to compete and where to collaborate – with peers, value chains and policymakers – will be critical. Policymakers face the same challenge: identifying where markets function well and where intervention is needed to accelerate sustainability.”*



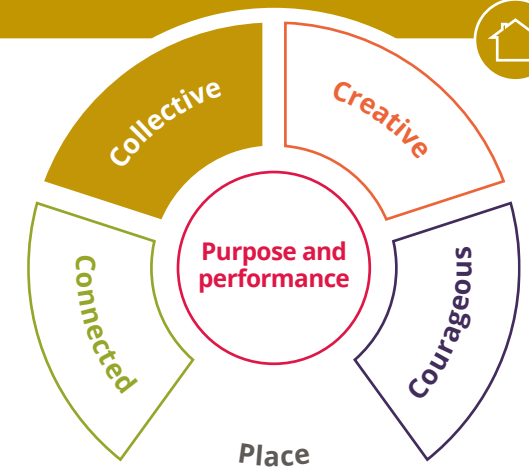
Where co-operation is needed, we maintain that the ability to collaborate effectively is a critical leadership capability. This means fewer ‘talking shops’ which have little impact in practical terms, and more purposeful alliances that orchestrate different actors strategically to be accountable for an impact that could not be achieved individually.

In such alliances, it remains important to engage, have credibility with, and build trust with a wide range of people beyond the usual echo chamber. Collective leadership is skilled at understanding how power operates, including both how to work well within the current system and leverage existing power dynamics, and where to confront existing concentrations of power for the collective good.<sup>94</sup> It recognises the fragility of over-dependence on a few ‘hero’ individuals, organisations or nations, and looks to build collective capacity and confidence.

This involves redistributing power and agency through multiple relationships and connections, while providing sufficient co-ordination and governance to enable the collective to operate with accountability. For example, global expansion of renewable energy raises serious concerns about how the transition to a green economy might replicate historical patterns of exploitation with the extraction of critical minerals like lithium, cobalt and rare earth elements.<sup>95</sup> Here, future strategic alliances will likely need to have a stronger focus on ensuring

the benefits of the energy transition are equitably shared, emphasising local agency, decentralised solutions, South-South investment and innovation, and self-sufficiency rather than dependency on Global North technologies and financing.<sup>96</sup>

**Collective leadership enables a purposeful and healthy interplay between collaboration and competition, and bridges strategically to bring about action and impact.**



## Collective capabilities

- Mobilise the capabilities required for progress by working across organisational and sector boundaries beyond the usual echo chambers, combining complementary expertise and competitive strengths.
- Build focused alliances with clear strategy, objectives, roles and accountability that accelerate progress on issues where working alone is slower or less effective.
- Strengthen the system by placing authority and responsibility where it can drive the greatest impact, creating governance that supports both co-ordinated action and healthy competitive dynamics.

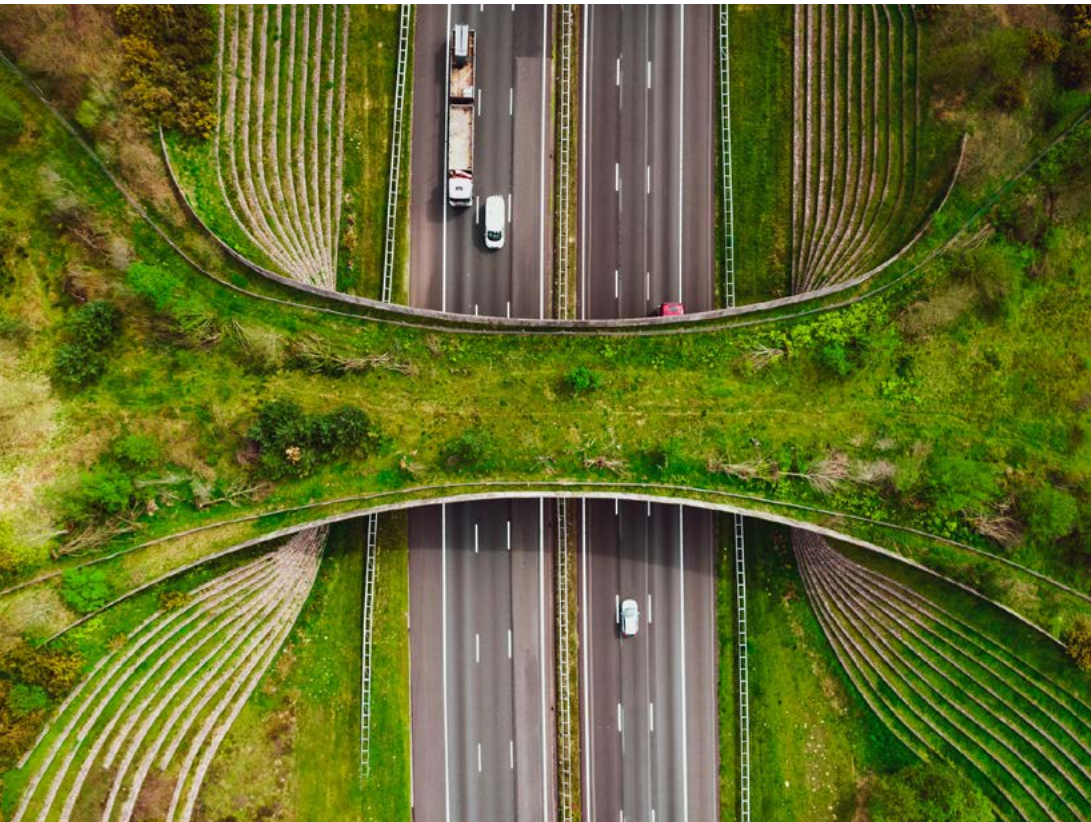




## 6. Creative

Leadership that generates the conditions for ideas and solutions to emerge, advance and fundamentally disrupt systems, building better futures

**THE UPDATE:** Creative leadership requires the capability to both dream *and* build.<sup>97</sup> In the original report, we focused more on imagination, curiosity and the emergence of possibility, than on the conditions that enable the actual creation and manifestation of stronger, healthier, cleaner, greener and fairer industries, markets, economies and societies. We also want to recognise more clearly the scale of innovation and transformation needed to respond to current crises, and therefore the need for conditions that enable radical, ‘moonshot’ ideas to emerge and disrupt.



### THE CONTEXT:

To create means to bring something into existence. The urge to imagine, shape, experiment and build is part of the universal human condition. Yet there are a number of forces that stifle creative energy, undermining its ability to innovate, transform and give birth to something new. Creative leadership is about generating the conditions for imagination to give rise to experimentation, innovation and ultimately powerful system-wide influence. It is a critical capability if we are to be part of the reinvention of industries, institutions, markets, economies and societies to be stronger, healthier, cleaner, greener and fairer.

Imagination is a core part of creativity: the ability to see and feel a different future.<sup>98</sup> Yet there must also be the capacity to activate these imagined possibilities through practical pathways, strategies and interventions.<sup>99</sup> Creative leadership is the capacity to both imagine *and* build. Insights from research are illuminating here, especially in understanding how change happens in complex systems. Innovation tends to emerge rather than being prescribed from the top down.<sup>100</sup> Systems tend to change when new technologies, infrastructure and social systems are built before the dismantling of old ones, and these different stages of transition can be supported by different policies.<sup>101</sup>



# Creative

It is also essential to be aware of forces constraining and stifling creativity. In some contexts, this will be because the conditions for imagination have been shut down or narrowed through, for example, lack of cognitive diversity and 'group think'.<sup>102</sup> In other contexts, fear of conflict or fear of failure can become institutionalised leading to inertia. This might be seen in a workplace culture that strongly discourages taking inter-personal risks such as challenging ideas or admitting mistakes,<sup>103</sup> or scant

funding available to explore disruptive ideas because of little appetite for higher risk-higher return opportunities.<sup>104</sup>

In contrast, creative leadership creates the conditions for innovation and radical disruption. It is seen in its distinctive attitude towards difference, actively bringing in 'outsiders' with different backgrounds and worldviews as 'creative triggers' to challenge thinking.<sup>105</sup> It is seen in its approach to conflict and tension,

supporting radical candour in order to expand thinking and generate new approaches that move beyond polarisation and/or 'artificial harmony'.<sup>106</sup> It is seen in cultures that reward creativity and not simply compliance.<sup>107</sup> It is seen in providing the time, resource and risk-appetite for imagination and experimentation so that 'moonshot' ideas might emerge and have the potential to disrupt. It is seen in the provision of intentional structures that provide both challenge and support to



make the bridge from experimentation into transformation, supporting ongoing learning and development.<sup>108</sup>

**Creative leadership generates the conditions for ideas and solutions to emerge, advance and fundamentally disrupt systems, building better futures.**



## Creative capabilities

- Create the right conditions for people to imagine different possibilities and apply creative energy to the practical task of building these futures.
- Use challenge and disagreement constructively to stress-test assumptions, broaden creative options and strengthen solutions.
- Support purposeful experimentation, risk-taking and innovation, with an ultimate ambition of system-wide influence.







# 7. Courageous

Leadership that knows what it stands for and does the hard things, rooted in active hope

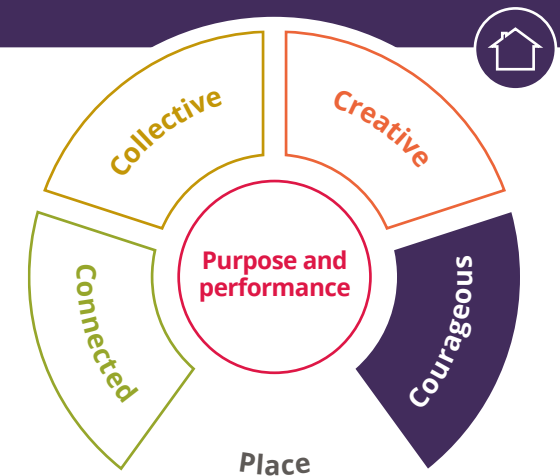
**THE UPDATE:** Courageous leadership takes many forms in a complex world. We see more clearly that courage can be just as evident in adaptability, confident humility and care, as in grit, perseverance and resistance. In its best form, it is other-oriented and is also closely tied to a sense of active hope. Courage is the disciplined moral commitment not to give in to despair but to work for a better future.



## THE CONTEXT:

There is a strong thread of courage through the whole of this leadership framework. For example, it takes courage to work for collective responsibility in leadership rather than defaulting to simple stories about hero leaders. Courage flows from a strong sense of purpose and is necessary for making difficult strategic choices. It takes courage to listen to and acknowledge backstories that shape leadership expectations in different places. Courage is needed to move from the 'safe illusion' of control and resistance, to ride the waves of disruption and complexity. It takes courage to step out of echo chambers, connect with different 'tribes', and address disagreement constructively rather than hiding behind an artificial sense of harmony. Alongside confidence, courage sits behind the impetus to create, especially the willingness to experiment, take risks and influence change.

We remain convinced that courage is often strongly related to values and a concern for the 'other',<sup>109</sup> although in complex



systems it is not always clear what is 'right'. Courageous leadership therefore sometimes involves surfacing ethical dilemmas and owning the consequences of challenging decisions. We continue to argue that courageous leadership is characterised by grit and perseverance, but that it also involves self-awareness and a willingness to adapt if needed.

This means that courage will take different forms. While there is a type of courage that is uncompromising, doubles down in the face of opposition and refuses to flex or adapt,<sup>110</sup> courageous leadership in other settings might look quite different. For instance, it might involve listening carefully to a wide range of evidence and changing direction when that evidence suggests a strategy is not working.<sup>111</sup> It might require sharing something challenging with a community or team that risks conflict or loss of support. It might involve acting in ways that are counter-cultural, challenging ingrained habits and norms, or caring about a group or population that tends to be overlooked, for example, future generations.



# Courageous

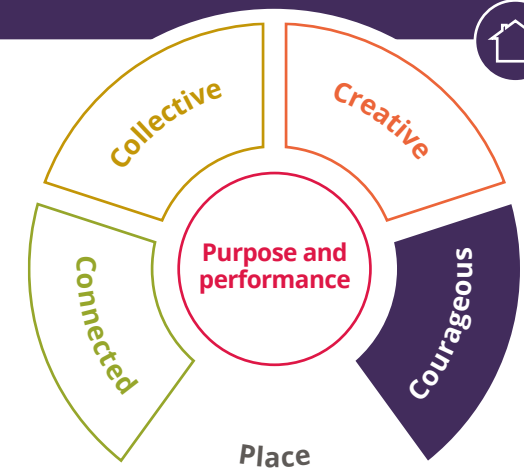
At a personal level, courageous leadership involves the daily work of difficult conversations with colleagues and neighbours to gently challenge ingrained beliefs or practices,<sup>112</sup> or the enormous courage it takes to acknowledge moral failings and limitations.

Research on character helps in understanding courageous leadership, especially insight into how different aspects of character help inform leadership judgement.<sup>113</sup> For instance, it is possible to over-develop one dimension

of character so that it becomes a vice or a weakness. For courage to be present in its most virtuous form (tenacious, determined, resilient and confident), it must be supported by other dimensions of character such as temperance (patience, calm, self-control and prudence) when required.<sup>114</sup> In that way, courage is characterised by confident humility rather than bravado, recklessness, obstinacy and/or ego.<sup>115</sup>

Finally, we return to the theme of hope – recently shown to be the most desired

leadership attribute across 52 countries<sup>116</sup> – and argue that it takes courage to hope, especially when despair is easier. More specifically, courageous leadership has the right kind of hope – not a passive, wishful thinking that everything will turn out for the best, but an ‘active hope’ that feels responsible for, works for and drives social change.<sup>117</sup> Optimism is often the radical, hard and brave choice.<sup>118</sup> Societies without much hope for their future do not see a need to build for it,<sup>119</sup> which can lead to passivity and resistance to change. Courageous



leadership is shaped by a hope that is open to a future outcome and progress; accepts the vulnerability of potential setbacks and failure; sees possibilities even as other options are collapsing; and moves forward in spite of fear.

**Courageous leadership knows what it stands for and does the hard things, rooted in active hope.**



## Courageous capabilities

- Be willing to say and do what is unpopular for the sake of a greater good.
- Develop self-awareness, reflect honestly, and be open to acknowledging the need for change or help if evidence requires it.
- Withstand challenge, persevere and grow in the face of setback and opposition through a purpose and values-based confidence and active hope.







# Closing thoughts

These seven updates all point towards the capabilities that we believe will support better leadership decision-making and practice in an age of disruption.

## **Building leadership capacity that:**

- accepts responsibility for creating the conditions for collective movement towards a shared meaningful goal
- drives strategic transformation and performance to realise the purpose of a better future
- puts place and context at the heart of sense-making and decision-taking
- prioritises interconnection and interdependence in every way, from navigating complex systems to inter-personal dynamics
- enables a purposeful and healthy interplay between collaboration and competition, and bridges strategically to bring about action and impact
- generates the conditions for ideas and solutions to emerge, advance and fundamentally disrupt systems, building better futures
- knows what it stands for and does the hard things, rooted in active hope.

No single 'hero' individual or organisation will ever embody all these capabilities. Rather, collectively as part of teams, organisations and movements, we believe that this kind of leadership will go a long way to creating the conditions for critical earth systems and the economies, societies and organisations that rely on them to genuinely prosper and thrive at this time of disruption.





# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Scheffer et al. note that “the same prerequisites that allow recovery from local damage may set a system up for large-scale collapse”: Marten Scheffer et al., “Anticipating Critical Transitions,” *Science* 338 (2012): 345, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1225244>. See also: Michael Lawrence et al., “Global polycrisis: the causal mechanisms of crisis entanglement,” *Global Sustainability* 7:e6 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.1>; Thomas Homer-Dixon et al., “Synchronous Failure: The Emerging Causal Architecture of Global Crisis,” *Ecology and Society* 20, no. 3 (2015), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26270255>; Dirk Helbing, “Globally networked risks and how to respond,” *Nature* 497 (2013): 51–59, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature12047>.
- <sup>2</sup> Mampuy et al. discuss a fragmenting global world order which renders international relations increasingly complex and unpredictable: Ruth Mampuy et al., “A Fragmenting World Order,” in *Navigating a Fragmenting World Order*, Research for Policy (Springer, 2025), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-00648-6\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-00648-6_2).
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- <sup>5</sup> Hurrell for example explores the long-term changes that have taken place in the character and dynamics of modern global international society: Andrew Hurrell, “Geopolitics and global economic governance,” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 40, no. 2 (2024): 220–233, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/gra013>.
- <sup>6</sup> Climate tipping points are a source of growing scientific, policy and public concern: David I. Armstrong et al., “Exceeding 1.5°C global warming could trigger multiple climate tipping points,” *Science* 377, no. 6611 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abn7950>; Jeff Tollefson, “Earth breaches 1.5 °C climate limit for the first time: what does it mean?” *Nature*, January 10, 2025, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-00010-9>; while six of nine ‘planetary boundaries’ are now transgressed, increasing the risk of large-scale abrupt or irreversible environmental changes: Katherine Richardson et al., “Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries,” *Science Advances* 9, no. 37 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458>. In a world already characterised by high geopolitical and social instability, climate and nature trajectories are predicted to trigger further violent conflict in specific contexts as fear, insecurity, scarcity of resources, increased migration, reduced social welfare and paralysed public institutions take hold: Peter F. Nardulli et al., “Climate change and civil unrest: the impact of rapid-onset disasters,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 2 (2015): 310–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713503809>; Andrew M. Linke et al., “Drought, Local Institutional Contexts, and Support for Violence in Kenya,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 7 (2017): 1544–1578, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717698018>; Xiaolan Xie et al., “The impacts of climate change on violent conflict risk: a review of causal pathways,” *Environmental Research Communications* 6, no. 11 (2024): 112002, <https://doi.org/10.1088/2515-1762/0ad8a21>.
- <sup>7</sup> The *Global Tipping Points Report 2025* argues that the same science that warns of ecosystems approaching dangerous thresholds also shows us the extraordinary potential of positive tipping points: self-reinforcing shifts in policies, technologies, finance and behaviours that can drive change at unprecedented speed and scale: Timothy M. Lenton et al., eds., *The Global Tipping Points Report 2025* (University of Exeter, 2025), <https://global-tipping-points.org/resources-gtp/>.
- <sup>8</sup> An annual publication by Stanford University’s Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI) concludes that AI’s influence on society has never been more pronounced, and that AI is poised to be the most transformative technology of the 21st century: Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, *Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2025* (Stanford University, 2025), <https://hai.stanford.edu/ai-index/2025-ai-index-report>. See also: Lareina Yee et al., *McKinsey Technology Trends Outlook 2025* (McKinsey, 2025), <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/the-top-trends-in-tech>.
- <sup>9</sup> Gini and Giordano conclude that humans show a trend towards not merely surviving, but flourishing: Adriana Gini and James J. Giordano, “The Human Condition and Strivings to Flourish,” in *Scientific and Philosophical Perspectives in Neuroethics*, ed. James J. Giordano and Bert Gordijn (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 343–54, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/scientific-and-philosophical-perspectives-in-neuroethics/human-condition-and-strivings-to-flourish/E48DB180D86AD1D388D48DC34E79E6BE>.
- <sup>10</sup> These trends are noted by Feingold: Spencer Feingold, “An optimist’s – and pessimist’s – guide to the state of global cooperation,” *World Economic Forum*, January 7, 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/optimists-pessimists-guide-state-global-cooperation/>; and Boswell: John D. Boswell, “We face daunting global challenges. Here are eight reasons to be hopeful,” *The Guardian*, July 29, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/ng-interactive/2025/jul/29/global-future-challenges-optimism>.
- <sup>11</sup> The framework has been shared and debated through our postgraduate programmes, executive programmes, digital education and customised programmes, spanning at least 40 different countries and multiple sectors and organisational types.
- <sup>12</sup> Garvey Berger explores this as one of five ‘mindtraps’ holding back leadership in complexity and uncertainty: Jennifer Garvey Berger, *Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps: How to Thrive in Complexity* (Stanford University Press, 2019), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Unlocking-Leadership-Mindtraps-Thrive-Complexity/dp/1503609014>.
- <sup>13</sup> In his thesis on history and future of societal collapse, Kemp argues that “one of the first and most pernicious stories justifying subjugation was that of the saviour leader” and urges people not to be dominated by such stories: Luke Kemp, *Goliath’s Curse* (Viking, 2025), 444, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/321192/goliaths-curse-by-kemp-luke/9780241741238>. In a similar vein, Brown surveys political leadership over the last 100 years, arguing that cultivation of the myth of the strong leader is often a prelude to oppression and carnage: Archie Brown, *The Myth of the Strong Leader: Political Leadership in the Modern Age* (The Bodley Head, 2014), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Myth-Strong-Leader-Political-Leadership/dp/1847921752>.
- <sup>14</sup> To quote King Henry IV in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 2*, “uneasy lies the head that wears a crown”.
- <sup>15</sup> These are key arguments set out by Haslam et al. in their paper on ‘zombie leadership’, a strong residual commitment to an older set of ideas about leadership which have been repeatedly debunked but which nevertheless resolutely refuse to die: S. Alexander Haslam et al., “Zombie leadership: Dead ideas that still walk among us,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 35, no. 3: (2024): 101770, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2023.101770>.
- <sup>16</sup> Joseph Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (Praeger, 1991), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Leadership-Twenty-First-Century-Joseph-Rost/dp/027594610X>.
- <sup>17</sup> Selcuk Gultasli, “Professor Ginsburg: The Search for a ‘Strongman’ to Fix Everything Is a Naive Approach,” *European Center for Populism Studies*, October 16, 2024, <https://www.populismstudies.org/professor-ginsburg-the-search-for-a-strongman-to-fix-everything-is-a-naive-approach/>; also Haslam et al., “Zombie leadership”; Kemp, *Goliath’s Curse*.
- <sup>18</sup> Osborne et al. explore the psychological and situational factors that foster authoritarianism, explaining how contextual threats to safety and security activate authoritarian predispositions: Danny Osborne et al., “The psychological causes and societal consequences of authoritarianism,” *Nature Reviews Psychology* 2, no. 4 (2023): 220–232, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-023-00161-4>. McCarthy pulls together evidence exploring how increasing climate shocks could trigger more authoritarian, nationalist backlashes: James



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- <sup>19</sup> Haslam et al., "Zombie leadership."
- <sup>20</sup> The 'romance of leadership' theory describes over-attribution of responsibility of (organisational) outcomes to leaders: James R. Meindl and Sanford B. Ehrlich, "The Romance of Leadership and the Evaluation of Organizational Performance," *The Academy of Management Journal* 30, no. 1 (1987): 91–109, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/255897>; Kedir Assefa Tessema, "Primacy of the leader, obscuration of followers: The discourse of leadership in the business media," *Discourse, Context & Media* 29 (2019): 100295, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2019.04.001>. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the popular press and modern (social) media culture in glorifying leaders: Michelle M. Hammond et al., "The romance of leadership: Rekindling the fire through replication of Meindl and Ehrlich," *The Leadership Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2023): 101538, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2021.101538>; and then "sowing the seeds for future destruction" when they fall from grace: Derron G. Bishop et al., "Falling from media grace: Telling lessons for leaders in modern times," *Business Horizons* 66, no. 5 (2023): 679–690, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2023.02.002>.
- <sup>21</sup> This is our working definition of leadership, informed by the following: Marshall Ganz, "Leading Change: Leadership, Organization, and Social Movements," in *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*, ed. Nitin Nohria and Rakesh Khurana (Harvard Business School Press, 2010), 509–550, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/leading-change-leadership-organization-and-social-movements>; Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*; Keith Grint, *Leadership: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Leadership-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions/dp/0199569916>; Brad Jackson and Ken Parry, *A Very Short Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book About Studying Leadership* (Sage Publications, 2018), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Fairly-Interesting-Reasonably-Studying-Leadership/dp/1849207399>.
- <sup>22</sup> This combination is seen for instance in the work of The School for Moral Ambition (<https://rutgerbregman.com/sma>), which "emerged from a desire to not just talk about a better world but also to take action towards one".
- <sup>23</sup> Annabel Beerel, *Rethinking Leadership: A Critique of Contemporary Theories* (Routledge, 2019), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Rethinking-Leadership-Critique-Contemporary-Theories/dp/0367490889>.
- <sup>24</sup> Examples applied to the individual include: Simon Sinek, *Find Your WHY* (Portfolio, 2017), <https://simonsinek.com/books/find-your-why/>; to business and corporations include: Colin Mayer, "The Future of the Corporation and the Economics of Purpose," *Journal of Management Studies* 58, no. 3 (2021): 887–901, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12660>; and George Serafeim, *Purpose and Profit: How Business Can Lift Up the World* (HarperCollins Leadership, 2022), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Purpose-Profit-Business-Lift-World/dp/1400230357>; and to the economy include: Victoria Hurth et al., *Beyond Profit: Purpose-Driven Leadership for a Wellbeing Economy* (John Murray Business, 2025), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Beyond-Profit-Purpose-Driven-Leadership-Wellbeing/dp/1399822489>.
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- <sup>27</sup> Raworth uses 'thriving' to refer to a "safe and just space" where humanity can meet its needs within planetary boundaries: Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (Random House Business Books, 2017), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Doughnut-Economics-Seven-21st-Century-Economist/dp/1847941370>.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Global Flourishing Study* defines human flourishing as "a state of complete physical, social, emotional, cognitive, volitional and spiritual wellbeing", to include "the wellbeing of the community and environment": Gallup, *The Global Flourishing Study: What Contributes to a Life Well-Lived?* (Gallup, 2025), [https://globalflourishingstudy.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/GFS\\_Report-1.pdf](https://globalflourishingstudy.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/GFS_Report-1.pdf); while Ehrenfeld describes flourishing as "the realization of living creatures' biological—and for humans, existential—potential": John Ehrenfeld, "Flourishing: Designing a Brave New World," *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation* 5, no. 2 (2019): 105–116, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2019.03.001>.
- <sup>29</sup> For example, in China the concept of ecological civilisation emphasises harmony and holism (Linda Westman and Ping Huang, "Ecological civilisation: a historical perspective on environmental policy narratives in China," *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2022): 181–206, <https://doi.org/10.11588/iqas.2022.2.13948>); while the Latin American concept of *buen vivir* emphasises the broad notion of wellbeing and cohabitation with others and nature: Eduardo Gudynas, "Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow," *Development* 54, no. 4 (2011): 441–447, <https://www.gudynas.com/publicaciones/GudynasBuenVivirTomorrowDevelopment11.pdf>.
- <sup>30</sup> PAS 808 refers to foundational natural capital as well as social capitals (including social and relational capital and intellectual capital) that underpin intermediate capitals, eg financial capital and manufactured capital, which then underpins the ability for long-term wellbeing for all people and planet to be achieved.
- <sup>31</sup> A substantial body of academic research, particularly in fields like community psychology, public health and social capital studies, suggests that a strong collective goal fosters unity, which in turn builds capacity for action. See for example the work of the Institute for Social Capital: "Shared goals and purpose," Institute for Social Capital, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/explore-social-capital/predispositions/shared-goals-and-purpose/>.
- <sup>32</sup> True purpose provides clarity, authenticity and meaningfulness, as explored by Hurth and Vrettos: Victoria Hurth and Aris Vrettos, *Unleashing the sustainable business: how purpose transforms an organisation* (University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, 2021), [https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/unleashing\\_the\\_sustainable\\_business\\_part\\_2\\_revised\\_3.12.21.pdf](https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/unleashing_the_sustainable_business_part_2_revised_3.12.21.pdf).
- <sup>33</sup> CISL's 2020 report emphasises the importance of aligning corporate strategy with purpose, including the strategic goals and responses, capabilities, resources and accountabilities required to move towards the purpose: University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), *Leading with a sustainable purpose: Leaders' insights for the development, alignment and integration of a sustainable corporate purpose* (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, 2020), <https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/resources/sustainability-leadership/leading-with-a-sustainable-purpose>. In her exploration of business ethics and practice, Taylor argues for identifying one to three priority issues when an organisation is having adverse societal impact and building these into core strategy: Alison Taylor, *Higher Ground: How Business Can Do the Right Thing in a Turbulent World* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2024), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Higher-Ground-Business-Right-Turbulent/dp/1647823439>.
- <sup>34</sup> Meager, writing for Sustainable Views, reports that shifting political winds, especially in the US, have provided some companies with an excuse to back away from their formerly ambitious sustainability targets: Elizabeth Meager, "Politics provides cover for corporate retreat from sustainability," Sustainable Views, September 15, 2025, <https://www.sustainableviews.com/politics-provides-cover-for-corporate-retreat-from-sustainability-643504c0/>.





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- <sup>35</sup> The psychology of human motivation is complex, but insights from Maslow on self-actualisation (striving to fulfil full potential) (Abraham Maslow, "A theory of human motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370–396, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>); Ryan and Deci on self-determination theory (the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness) (Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68–78, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>); and McClelland on the need for achievement (David C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (Free Press, 1967), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Achieving-Society-David-C-McClelland/dp/0029205107>) share an interest in the desire to perform and succeed.
- <sup>36</sup> Avelino (2020) argues that the "fierce power struggles and inequalities that come with social change and innovation" have historically been underemphasised, but a growing number of scholars are paying explicit attention to power, although it is a 'contested concept': Flor Avelino, "Theories of power and social change. Power contestations and their implications for research on social change and innovation," *Journal of Political Power* 14, no. 3 (2021): 425–448, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2021.1875307>.
- <sup>37</sup> Work by Bishop recasts the desire to succeed from 'short wins' to 'long wins', but still with an emphasis on performance (Cath Bishop, *The Long Win: There's more to success than you think* (Practical Inspiration Publishing, 2024), <https://cathbishop.com/the-long-win/>); while Antonacopoulou et al. argue in support of 'competing for flourishing' or competing to contribute to the common good (Elena P. Antonacopoulou et al., "Competing for Flourishing: Responsible Management and Relational Leadership, Revisited," in *Leadership for Flourishing*, ed. James L. Ritchie-Dunham, Katy E. Granville-Chapman, and Matthew T. Lee (Oxford Academic, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780197766101.003.0007>).
- <sup>38</sup> In a CISL paper on low carbon disruption, Ball-Burack et al. argue that disruption does not happen in a linear way, but is characterised by feedback and tipping points which can be influenced by policy, technology, finance and other conditions: Ari Ball-Burack et al., *Navigating low carbon disruption: Systems thinking and dynamic system drivers in power, road transport and agriculture* (University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, 2023), <https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/news-and-resources/publications/navigating-low-carbon-disruption-systems-thinking-and-dynamic-system>.
- <sup>39</sup> See the work of the Changing Markets Foundation, for instance: <https://changingmarkets.org/>.
- <sup>40</sup> CISL's work on the Future of Boards explored how moving beyond compliance and box ticking to a more strategic use of sustainability data combined with broader sustainability insights, enables boards to develop integrated strategies that drive long-term sustainable value for stakeholders, society and the environment: University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), *The Future of Boards: The Rise and Influence of Investor Stewardship* (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, 2025), <https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/news-and-resources/publications/future-boards-phase-2>.
- <sup>41</sup> The Global Flourishing Goals for instance identify five domains of human flourishing: life satisfaction, holistic health, fulfilling relationships, meaning and purpose, and contributing to the flourishing of all life forms: Brandy Keating, "The Global Flourishing Goals," in *Leadership for Flourishing*, ed. James L. Ritchie-Dunham, Katy E. Granville-Chapman, and Matthew T. Lee (Oxford Academic, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780197766101.003.0024>.
- <sup>42</sup> Jay and Grant, for instance, identify concentric "spheres of care" from the individual through community, nation and the world, to future generations and all of life: Jason Jay and Gabriel Grant, *Breaking Through Gridlock: The Power of Conversation in a Polarized World* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2017), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Breaking-Through-Gridlock-Conversation-Polarized/dp/1626568952>.
- <sup>43</sup> Ramanna argues that the traditional approach to leadership has involved rallying diverse people around a well-articulated common value or aspiration, usually one that is not easily defined or even realisable – sometimes labelled 'the noble lie': Karthik Ramanna, *The Age of Outrage: How to Lead in a Polarized World* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2024), <https://karthikramanna.com/>.
- <sup>44</sup> As Massey observes regarding the dynamic of globalisation, "different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections...some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-  
end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it". Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, NED-New edition (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttw2z>.
- <sup>45</sup> In the UK, for example, work by the University of Cambridge Bennett Institute explores how decades of centralised decision-making have left regions feeling disenfranchised, creating deep divides in political identity and confidence: "Place," Bennett School of Public Policy, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.bennettschool.cam.ac.uk/place>. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) talks about "the revenge of the places that don't matter" resulting in a wave of political populism with strong territorial rather than social foundations across Asia, Latin America and especially Europe and the US in recent years: Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, "The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it)," *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 11, no. 1 (2018): 189–209, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx024>.
- <sup>46</sup> In a 2022 UK government white paper on "Levelling Up the United Kingdom" examining regional inequalities across the country, it was concluded that policymakers should be more interested in the cultural and affective dimensions of the relationship people have with the places they live in, and that improvements in this respect can have important implications for the social fabric and economic prospects of places: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, "Levelling Up the United Kingdom," GOV.UK, February 2, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>.
- <sup>47</sup> Malpas argues that place is where we find and understand ourselves: Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (MIT Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/3467.001.0001>.
- <sup>48</sup> Jack Shaw et al., *Townscapes: Pride in Place* (Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2022), <https://bennettschool.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Pride-in-Place-Report.pdf>.
- <sup>49</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Place-Introduction-Short-Introductions-Geography/dp/0470655623>.
- <sup>50</sup> In his book *Citizens*, Alexander talks about the importance of seeing ourselves as citizens – people who actively shape the world around us, cultivate meaningful connections with their community and institutions, who can imagine a different and better life, who take responsibility and who encourage others to do the same: Jon Alexander, *Citizens: Why the Key to Fixing Everything is All of Us* (Canbury Press, 2023), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/1912454882?tag=siscuk-21>.
- <sup>51</sup> Kline describes listening as a 'radical act': Nancy Kline, *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind* (Cassell, 2002), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Time-Think-Listening-Ignite-Human/dp/0706377451>.
- <sup>52</sup> See for example Stephanie Gillibrand et al., "Take a walk in someone else's shoes: the role of participatory arts for health research development and training," *Research Involvement and Engagement* 9, no. 42 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-023-00441-6>.
- <sup>53</sup> Ramanna speaks of the importance of listening to the 'scripts' of others in navigating outrage and polarisation: Ramanna, *The Age of Outrage*.
- <sup>54</sup> Arora and Stirling warn of "failing to challenge the reproduction of colonially accumulated power and privilege": Saurabh Arora and Andy Stirling, "Colonial modernity and sustainability transitions: A conceptualisation in six dimensions," *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 48 (2023): 100733, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2023.100733>. (See also Saurabh Sukhadeo Ghule, "A Decolonial framework for Sustainable Business: An interdisciplinary narrative review of the literature" (Master's thesis, Politecnico di Milano, 2024), <https://www.politesi.polimi.it/handle/10589/222712>.)
- <sup>55</sup> Mazzucato urges the state to proactively define and pursue a clear "public purpose" to shape markets and solve grand societal challenges like climate change and inequality: Mariana Mazzucato, *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism* (Harper Business, 2022), <https://marianamazucato.com/books/mission-economy/mission-economy-usa>.
- <sup>56</sup> For instance, Hummel et al. conclude that digital mapping campaigns designed in partnership with underserved communities can enhance the participation of diverse populations in data collection efforts and uncover new insights into local-scale factors affecting resilience to flooding: Michelle A. Hummel et al., "Leveraging community-generated data to enhance flood resilience assessments," *Natural Hazards* 121 (2025): 17391–17410, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11069-025-07475-x>.





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- <sup>58</sup> The CLEVER Cities Project across Europe, and now expanding to China and Latin America, has steered a radical shift in co-creative urban development strategies, fostering a novel approach to urban transformation rooted in nature-based interventions, inclusive collaboration, multi-disciplinary learning and robust exchanges: <https://clevercities.eu/>.
- <sup>59</sup> As Andersson argues, "[a]lthough our globalised economy...has diminished our potential to be connected to place, we humans can still best experience intimacy, connection, consideration and caring for our natural surroundings from a perspective of place": Jenny Andersson, "Why Place?" LinkedIn, January 8, 2024, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-place-jenny-andersson--qxdde/>.
- <sup>60</sup> This argument is offered by Guthey et al.: Greig Tor Guthey et al., "Place and Sense of Place: Implications for Organizational Studies of Sustainability," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (2014): 62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492613517511>.
- <sup>61</sup> This quote comes from Erik Fernholm, co-founder of the Inner Development Goals (<https://innerdevelopmentgoals.org/>), speaking at the inaugural Inner Development Goals Summit in Stockholm in 2022.
- <sup>62</sup> In contrast, 'regenerative' thinking is premised on the importance of interdependency, seeing the world as "built around reciprocal and co-evolutionary relationships, where humans, other living beings and ecosystems rely on one another for health, and shape (and are shaped by) their connections with one another": Josie Warden, "Regenerative Futures: From sustaining to thriving together," RSA, October 6, 2021, <https://www.thersa.org/reports/regenerative-futures-from-sustaining-to-thriving-together/>.
- <sup>63</sup> In discussing the non-linear nature of change, Nobel Laureate Prigogine and Stengers observe that "most of reality, instead of being orderly, stable, and equilibrated, is seething and bubbling with change, disorder, and process": Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of chaos: Man's new dialogue with nature* (Verso Books, 2018), xv, [https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/390-order-out-of-chaos?srsltid=AfmBOoqpB5QYx7m7p-raEdckD73pP0J-4SMAGBi1k6WITb\\_M5xF53w-](https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/390-order-out-of-chaos?srsltid=AfmBOoqpB5QYx7m7p-raEdckD73pP0J-4SMAGBi1k6WITb_M5xF53w-).
- <sup>64</sup> Systems thinker Sterman argues that "[w]e frequently talk about side effects as if they were a feature of reality. Not so. In reality there are no side effects, there are just effects. Side effects are not a feature of reality but a sign that our understanding of the system is narrow and flawed": John Sterman, *Business Dynamics: Systems Thinking and Modeling for a Complex World* (Irwin Professional/McGraw-Hill, 2000), 11, <https://www.mheducation.co.uk/business-dynamics-systems-thinking-and-modeling-for-a-complex-world-int-l-ed-9780071179898-emea>.
- <sup>65</sup> Blankespoor et al. in their study of mangroves as a protection from storm surges in a changing climate conclude that under the current climate and declining mangrove coverage, 3.5 million people and GDP worth roughly US \$400 million are at risk across 42 developing countries, projected to rise by 103 per cent for population and 233 per cent for GDP under future climate scenarios: Brian Blankespoor et al., "Mangroves as a protection from storm surges in a changing climate," *Ambio* 46, no. 4 (2017): 478–491, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-016-0838-x>.
- <sup>66</sup> Carswell et al. use systems analysis to examine how agricultural intensification undermines soil resilience, warning that "abrupt changes in soil resilience and the consequent effect on food and feed yields resulting from tipping points in agricultural soils could be speculated to cause near 'end-of-world' scenarios": Alison Carswell et al., "Agricultural practices can threaten soil resilience through changing feedback loops," *npj Sustainable Agriculture* 3, no. 56 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44264-025-00098-6>.
- <sup>67</sup> See for example: Sam J. Buckton et al., "The Regenerative Lens: A conceptual framework for regenerative social-ecological systems," *One Earth* 6, no. 7 (2023): 824–842, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2023.06.006>; Christopher Marquis, "How Regeneration Is Redefining Business," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 22, no. 3 (2024), <https://ssir.org/articles/entry/regenerative-business-models>; Jan Konietzko et al., "Towards regenerative business models: A necessary shift?" *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 38 (2023): 372–388, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2023.04.014>; Pablo Muñoz and Oana Branzei, "Regenerative Organizations: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Organization & Environment* 34, no. 4 (2021): 507–516, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10860266211055740>.
- <sup>68</sup> Gibbons describes the aim for "thriving living systems in which whole-system health and wellbeing increase continually": Leah V. Gibbons, "Regenerative—The New Sustainable?" *Sustainability* 12, no. 13 (2020): 5483, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12135483>.
- <sup>69</sup> Regenerative approaches shift the focus from minimising harm to actively restoring and improving the natural systems that provide these resources. Hutchins and Storm argue that regenerative, life-affirming approaches to business result in more resilient, innovative, purposeful, agile organisations: Giles Hutchins and Laura Storm, *Regenerative Leadership: The DNA of life-affirming 21st century organizations* (Wordsworth Publishing, 2019), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Regenerative-Leadership-life-affirming-century-organizations/dp/1783241195>.
- <sup>70</sup> Uhl-Bien et al. argue that a complexity paradigm is fitting for the 'knowledge era', in which "the rapid production of knowledge and innovation is critical to organizational survival": Mary Uhl-Bien et al., "Complexity Leadership Theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): 299, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.002>.
- <sup>71</sup> Alice Kalro et al., *Executive Summary: Leading through the polycollapse: A guide to Systemic Foresight for VUCA native strategy* (arkH3, 2025), <https://www.arkh3.com/resources/leading-through-the-polycollapse-a-guide-to-systemic-foresight-for-vuca-native-strategy>.
- <sup>72</sup> Systemic foresight is a core part of becoming 'VUCA native', which Kalro et al. (*Leading through the polycollapse*) describe as "envisioning and anticipating possible and probable futures in reliance on a highly developed and up to date understanding of the broader planetary context and its interactions with and impacts on the economic and broader societal contexts" and then defining "proportional, systemic action".
- <sup>73</sup> When exploring the nature of decision-making, critical attention needs to be given to how 'trade-offs' are identified, understood and navigated. Even within the Sustainable Development Goals, there are interactions between the goals that are potentially co-beneficial and those that might involve trade-offs, but crucially these interactions are dependent on geographical context, time horizon and institutional/governance context: Måns Nilsson et al., "Mapping interactions between the sustainable development goals: lessons learned and ways forward," *Sustainability Science* 13 (2018): 1489–1503, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0604-z>. Contributions from 'paradox theory' replace the choice with the insight that these demands are often interrelated in a persistent relationship over time (see Raphael Boemelburg et al., "How paradoxical leaders guide their followers to embrace paradox: Cognitive and behavioral mechanisms of paradox mindset development," *Long Range Planning* 56, no. 4 (2023): 102319, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2023.102319>. Various multi-criteria decision analysis tools support decision-making. In the field of sustainability assessment, Morrison-Saunders and Pope argue for early consideration of trade-offs, demarcation of acceptable from unacceptable impacts, and the possibility of offsets in place, time or kind: Angus Morrison-Saunders and Jenny Pope, "Conceptualising and managing trade-offs in sustainability assessment," *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 38 (2013): 54–63, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2012.06.003>. In current day board decision-making, Bank Jorgensen (2025) emphasises the need to translate trends into strategic choices as a way of analysing trade-offs: Helle Bank Jorgensen, "Sustainability in the boardroom: Transforming business decision-making," Thomson Reuters, July 21, 2025, <https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en-us/posts/sustainability/transforming-business-decision-making/>.
- <sup>74</sup> Insights from design thinking have informed iterative approaches in contexts where there is high uncertainty and real-world complexity. Adaptability and learning are at the heart of such approaches; see for example: Dustin L. Herrmann et al., "Iterative scenarios for social-ecological systems," *Ecology and Society* 26, no. 4 (2021): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-12706-260408>.
- <sup>75</sup> CISL has a range of resources supporting business to move to a nature-positive strategy: "Nature Positive Hub," University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/resources/nature-positive>.



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- <sup>76</sup> Blair Sheppard, "The urgent need for sophisticated leadership," PwC, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.pwc.com/sg/en/publications/the-urgent-need-for-sophisticated-leadership.html>
- <sup>77</sup> Leadership maturity is an adult development theory promoted by Julia Kukard, where higher stages of maturity embrace thinking is multi-perspectival and broad. See: "Resources," Dr Julia Kukard, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.jkukard.com/resources>.
- <sup>78</sup> Ryan Gottfredson and Bret Crane, "Navigating complex environments requires complex leaders," *Business Horizons* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2025.06.002>.
- <sup>79</sup> See for example: Benjamin Scharte, "The need for general adaptive capacity—Discussing resilience with complex adaptive systems theory," *Risk Analysis* 45, no. 6 (2025): 1443–1452, <https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.17676>.
- <sup>80</sup> Hooper argues that "we must tell stories that root systemic change in personal connection — that make people proud of their landscapes, communities and role in protecting them": Lindsay Hooper, "Changing the future of nature: 5 principles for shifting narratives," World Economic Forum, June 16, 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/06/changing-the-future-of-nature-5-principles-for-shifting-narratives/>.
- <sup>81</sup> In an open letter to the United Nations from representatives of the cultural sector in the UK for COP30, actors, authors and public figures advocate using the emotional and intellectual power of storytelling and the arts by bringing them together with the sciences, so that people truly connect with the need for wide-ranging societal change: John Holmes, "Use storytelling to tackle 'failure of imagination' behind climate inaction, say 200 experts," University of Birmingham, November 13, 2025, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/2025/use-storytelling-to-tackle-failure-of-imagination-behind-climate-inaction-say-200-experts>.
- <sup>82</sup> A Finnish study by Ahonen et al. found that framing climate policy around energy independence enhanced acceptable and perceived effectiveness: Sami Ahonen et al., "Framing climate policy around energy independence enhances acceptance and perceived effectiveness: evidence from a Finnish survey experiment," *Climatic Change* 178, no. 22 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-025-03859-x>.
- <sup>83</sup> CISL's report on Better Homes explores the contribution of retrofit to comfort and energy efficiency, reducing fuel poverty and eradication of unhealthy housing conditions, as well as emissions reduction: University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), *Delivering Retrofit at Scale Together: Better homes for healthier, resilient and stronger communities* (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, 2025), [https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/files/cisl\\_-\\_better\\_homes\\_report\\_2025.pdf](https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/files/cisl_-_better_homes_report_2025.pdf).
- <sup>84</sup> Dagunga et al. explore how agroecology practices, based on ecological principles of diversity, synergy, and nutrient cycling of agroecosystems, are capable of enhancing the resilience of smallholder food security while providing ecosystem services: Gilbert Dagunga et al., "Agroecology and resilience of smallholder food security: a systematic review," *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 7 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2023.1267630>.
- <sup>85</sup> Neale argues that empathy is a non-negotiable leadership skill for the 21st century: Palena Neale, "Empathy Is a Non-Negotiable Leadership Skill. Here's How to Practice It," Harvard Business Review, April 30, 2025, [Empathy Is a Non-Negotiable Leadership Skill. Here's How to Practice It](https://hbr.org/2025/04/empathy-is-a-non-negotiable-leadership-skill-heres-how-to-practice-it), <https://hbr.org/2025/04/empathy-is-a-non-negotiable-leadership-skill-heres-how-to-practice-it>.
- <sup>86</sup> Palsule and Chavez argue that while digital technology is transforming our world into an interconnected whole, more linear and fragmented approaches to leadership lead to 'walls of protectionism', whereas a re-humanised approach to leadership based on purpose, empathy and caring can help deconstruct these walls: Sudhanshu Palsule and Michael Chavez, *Rehumanizing Leadership: Putting Purpose Back into Business* (LID Publishing, 2020), <https://broadvistapartners.com/rehumanizing.php>.
- <sup>87</sup> Edmondson and Harvey introduce the concept of 'extreme teaming', which recognises that today's global enterprises increasingly involve collaborative work by teams of experts operating across different professions, organisations and industries, and that 'teaming' across boundaries is a critical leadership skill: Amy C. Edmondson and Jean-François Harvey, *Extreme Teaming: Lessons in Complex, Cross-Sector Leadership* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2017), <https://www.amazon.com/Extreme-Teaming-Lessons-Cross-Sector-Leadership/dp/1786354500>.
- <sup>88</sup> Dustin R. Rubenstein and James Kealey, "Cooperation, Conflict, and the Evolution of Complex Animal Societies," *Nature Education Knowledge* 3, no. 10 (2010): 78, <https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/cooperation-conflict-and-the-evolution-of-complex-13236526/>; also Emma H. E. Fromberg et al., "Transforming Circular Economy Thinking Using the Forest as a Metaphor," *Sustainability* 17, no. 5 (2025): 1858, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17051858>.
- <sup>89</sup> One might distinguish between pro-social competition for instance (sharing, co-operative, mutually supportive and beneficial relationships) or anti-social competition (self-focused, threat sensitive and aggressive) as discussed by Gilbert and Basran: Paul Gilbert and Jaskaran Basran, "The Evolution of Prosocial and Antisocial Competitive Behavior and the Emergence of Prosocial and Antisocial Leadership Styles," *Frontiers in Psychology* 20 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00610>.
- <sup>90</sup> This principle sits behind the work of CISL's Corporate Leaders Groups (<https://www.corporateleadersgroup.com/>) for instance, which bring together business leaders committed to supporting the transformation to competitive, sustainable, inclusive economies that will deliver net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, through exchange of evidence-based ideas and influential discussions with policymakers and peers.
- <sup>91</sup> Antonacopoulou et al., "Competing for Flourishing."
- <sup>92</sup> The Changing Markets Foundation argues that sustainability "requires major changes in markets, with companies acting on sustainability gaining market share at the expense of those who neglect it", driving "a self-reinforcing, accelerating loop of change in global markets" and "progressive legislation, which will level the playing field": <https://changingmarkets.org/about/>.
- <sup>93</sup> Jaeger explores some of the drivers behind the exponential growth in renewables for the World Resources Institute: Joel Jaeger, "Explaining the Exponential Growth of Renewable Energy," World Resources Institute, September 20, 2021, <https://www.wri.org/insights/growth-renewable-energy-sector-explained>.
- <sup>94</sup> In their exploration of 'systems convening' as a critical leadership skill for the 21st century, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner highlight the importance of 'power work', recognising that "[s]ystems conveners thus need to be politically savvy. They need to learn to both leverage and resist existing power structures": Etienne Wenger-Trayner and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, *Systems convening: a crucial form of leadership for the 21st century* (Social Learning Lab, 2021), 72, <https://www.wenger-trayner.com/systems-convening-book/>.
- <sup>95</sup> Dunlap et al. warn of the dangers of "green extractivism" – using claims of ecological sustainability to rationalise further extraction such as critical minerals for the green transition: Alexander Dunlap et al., "The political ecologies of 'green' extractivism(s): An introduction," *Journal of Political Ecology* 31, no. 1 (2024): 436–463, <https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.6131>. (See also: Filipe Calvão et al., "Global Afterlives of Extraction," *International Development Policy* 16 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.6001>).
- <sup>96</sup> Majid makes the case that South–South investment and partnership are key catalysts that could fundamentally transform the economic landscape of developing nations: Ayla Majid, "Why South–South collaboration is the key to unlocking clean energy in the Global South," World Economic Forum, February 3, 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/02/cross-border-collaboration-clean-energy-global-south/>.
- <sup>97</sup> Both are seen as critical in the work of Hoffman: Johanna Hoffman, *Speculative Futures* (Penguin Random House, 2022), <https://johannahoffman.com/Speculative-Futures>.
- <sup>98</sup> In Tickell's work on 'moral imagination', imagining "allows us not just to see a different future but to feel it": "Moral Imagination," A Better Way, February 15, 2022, <https://www.betterway.network/past-events-feed/moral-imagination-15feb2022>.
- <sup>99</sup> Some academics distinguish between creativity as the generation of new and novel ideas, and innovation as the process of implementing them, for example: Neil Anderson et al., "Innovation and Creativity in Organizations: A State-of-the-Science Review, Prospective Commentary, and Guiding Framework," *Journal of Management* 40, no. 5 (2014): 1297–1333,



# Endnotes

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- <sup>100</sup> Wheatley and Frieze describe emergence as the way in which "life creates radical change". Change begins as local actions springing up simultaneously in many different areas, which then become connected and ultimately emerge as a powerful system with influence at a more comprehensive level: Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze, *Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale* (The Berkana Institute, 2006), <https://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/using-emergence.pdf>.
- <sup>101</sup> This is one of the principles in applying 's curve' thinking to sustainability transitions, as explored by Murphy et al.: Anna Murphy et al., *First build, then break. A policy framework for accelerating zero-carbon transitions* (S-Curve Economics, 2025), [First build then break. A policy framework for accelerating zero-carbon transitions. | S-Curve Economics](https://www.scurveeconomics.org/publications/first-build-then-break/)<https://www.scurveeconomics.org/publications/first-build-then-break/>.
- <sup>102</sup> Tickell argues that educational systems, workplace cultures and lack of time in many contexts narrows or 'colonises' the imagination – see: "Imagination Activism," Moral Imaginations, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.moralimagnations.com/imaginationactivism>.
- <sup>103</sup> Edmondson describes this as a lack of "psychological safety": Amy Edmondson, "Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1999): 350–383, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2666999>.
- <sup>104</sup> Director of the Whittle Laboratory at the University of Cambridge, Miller argues that this dynamic is holding back radical innovation in the aerospace industry: Rob Miller, "Why can't Britain's leading aerospace lab raise more money?" *The Economist*, October 6, 2025, <https://www.economist.com/britain/2025/10/06/why-cant-britains-leading-aerospace-lab-raise-more-money?>
- <sup>105</sup> Ferriani and Cattani argue that 'outsiders' can spark new thinking by challenging norms and spotting overlooked opportunities. Simone Ferriani and Gino Cattani, "Lessons Learned From Outside Innovators," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, March 11, 2025, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/lessons-learned-from-outside-innovators/>.
- <sup>106</sup> Lencioni uses "artificial harmony" to describe a team state where members present a facade of agreement and politeness to avoid conflict, masking real concerns and suppressing healthy debate: Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (Jossey-Bass, 2002), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Five-Dysfunctions-Team-Leadership-Lencioni/dp/0787960756>. Scott advocates radical candour in organisations, providing feedback that is kind, clear, specific and sincere: Kim Scott, *Radical Candor: How to Get What You Want by Saying What You Mean* (Macmillan, 2017), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Radical-Candor-What-Want-Saying/dp/1509845356>.
- <sup>107</sup> Loch et al. explore the creation of an 'innovation culture', which involves "recognizing all contributions, both the flashy new ideas and the hard work of realizing them" through financial rewards, recognition, signalling respect and appreciation, and giving credit where it is due: Christoph Loch et al., "Organizational Culture, Innovation, and Competitive Performance: A Multilevel Dynamic Model," *Management Science* 71, no. 11 (2025): 8995–9868, iv–vi, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2024.05087>.
- <sup>108</sup> This approach to learning and the bridge from experimentation to transformation is explored in the context of the built environment by Evans et al.: James Evans et al., "How Cities Learn: From Experimentation to Transformation," *Urban Planning* 6, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v6i1.3545>.
- <sup>109</sup> For Aristotle, the highest form of courage was facing the greatest fear for the most selfless reason: Matthew Beard, "Courage isn't about facing our fears, it's about facing ourselves," *The Ethics Centre*, August 22, 2019, <https://ethics.org.au/courage-isnt-about-facing-our-fears-its-about-facing-ourselves/>.
- <sup>110</sup> Certainly, there are examples throughout history where such 'unreasonableness' took remarkable courage and had powerful transformative influence, for example: "Rosa Parks," Biography.com, updated October 4, 2023, <https://www.biography.com/activists/rosa-parks>.
- <sup>111</sup> In his book *Think Again*, Grant argues that in a rapidly changing world, the ability to question assumptions and rethink one's views based on new evidence is important for success: Adam Grant, *Think Again* (Viking, 2021), <https://adamgrant.net/book/think-again/>.
- <sup>112</sup> Kemp argues that "it is going to take the thankless, unglamorous work of having difficult conversations with your friends, giving up power, trusting your fellow citizen rather than a strongman leader when you're scared, going into the streets even when you are uncomfortable at home, and taking an ethical stand even if it might cost you your job." Kemp, *Goliath's Curse*, 445.
- <sup>113</sup> See for example the work of The Oxford Character Project: "A new generation of wise thinkers & good leaders," The Oxford Character Project, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://oxfordcharacter.org/>.
- <sup>114</sup> Brenda Nguyen and Mary Crossan, "Character-Infused Ethical Decision Making," *Journal of Business Ethics* 178 (2022): 171–191, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04790-8>.
- <sup>115</sup> Confident humility is a concept popularised by Grant – the ability to have confidence in your abilities while remaining open to the possibility that you might be wrong: Grant, *Think Again*.
- <sup>116</sup> This study by Gallup builds on decades of research into what people desire from their leaders: Gallup, *Global Leadership Report: What Followers Want* (Gallup, 2025), <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/656315/leadership-needs-of-followers.aspx>.
- <sup>117</sup> Macy and Johnstone describe active hope as a practice or way of engaging with the world, not a passive feeling or a belief that everything will turn out okay: Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy* (New World Library, 2012), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Active-Hope-without-Going-Crazy/dp/1577319729>.
- <sup>118</sup> del Toro – Oscar-winning filmmaker, director and producer – argues that "the most radical and rebellious choice you can make is to be optimistic": Guillermo del Toro, "The Most Radical and Rebellious Choice You Can Make Is to Be Optimistic," *Time*, February 7, 2019, <https://time.com/5520554/guillermo-del-toro-radical-optimism/>.
- <sup>119</sup> Coyle makes this argument looking back in history to the optimism of the British Victorian era: Diane Coyle, "What's stopping Britain building?" *Financial Times*, October 29, 2025, <https://www.ft.com/content/0ad5d585-18b4-46f0-9b3b-9e369478c790>.





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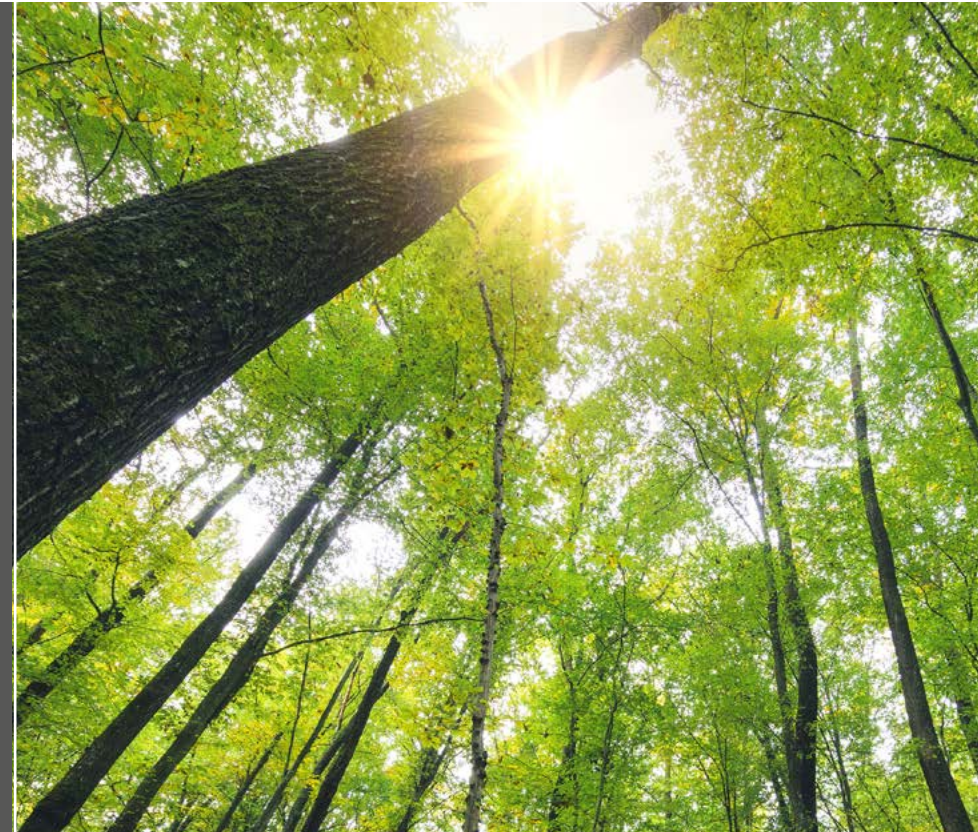
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